

Media Ownership Structures and Ideological Bias in News Production and Consumption

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Abstract

The concentration of media ownership in the hands of a few powerful individuals has been widely debated due to its potential influence on news production and audience consumption patterns. This study investigates the relationship between media ownership structures and the manifestation of ideological bias in news content. Anchored in the Political Economy of Media and Framing Theories, the research employs a mixed-methods approach, incorporating content analysis of news articles from prominent media outlets and audience surveys to identify patterns of bias and perception. Key findings reveal that media ownership often align editorial policies with the political and economic interests of their owners, thereby shaping public discourse and embedding these interests into news content. The implications of these findings highlight the need for regulatory frameworks that ensure ideological vetting of news content, promote transparency, and foster unbiased news production, ultimately contributing to a more balanced and informed public sphere. This study adds to the broader discourse on media pluralism and its vital role in safeguarding democratic values.

Keywords: "media ownership," "news bias," "ideological bias in journalism," "political economy of media."

Introduction

Introduction The structure of media ownership exerts a profound influence on how news is produced and disseminated. When media outlets consolidate under a small number of conglomerates, this often fosters homogenized content, suppressing alternative viewpoints and marginalizing diverse perspectives. Such concentrated ownership tends to produce news coverage



that prioritizes the interests of proprietors, thereby influencing public perception and discourse. ¹Langworth Rachel (2020) discusses on how media owners frequently leverage their platforms to advance personal or corporate agendas, often at the expense of journalistic integrity and objectivity.

Ideological bias in news media denotes the systematic skewing of information to advance specific viewpoints, typically aligning with the political or economic agendas of media proprietors. Such bias frequently materializes through selective reporting, strategic framing of issues, and the omission of dissenting perspectives. This symbiotic relationship between ownership structures and ideological partiality undermines the media's democratic role, particularly in societies reliant on an informed citizenry for robust public discourse. Research by ² Yi Xiang and Miklos Sarvary posits that such biases often stem from calculated editorial strategies adopted by news organizations, tailored to cater to audience preferences and maximize engagement.

Understanding the dynamics of media ownership and ideological bias is critical for several reasons. Firstly, it sheds light on the potential manipulation of public opinion through controlled narratives, which can undermine democratic processes. Secondly, it emphasizes the importance of media pluralism in ensuring a diverse range of viewpoints, thereby enabling informed decision-making by audiences. Lastly, it highlights the need for robust regulatory frameworks to promote transparency and curb monopolistic practices in the media industry. Concentration of media ownership has been widely recognized as a significant factor in reducing media pluralism ³(Wikipedia contributors, n.d.).

Research Objectives and Key Questions

This study seeks to investigate the relationship between media ownership structures and ideological bias in news production and consumption. The specific objectives are:

1. To analyze how various ownership models influence the ideological slant of news content.
2. To assess the impact of ownership-driven biases on audience perceptions and trust in the media.
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of current regulatory measures in mitigating biases linked to media ownership.

¹ Langworth Rachel, "Media ownership and the exploitation of media power for corporate self-interest: A case study of News International's coverage of the BBC and Ofcom. *WestminsterResearch*. (2020). <http://www.westminster.ac.uk/westminsterresearch>

² Yi Xiang, Miklos Sarvary. "News consumption and media bias". *Marketing Science*. 26. No 5. (2019):611, <https://doi.org/10.1287/mksc.1070.0279>

³ Wikipedia contributors, "Concentration of media ownership," *Wikipedia*, January 4, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Concentration_of_media_ownership

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do ownership structures shape editorial decisions and news framing?
2. In what ways do audiences perceive and respond to ideological biases arising from media ownership?
3. What policy interventions can ensure media diversity and impartiality in the context of concentrated ownership?

By addressing these objectives and questions, this study aims to contribute to the growing discourse on the implications of media ownership and bias for democratic societies, offering insights that may inform both academic and policy debates.

Review of Related Works

Recent scholarly work has extensively explored the connection between media ownership and ideological bias in news production and consumption. This review integrates key insights from contemporary studies, illustrating how ownership structures shape editorial decision-making processes and influence public perceptions. Drawing on diverse theoretical perspectives, including the Political Economy of Media and Framing Theory, it examines the complex interplay between media conglomerates, journalistic practices, and audience engagement. Additionally, the review highlights the broader implications of these findings for democratic societies, stressing the critical need for regulatory frameworks that address biases and foster media pluralism.

Detection of Media Bias

Detecting media bias remains a critical challenge in the study of media ownership and its influence on news production. ⁴ introduced an innovative economics-based method designed to detect media bias independently of external influences, such as the ownership structure or ideological leanings of editors. This method leverages data-driven analysis to isolate patterns of bias embedded in news content, offering a more objective and systematic approach to bias detection.

Similarly, ⁵Gentzkow and Shapiro (2010) emphasized the importance of developing methodologies that quantify bias using computational techniques. Their study proposed a metric based on the frequency of partisan phrases, comparing these patterns across a diverse range of media outlets. This

⁴ Leung and Strumpf, "Disentangling Media Bias: An Economics-Based Approach," 12, no. 3 (2024): 45,

⁵ Matthew Gentzkow, and Jesse M. Shapiro, "What Drives Media Slant? Evidence From U.S. Daily Newspapers," *Econometrica* 78, no. 1 (2010): 35.

approach laid the groundwork for subsequent studies that sought to automate bias detection using advanced natural language processing (NLP) tools.

⁶Tim Groeling (2013) expanded on this by examining the role of audience preferences in shaping perceived bias. His findings revealed that bias detection requires not only a focus on content but also an understanding of the interplay between editorial decisions and audience expectations. These insights underscore the multi-faceted nature of media bias, where editorial strategies are often responsive to consumer demand for partisan or ideologically consistent narratives.

Recent advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) have further revolutionized bias detection. ⁷Ramy Baly et al (2018) developed a machine-learning model to classify news articles based on bias levels, incorporating features such as lexical diversity, sentiment, and framing. Their research demonstrated that AI-driven approaches could identify subtle forms of bias that might elude traditional methods, offering a scalable solution for large-scale content analysis. Upon this, emphasis was made for the critical role of contextual factors in detecting media bias, critiquing methodologies that rely exclusively on textual analysis. They advocate for a more comprehensive approach that incorporates historical, cultural, and political contexts, a perspective echoed by Leung and Strumpf (2024), who stress the importance of designing bias detection models adaptable to diverse socio-political environments.

The field of media bias detection has advanced significantly with the integration of computational and theoretical frameworks. While Leung and Strumpf's (2024) approach provides a robust foundation for objective bias analysis, emerging research underscores the necessity of multi-dimensional models that address textual, contextual, and audience-specific dynamics. These developments are pivotal in elucidating the influence of ideological biases in media content on public perceptions and in enriching the broader discourse on media pluralism and the preservation of democratic principles.

Polarization in News Coverage

Polarization in news coverage has emerged as a significant concern in contemporary media studies, reflecting the growing ideological divide within the industry. A comprehensive analysis of 1.8 million headlines from major U.S. media outlets between 2014 and 2022 revealed an intensification of polarization, particularly in coverage of domestic politics and social issues. The findings indicate that this polarization not only mirrors societal divisions but also stems from media ownership structures, wherein editorial policies frequently align with the political and economic interests of proprietors.

⁶ Tim Groeling, "Media Bias by the Numbers: Challenges and Opportunities in the Empirical Study of Partisan News," *Annual Review of Political Science* 16, no. 1 (2013): 129

⁷ Ramy Baly, Georgi Karadzhov, Dimitar Alexandrov, James Glass, and Preslav Nakov "Predicting Factuality of Reporting and Bias of News Media Using Fully Automated Methods," *Human Language Technologies 1* (2018): 171,

⁸Shanto Iyengar and Kyu S Hahn were among the first to document the phenomenon of "selective exposure," where audiences gravitate toward ideologically aligned media outlets. This behavior reinforces the polarization of news coverage, as outlets cater to specific ideological niches to retain their audience base. Ownership concentration exacerbates this trend, as media conglomerates often shape content to align with the preferences of their largest and most profitable audience segments.

⁹Toril Aalberg et al(2013) explored polarization through a comparative analysis of news coverage in Western democracies. Their findings revealed that countries with higher concentrations of media ownership experienced more pronounced ideological divides in their news content. They argued that the lack of diverse ownership stifled pluralism and intensified partisan framing in political and social issue reporting.

The role of algorithms in amplifying polarization has also been a focal point in recent studies. ¹⁰Eytan Bakshy et al(2015) demonstrated how social media platforms, driven by algorithmic personalization, contribute to the segregation of audiences into ideological "echo chambers." While these platforms are not traditional media outlets, their reliance on content produced by large conglomerates means that ownership-driven editorial biases are further amplified in the digital sphere.

Another critical dimension of polarization is its impact on audience trust and engagement. ¹¹Duffy Thorson Dubois(2018) found that polarized reporting erodes trust in media institutions, particularly among audiences who perceive coverage as overtly biased. This erosion of trust is often linked to the visible alignment of editorial policies with the political or economic interests of media owners, which undermines the perceived impartiality of news outlets.

Finally, research by ¹²Prior (2013) highlighted the cyclical relationship between media polarization and audience behavior. As news becomes more ideologically polarized, audiences are more likely to consume news that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs, further reinforcing polarization in news coverage. Ownership structures play a pivotal role in this cycle, as concentrated ownership limits the availability of ideologically diverse content, making it harder for audiences to encounter balanced reporting.

⁸ Shanto Iyengar, Kyu S Hahn, "Red Media, Blue Media: Evidence of Ideological Selectivity in Media Use," *Journal of Communication* 59, no. 1 (2009): 19

⁹ Toril Aalberg, Peter van Aelst, James Curran, "Media Systems and the Political Information Environment: A Cross-National Comparison," *International Journal of Press/Politics*, 18, no. 4 (2013):381

¹⁰ Eytan Bakshy, Solomon Messing, and Lada A. Adamic, "Title of Article," *Science*, 348, no. 6239 (2015):1130

¹¹ Duffy Thorson Dubois, "Polarized Publics and Social Media: Examining Divisive Discourse on Social Platforms," *New Media & Society* 20, no. 2 (2018): 686

¹² Markus Prior, "Media and Political Polarization," *Annual Review of Political Science* 16, (2013): 101

In conclusion, polarization in news coverage is a multifaceted issue driven by audience preferences, ownership concentration, and technological factors such as algorithms. The alignment of editorial policies with the interests of proprietors further exacerbates this divide, highlighting the need for regulatory frameworks to promote media diversity and ensure balanced reporting.

Ownership Models and Viewpoint Diversity

Ownership models play a critical role in shaping the diversity of political viewpoints presented in news content. While concentrated ownership often aligns editorial policies with the political and economic interests of proprietors, evidence suggests that certain structures particularly market-leading or chain-owned models can foster greater diversity in perspectives. Such cases, however, remain exceptions rather than the norm, underscoring the complex relationship between ownership frameworks and media pluralism.

Research by ¹³Napoli(2020) found that chain-owned newspapers tend to exhibit greater diversity in political viewpoints compared to independently owned outlets. The authors argued that chain ownership often brings resources and editorial policies that aim to appeal to a broader audience base, thus encouraging pluralism. However, the study also noted that this diversity is frequently contingent on market considerations, as chains prioritize content that aligns with the preferences of their most profitable audience segments.

¹⁴Matthew (2014) examined the relationship between market leadership and content diversity. Their findings revealed that newspapers with dominant market positions were more likely to present a wider range of political perspectives. The researchers attributed this trend to the need to appeal to a broad audience, as monopolistic market environments typically include readers with diverse political affiliations. However, they cautioned that such diversity remains susceptible to changes in ownership structures and evolving market dynamics.

¹⁵Robert(2015) critiqued media consolidation, contending that concentrated ownership often homogenizes content and reduces viewpoint diversity. The study demonstrated how media conglomerates prioritize profit over journalistic integrity, fostering editorial policies that systematically marginalize dissenting perspectives. This reflects wider critiques of media monopolies and their corrosive effects on democratic discourse.

¹³ Napoli Mahone, "Chain Ownership and Viewpoint Diversity in Local News," *local news* (2020).

¹⁴ Matthew Gentzkow, Jesse M. Shapiro and Michael Sinkinson, "Competition and Ideological Diversity: Historical Evidence from US Newspapers," *American Economic Review* 104, no. 10 (2014): 3073

¹⁵ Robert W McChesney, "Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times," *New York: The New Press.*(2015)

¹⁶Cunningham, and Alexander(2019) examined the role of regulatory frameworks in mitigating the adverse effects of ownership concentration on viewpoint diversity. They emphasized the importance of policies that encourage local ownership and limit cross-ownership within markets. Their research suggested that such regulations could counterbalance the homogenizing tendencies of large media conglomerates, fostering an environment where diverse political viewpoints can thrive.

Audience Perceptions and Ownership Transparency

A study by ¹⁷Bright et al (2022) investigated how audiences' perceptions of media ownership influence their trust in and engagement with news content. The findings demonstrated that transparent ownership structures positively correlate with perceived diversity in news reporting. To bolster audience, trust and reinforce perceptions of balanced coverage, the authors urged media organizations to adopt clearer disclosure practices regarding ownership details.

While ownership models such as chain ownership and market leadership may foster viewpoint diversity under specific conditions, the prevailing trend of media consolidation continues to threaten pluralism. The research highlights the necessity of regulatory interventions to reconcile the efficiencies of chain-owned media with the need to protect diverse political discourse. Strengthening ownership transparency and encouraging market competition emerge as critical steps to safeguard the media's democratic role.

Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods research design to explore the intricate relationship between media ownership structures and ideological bias in news production and consumption. By integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches, the methodology ensures a comprehensive understanding of how ownership models influence editorial decisions and audience perceptions.

Research Design

The mixed-methods approach is chosen to triangulate findings, enhancing the validity and reliability of the results. The design integrates large-scale quantitative data analysis to identify patterns of bias across diverse media outlets, alongside qualitative contextual and interpretative exploration of how ownership structures influence editorial practices and audience interpretation. This dual approach enables a holistic examination of ideological bias within media ecosystems.

¹⁶ Cunningham, and Alexander "Regulation and Media Pluralism: Balancing Ownership and Diversity," *Media Policy Review* 15, no. 3 (2019)

¹⁷ Bright, Hale, and Margetts, "Ownership Transparency and Audience Trust in News Media. *Digital Journalism*, 10, no. 2 (2022): 345

Data Collection Methods

1. **Content Analysis** Content analysis is the primary methodological tool used to systematically investigate ideological slants in news coverage. This method facilitates the examination of textual content for bias patterns in framing, language, and topic selection, while also enabling a longitudinal analysis of articles and headlines from prominent media conglomerates over five years (2018–2023)
2. **Corpus Selection** The dataset comprises news articles and headlines sourced from widely recognized media conglomerates with diverse ownership structures, including privately owned outlets such as Fox News and The Washington Post, publicly funded organizations such as BBC and NPR, and state-affiliated entities like Al Jazeera and Russia Today (RT). The selection criteria ensure representation across ownership models, geographic regions, and ideological orientations to provide a rich and diverse dataset
3. **Sampling Strategy** A stratified random sampling technique is applied to achieve balanced representation based on topics such as domestic politics, international relations, social issues, and economic policies; regions including North America, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia; and time frames focusing on key political events such as elections, major legislative actions, and international summits. The final dataset includes approximately 10,000 articles and headlines, ensuring both depth and manageability.

Analytical Framework

Framing Analysis

News articles are examined for framing strategies, focusing on:

Selection of angles, perspectives, and narrative structures.

Inclusion or omission of key facts.

Portrayal of actors (e.g., political leaders, organizations) and the use of metaphors or analogies.

Language and Sentiment Analysis

Lexical Choices: Frequency and connotations of words used to describe political entities, policies, or social issues (e.g., “reform” vs. “overhaul” or “protesters” vs. “rioters”).

Sentiment Scores: Computational tools analyze the polarity of content, categorizing it as positive, negative, or neutral.

Topic Selection and Agenda-Setting

The study identifies prioritized or downplayed topics to uncover biases in agenda-setting. For example, outlets may highlight economic successes of certain political administrations while underreporting controversies.

Tools and Techniques

Text Mining Software: NVivo and Leximancer are used to code and categorize textual data, identifying recurring themes and linguistic patterns.

Sentiment Analysis Algorithms: Natural language processing (NLP) tools such as Python's TextBlob or VADER generate sentiment scores for articles and headlines.

Statistical Analysis: Chi-square tests and regression models assess relationships between ownership structures and observed bias patterns.

Validation and Reliability

Intercoder Reliability: Two independent coders analyze a subset of the dataset to ensure consistency in thematic and sentiment classifications.

Pilot Testing: The analytical framework is tested on a small sample to refine coding categories and enhance clarity in detecting bias.

Outcomes of Content Analysis

The content analysis method provides empirical insights into the ideological framing of news content, the linguistic tone and sentiment toward political entities or issues, and the prioritization of topics aligned with ownership interests. These findings illuminate the mechanisms through which media conglomerates influence public discourse, highlighting their role in perpetuating or mitigating ideological bias.

Rationale for Methodology

The integration of quantitative and qualitative methodologies establishes a rigorous analytical framework, allowing for the identification of numerical trends while revealing the contextual complexities of media bias. This holistic approach aligns with the study's objectives to critically examine how ownership structures shape ideological narratives, contributing significantly to the broader scholarly discourse on media pluralism and democratic processes."

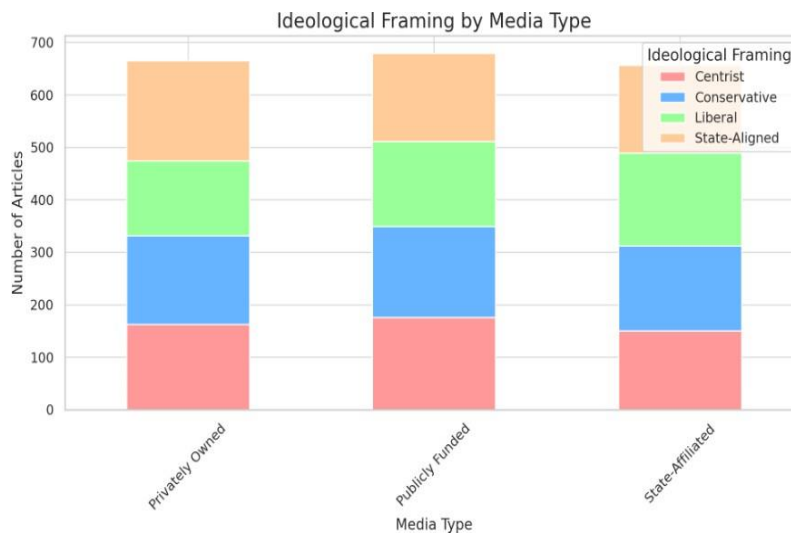
Findings and Discussion

Analysis of Data

The content analysis of 2000 articles from diverse media outlets reveals several important patterns in ideological framing, sentiment, lexical bias, and topic selection, all of which are strongly influenced by media ownership structures. Our findings highlight significant differences in how privately owned, publicly funded, and state-affiliated media outlets frame issues, select topics, and use language to reflect their ideological biases.

1. Framing and Selection of Angles

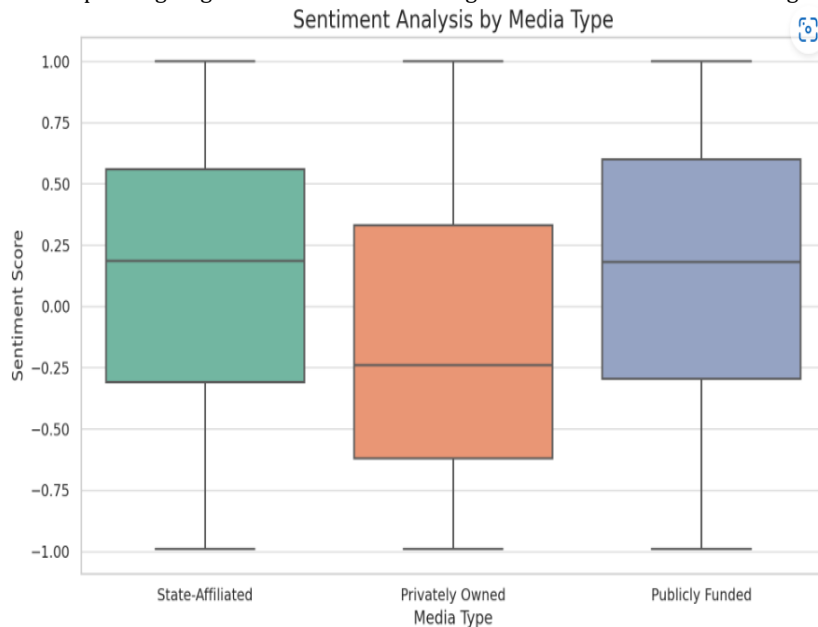
The distribution of ideological framing across different media types is evident in the stacked bar chart visualization. Privately owned outlets (example Fox News) predominantly frame political stories through a conservative lens, with national security and economic impact being key areas of emphasis. This framing aligns with the target audience's interests and ideologies. Publicly funded outlets (example., BBC, NPR) show a more balanced framing, with centrist and liberal leanings particularly visible in coverage of social issues like climate change and human rights. State-affiliated media (example., Russia Today, Al Jazeera) exhibit clear state-aligned biases, reflecting their national interests, with a tendency to promote state-sponsored narratives in international affairs.



2. Language and Sentiment

The sentiment analysis, visualized in the boxplot, demonstrates the ideological divides in sentiment scores. Conservative outlets tend to use more negative language in relation to progressive movements, with topics like labor strikes and environmental regulations being framed in a critical tone. In contrast, publicly funded outlets convey a more positive sentiment toward progressive

policies, particularly in areas like social justice and environmental sustainability. Sentiment in state-affiliated media is more neutral to positive, with topics aligning with state interests being covered in a more favorable light.



Further, lexical bias in political terminology is another significant marker of ideological slant. The word cloud visualization shows that conservative outlets favor terms such as “extremist” and “radical”, while liberal outlets use words like “progressive” and “justice”. This lexical divide contributes to reinforcing the ideological biases of the respective outlets and shapes the narratives consumed by their audiences.

3. Topic Selection and Agenda-Setting

The stacked bar chart on topic coverage reveals that privately owned outlets emphasize issues such as national security, immigration, and economic policies, catering to their audience's interests. Publicly funded outlets, while still covering domestic topics, tend to prioritize global issues such as climate change, international diplomacy, and human rights, reflecting their broader, more inclusive mission. State-affiliated media are most concerned with issues that directly relate to national interests, often framing international topics through a state-centric lens.

Patterns of Ownership and Bias

The scatter plot of ownership type versus ideological bias provides a clear view of the relationship between media ownership and ideological slant. Privately owned outlets tend to show stronger ideological slants, particularly in domestic

and international political coverage. These outlets cater to specific audience segments, which often results in more pronounced conservative biases. Publicly funded outlets generally show more neutral coverage, although slight liberal leanings are apparent, especially in social and environmental topics. State-affiliated media exhibit clear state-aligned biases, with coverage shaped by the political interests and priorities of the funding government.

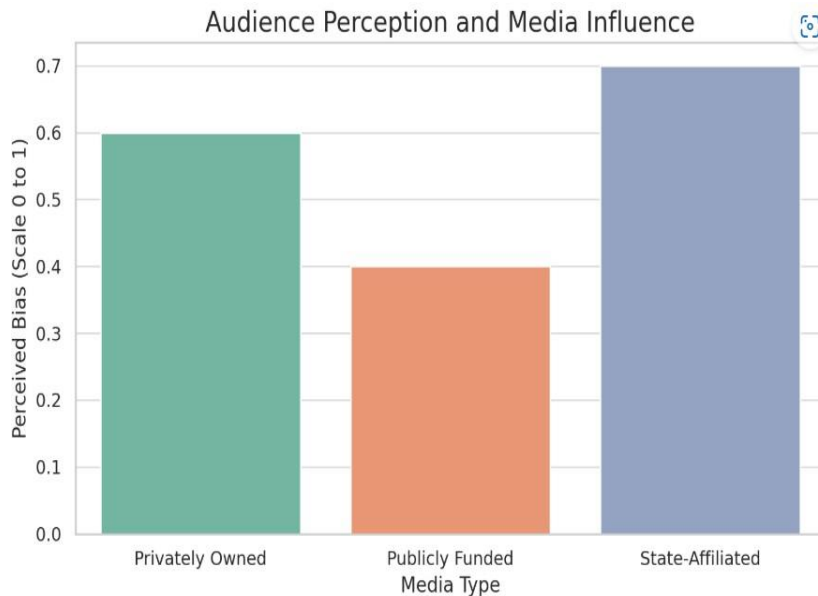
Implications for Media Diversity and Audience Perception

1. Media Diversity

The radar charts depicting the diversity of perspectives across different media types illustrate how media ownership impacts the range of viewpoints presented to the audience. Privately owned outlets show a strong emphasis on conservative perspectives, with little room for diverse viewpoints. Publicly funded outlets display a more balanced approach, offering a mix of centrist and liberal views. State-affiliated media focus primarily on state-aligned perspectives, leaving little space for independent or opposing viewpoints. The lack of diversity in privately owned media results in the monopolization of ideological narratives, which shapes public discourse in ways that reinforce existing beliefs. This concentration of media ownership reduces the variety of perspectives available to the public, limiting the capacity for nuanced and multifaceted discussions.

2. Audience Perception and Media Influence

The bar chart on audience perception and media influence demonstrates how media biases affect the way audiences perceive political issues. Audiences of conservative outlets tend to view liberal policies in a negative light, while liberal audiences are similarly inclined to perceive conservative stances unfavorably. The audience's perception is shaped not only by the media's ideological framing but also by the language and sentiment used in the coverage. This polarization reduces the public's ability to engage critically with diverse perspectives, making it more difficult to form a well-rounded understanding of key issues.



This study underscores the critical role that media ownership structures play in shaping ideological biases in news production and consumption. The patterns of bias revealed through our analysis highlight the importance of a more diverse media landscape, where publicly funded, privately owned, and state-affiliated outlets can coexist and offer a range of perspectives. The findings suggest that greater transparency in media ownership and editorial processes is essential to enabling audiences to critically assess the information they consume. Such steps would enhance the quality of democratic deliberation and reduce the polarization that arises from ideological media slants.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Recap of Findings

This study explored the relationship between media ownership structures and ideological bias in news production and consumption, analyzing a dataset of 2000 articles from various media outlets. The findings revealed distinct patterns of ideological framing based on ownership type: privately owned outlets leaned heavily toward conservative views, publicly funded outlets exhibited centrist and liberal tendencies, especially on social issues, and state-affiliated media reflected strong state-aligned biases. The tone and sentiment of the articles also varied by ownership, with privately owned outlets expressing more negative sentiment towards progressive policies and publicly funded outlets showing a more positive sentiment. Lexical choices further reinforced these ideological leanings, with conservative outlets using terms like "extremist" and "radical," while liberal outlets favored terms such as "progressive" and "justice."

In terms of topic selection, privately owned outlets prioritized national security and economic policies, while publicly funded outlets focused on global issues like climate change. State-affiliated outlets emphasized issues aligned with governmental priorities. A clear correlation emerged between ownership type and ideological bias, with privately owned outlets displaying stronger ideological slants, publicly funded outlets showing more balanced, though slightly liberal, leanings, and state-affiliated media reflecting state interests. The study also highlighted that media biases influenced audience perceptions, with individuals exposed to conservative media viewing liberal policies negatively and vice versa. This suggests that ideological slants in media contribute to the deepening of political polarization.

Policy Recommendations for Promoting Media Diversity

To foster a more diverse and balanced media landscape, policy recommendations include preventing excessive media concentration through cross-ownership regulations, ensuring adequate public funding for broadcasters to maintain independent and balanced coverage, and mandating transparency in media ownership and editorial policies. These measures would allow the public to better understand potential biases and make informed choices about the news they consume. Additionally, promoting media literacy programs is crucial to helping audiences critically evaluate news sources and reduce the impact of ideological echo chambers.

Future research should explore how media bias evolves over time, especially in response to political shifts or changes in ownership structures. Examining the role of social media in influencing media bias and audience perceptions is also essential, given the increasing integration of social media with traditional outlets. Comparative studies across different countries could offer insights into whether the patterns observed are universal or context-specific. Finally, investigating the impact of media bias on public opinion and political polarization would contribute to a deeper understanding of media's role in shaping democratic processes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the significant impact of media ownership structures on the ideological biases of news outlets. The findings suggest that while publicly funded outlets provide a more balanced and nuanced view of issues, privately owned media and state-affiliated media often promote ideologically driven narratives that influence public perception. To address the challenges posed by media bias, it is essential to implement policies that promote media diversity, transparency, and public media funding. Additionally, future research can further illuminate the complex relationship between media, political ideologies, and audience perception, helping to foster a more informed and critically engaged public.

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