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### Ethnic newspaper industry in Pakistan and impacts of corporate ownership

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## ETHNIC NEWSPAPER INDUSTRY IN PAKISTAN AND IMPACTS OF CORPORATE OWNERSHIP

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**ABSTRACT** During the Indian independence movement, the Urdu-language ethnic newspapers played a significant role in instigating resistance against colonial authorities within local communities. However, later on, Urdu journalism underwent a transformation, shifting from the ‘advocate-journalist’ model to one dominated by corporate ownership in Pakistan. These commercial agents have faced criticism for using journalism as a shield for their other businesses, yet their presence has profoundly impacted current newspaper practices in various ways. Our case study of the *Daily Express* reveals that this newspaper, by implementing innovative journalism, technological advancements and efficient management practices, has influenced both preceding and subsequent Urdu dailies, transforming Pakistani newspapers into a modern print media industry. Despite these advancements, the impacts of corporate concerns also include a lack of adequate coverage on various human development issues and science-related topics, posing risks to the attractiveness of such papers for the reading public.

**KEYWORDS:** *advocate-journalists, climate change, corporate ownership, Daily Express, Pakistan, print media, Urdu press, science journalism*

### Introduction

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, Pakistan has witnessed significant growth in mass media (Gul et al., 2017), attributed in part to the rapid expansion of the print media and publishing sectors. Currently, over 1,500 daily, weekly or monthly newspapers are published in Pakistan in various languages including English, Urdu and Sindhi (Dickinson & Memon, 2012: 623). All mainstream newspapers in Pakistan are privately owned, as the state does not run any newspapers

(Hussain, 2012). Structurally, these papers fall under two major ownership types, cross-media and corporate. Cross-media ownership occurs when an individual media tycoon owns varying kinds of media outlets, such as news publications, television networks and FM radio channels. For example, over the past 20 years, the Jang Media Group has horizontally expanded its reach from print to digital media. Conversely, corporate media ownership as a growing trend in the media industry sees non-journalistic companies diversifying into the mass media sector. The Dunya Media Group, established by Mian Amir Mahmood in 2012, exemplifies this trend, with its proprietors transitioning from the private education sector to venture into the media industry.

Corporate media ownership frequently faces criticism for its role in promoting a particular cultural hegemony and prioritising profit-oriented societal structures on a global scale (Bourdieu, 2002; Herman & McChesney, 1997). In Pakistan, media conglomerates owned by corporations have been accused of using their media entities as a shield for commercial pursuits (Mezzera & Sial, 2010). However, there is a dominant perception that the Lakson Group (<http://www.lakson.com.pk/lakson-group>), a major business conglomerate operating in Pakistan since 1954, has been instrumental in bringing transformative corporate practices to the conventional Urdu language newspaper market by initiating the *Daily Express* in 1998, turning newspaper publishing in Pakistan into an acknowledged industry.

The Lakson Group, with a wide-ranging portfolio, is recognised among Pakistan's biggest and most dynamic business groups. Its *Daily Express* has brought fresh concepts into the Urdu newspaper sector, regarding content, presentation, operations, technology, distribution and staff recruitment. Despite these innovations in Pakistan's print journalism by the *Daily Express*, it remains unclear to what extent such developments have been adopted by rival publishing houses.

Modern Urdu journalism in Pakistan has transitioned from the activism-oriented 'advocate-journalist' approach to becoming part of the corporate ownership domain, emphasising commercial aspects. It now pursues interests connected to all kinds of economic and political matters, rather than giving importance to activist journalism and acting as a people-centric enterprise. This article's main aim is to examine the various implications of this significant shift in management focus in terms of the vision, reach and operation of such ethnic newspapers and media enterprises. Our study scrutinises the impacts of introducing modern trends and associated changes in management and journalism practices of Pakistan's newspaper industry. Drawing on a detailed case study of the corporate-owned *Daily Express*, the article first contextualises its analysis by presenting a historical backdrop of the transformation of the popular Pakistani Urdu press, reflecting on developments known from the pre- and post-independence periods. It then explores how contemporary newspaper publishers are following certain production and management practices to adapt to technological advancements in the newspaper industry. The article concludes with a brief discussion on areas of improvement and bottlenecks of development that may help

to strengthen the science literacy of Pakistan's newspaper readers through activist journalism, which seems to be curtailed by the impacts of corporate ownership.

## **History of the Urdu Press in Pre- and Post-independence Pakistan**

### *Pre-independence Newspapers*

The pre-partition era of the Indian subcontinent is known for its rich history of newspaper publishing in many languages, including Urdu, Bengali, English, Hindi and Persian (Shahzad, 2019). Urdu newspapers significantly contributed to the struggle against colonial rule by fostering a sense of freedom among South Asian Muslims (Tahir & Baloch, 2009). From a historical perspective, the era of Urdu journalism in British India can be divided into the epochs before and after the 1857 War of Independence. Seeking to differentiate these two epochs, Tahir and Baloch (2009: 33) explain that before the Revolt of 1857, progressive movements in India placed greater focus on social rather than political change. Newspapers such as those supported by Raja Ram Mohan Rai (1772–1833) played a significant role in these movements, while after 1857, the press became more politically and ideologically radicalised.

The initial Urdu newspaper, the weekly *Jam-e-Jahan Numa*, established in 1822 in Calcutta (now Kolkata), faced limited success in engaging an Urdu readership and subsequently switched to publishing in Persian (Masood, 2003). In 1836, Maulvi Muhammad Baqar (1780–1857), a great advocate of Hindu–Muslim unity (Rizvi, 2014), took the bold step of publishing the second Urdu newspaper in Delhi, *Dilli Urdu Akhbar*. Initially, the tone of this weekly paper was cautious. However, once the 1857 war began, it underwent a complete transformation and became more popular and activist (Tahir & Baloch, 2009). Unfortunately, Maulvi Muhammad Baqar's support for the mutineers led to him facing the death penalty at the hands of the British (Rahman et al., 2019; Rizvi, 2014). He was arrested by the British on 16 September 1857 and shot two days later without a trial.

Subsequently, with the acceleration of the independence movement in major cities across colonial India, the Urdu press experienced unparalleled expansion. Tahir and Baloch (2009: 36) document that newspapers emerged from 29 cities throughout India, with key centres including Agra, Bombay, Banaras, Delhi, Lahore, Lucknow and Madras. Interestingly, these regions served as both battlefields for the freedom struggle and prominent hubs of the Urdu press.

The assassination of Maulvi Muhammad Baqar motivated numerous Muslim philosophers to emulate his example and commence publishing Urdu newspapers (Masood, 2003). The 'advocate-journalist' model (Janowitz, 1975) influenced several Urdu newspapers that emerged prior to independence in August 1947. Owners and publishers utilised these platforms to propagate their political views and to rouse Muslims from political apathy. Prominent advocate-journalists such as Abdul Halim Sharar, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Maulana Hasrat Mohani, Maulana Muhammad Ali Johar, Maulana Zafar Ali Khan, Majid Hasan and Hameed

Nizami played pivotal roles in the pursuit of freedom. They utilised their publications, such as *Urdu-i-Mualla*, *The Aligarh Institute Gazette*, *Comrade*, *Muhazzab*, *Al-Hilal*, *Zamindar*, *Madinah*, and *Daily Nawa-i-Waqt*, to advance their cause (Abbas, 2013; Chatterjee, 2011; Gunaratne, 2003; Hussain, 2012; Jalandhari, 2014; Laskar, 2012; Parekh, 2018; Rao, 2018; Robb, 2020).

In the early days, owners of Urdu publications were themselves notable literary figures who held radical perspectives. Consequently, the content of these newspapers prominently showcased the assertive tone of Urdu literature (Chatterjee, 2011). Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, a pioneering advocate-journalist, diverged from the conventional literary approach when he launched the weekly *Al-Hilal* in Calcutta in 1912. According to Chatterjee (2011: 14), *Al-Hilal* was among the early Urdu newspapers that emphasised both content and presentation, encompassing layout and design. Following the pattern of Egyptian newspapers (Laskar, 2020), its notable strength lay in its content, engaging readers with a fresh language and expressive style.

During the Indian independence movement in the 1930s and 1940s, Urdu newspapers, with their distinctive advocate-journalist approach, played a significant role in highlighting abuses of power and forms of bad governance, often provoking resistance against colonial authorities and various princely rulers. For example, when the Hindu Dogra rulers of Kashmir prohibited newspaper publications in their state, journalists sent their reports for publication to papers in Lahore (Bhat, 2022: 146–7).

Based on the above accounts, it can be inferred that Urdu newspapers prior to independence were primarily controlled by ‘advocate-journalists’, who pursued their writings as a life goal rather than a means to generate personal wealth and acclaim (Ahmad, 2000; Laskar, 2020; Rizvi, 2014). As a result, the idea of an impartial press was entirely absent during the British colonial era in the subcontinent (Mezzera & Sial, 2010: 12). This pattern was not limited to South Asia. In many other post-World War II developing nations, journalism commonly formed an integral part of liberation movements advocating freedom from colonial rule (Jensen, 2008).

### *Post-independence Newspapers*

Following Pakistan’s independence in 1947, it inherited two notable Urdu newspapers, *Daily Nawa-i-Waqt* and *Daily Jang*, among a few others. Hameed Nizami and Mir Khalil-ur-Rehman, two distinguished journalists of the independence movement, had founded these newspapers, respectively (see Table 1). The first new Urdu newspaper published in independent Pakistan was the daily *Imroz*, founded by Mian Iftikharuddin in 1947 (Malik, 1967). Initially, there were more Urdu dailies compared to Bengali, Sindhi and English language newspapers. Highlighting a unique feature that contributed to the popularity and economic viability of early Urdu newspapers, Feldman (1956: 93) noted that Urdu newspapers are distinct in their composition and printing methods compared to those used for other languages in Pakistan. They were handwritten in the elegant Persian-Arabic script by calligraphists known as *katibs*. The newspaper was then directly printed from the master copy using a

lithographic process, making the production of Urdu newspapers cheaper than that of other publications.

Initially, the pre-independence advocate-journalist approach remained operational. Mainstream newspapers were largely aligned with either the left or right and were influenced by ideological conflicts of the Cold War. Notable examples were Mian Iftikharuddin's liberal-left newspaper *Imroz* and Hameed Nizami's right-leaning liberal publication *Daily Nawa-i-Waqt*, which Sheikh (2014) discusses on the death of Nizami (1928–2014). During this dynamic period, characterised by volatility and the search for a conducive environment for advocacy journalism, various political parties in Pakistan, including the Pakistan Peoples Party, the Muslim League and Jamat-e-Islami, ventured into the realm of Urdu newspapers to exert their influence on public opinion. Yet, as Sajid (1992: 9) commented, very soon 'this experiment proved to be a failure'.

When during the late 1960s, Pakistan under Ayub Khan decided to align with the USA (Iqbal & Khalid, 2011), this political shift led to the detention of numerous progressive journalists and writers. The military government took control of Mian Iftikharuddin's Progressive Papers Limited (PPL) and its associated publications, such as *The Pakistan Times* (English), the daily *Imroz* (Urdu) and the weekly *Lailo Nahar* in Urdu (Niazi & Mustafa, 2010; Parveen & Bhatti, 2018). The primary reason for such takeovers was the suspicion that their editors held socialist beliefs (Mezzera & Sial, 2010). In 1964, further suppressing dissenting voices, the Ayub Khan government established the National Press Trust (NPT). Under this initiative, all PPL newspapers, including the popular Urdu daily *Mashriq*, along with 15 others, were placed under NPT control (Siddiqi, 2015).

Under the succeeding two military regimes, from 1969 to 1971 and 1977 to 1988, all newspapers owned by the NPT continued to serve as propaganda tools for the military rulers (Parveen & Bhatti, 2018). According to William (1978), this indirect government ownership of newspapers was acknowledged as a method of controlling content and editorial policies. However, when democracy was restored in 1988, the new government decided to disassociate itself from the media industry. Consequently, the NPT was disbanded in 1989 and all government-owned publications gradually underwent privatisation (Media Ownership Monitor Pakistan, 2018a).

This partly state-driven privatisation policy prompted private newspaper owners to horizontally grow their print media empires. *Daily Jang* and *Daily Nawa-i-Waqt* quickly launched their English dailies, *The News* and *The Nation*, respectively (Media Ownership Monitor Pakistan, 2018a). This development also motivated corporate owners to enter the print media industry, ostensibly to protect their other commercial concerns (Mezzera & Sial, 2010). In this context, *Daily Express* became Pakistan's first corporate-owned newspaper, signalling a shift from the advocate-journalist era towards ideological and political independence in the country's newspaper industry. Hussain (2012) confirms that corporate media groups in Pakistan maintain a moderate political stance and seek to prioritise their commercial interests over

alignment with any specific political party or group. The next section sheds light on how the *Daily Express* became a trendsetter for commercialisation in contemporary Pakistan's newspaper industry.

### *Express Media Group*

As one of the most circulated national daily Urdu newspapers in Pakistan, the *Daily Express* is a flagship project of the Express Media Group (EMG). This group also oversees the publication of *The Express Tribune*, an English daily that partners with the international edition of *The New York Times*, and the daily *Sindh Express*, a Sindhi language newspaper. EMG also broadcasts a 24/7 Urdu news channel, Express News, and has an entertainment channel, Express Entertainment. EMG is a subsidiary of the Lakson Group, a conglomerate company owned by the well-known Pakistani Lakhani business family, with corporate ventures spread all over the country. The Lakson Group, founded in 1954, stepped into print journalism in 1998 by publishing the *Daily Express* from Karachi, Pakistan's largest city. Therefore, EMG by now has many years of experience in balancing corporate culture and values with the print media domain. Hussain (2012: 61) reports that EMG follows a moderate political approach, and instead of being aligned with any particular political party, focuses on its business and commercial interests.

Before EMG ventured into print media, there were three prominent publishing houses, the Jang Group, Nawa-i-Waqt Group and Khabrain Group, with widely-circulated newspapers in Urdu and English. The owners of these three groups had a journalism background, with no other business or corporate experience. EMG introduced a new corporate business model and helped in the transformation of the print media into a recognised industry in Pakistan. *Daily Express* has influenced print journalism in Pakistan in multiple ways. It has brought wholesome changes in the procedures of conducting practical journalism and has also changed the content and layout of Urdu newspapers. Moreover, it has created a corporate atmosphere in the local newspaper industry, also establishing links with journalism academia to recruit journalists with relevant qualifications and streamlining hiring and firing processes.

### *Regional Journalism*

Prior to the inception of *Daily Express*, Pakistan's print media was confined to major cities such as Lahore, Islamabad, Peshawar, Karachi and Quetta until the late 1990s. All publications under the group's umbrella were printed within these urban hubs and then distributed to remote areas, resulting in delayed news for readers in distant regions. To tackle this challenge, *Daily Express* proactively initiated operations from 11 regional centres, including Sargodha, Sukkur, Multan, Gujranwala, Rahim Yar Khan and Faisalabad. This extensive network expansion gave *Daily Express* a substantial edge over its rivals.

However, a metropolitan-centric bias in the newspaper content due to their initial publication in larger urban centres (Dickinson & Memon, 2012) has been identified. Publishers printed multiple editions and distributed them to various cities. Local correspondents sent news stories through regular postal services, resulting in a three-day delay before the story appeared in the relevant newspaper. Consequently, readers in remote areas were still left with outdated news. A notable example arose when Nawabzadah Nasarullah Khan, an eminent local politician, breathed his last in the late hours of 27 September 2003. The following day, only the *Daily Express* in Islamabad reported his death, while other newspapers still covered his hospitalisation.

However, the innovative regional journalism venture not only narrowed the information divide but also opened doors for local journalists to seize new employment prospects. *Daily Express* expanded its local publications, surpassing traditional correspondence-based journalism. It established state-of-the-art newsrooms in smaller cities, providing platforms for local journalists to engage in diverse roles such as news reporting, sub-editing and feature writing. Pioneering the introduction of press machines in these regions, readers gained access to daily local newspapers with a comprehensive coverage of local, regional, national and global news. Table 1 provides an overview of Pakistan's Urdu newspapers.

Table 1 shows that both preceding and succeeding Urdu newspapers have largely followed the trend of regional journalism. Unlike earlier Urdu newspapers, *Daily Express* chose to print from populous cities rather than provincial headquarters. It debuted in Faisalabad, Gujranwala and Sargodha, ranking 3rd, 5th and 12th in population. Later, all Urdu newspapers followed this pattern when they were launched. For instance, *Daily Khabrain* issued local editions from Muzaffarabad and Peshawar since 2002 and later from Sukkur and Hyderabad in 2004. Similarly, according to the website of *Daily Nawa-i-Waqt*, its owners are planning to issue Gujranwala and Muzaffarabad editions.

### *Technology*

In Pakistan, *Daily Jang* was the first Urdu newspaper to introduce computers in newsrooms for composing, editing and laying out newspapers (Media Ownership Monitor Pakistan, 2018c). It was also the prime one to use *Noori Nastaliq*, the Urdu computer composing font (Chhapra, 2009). But this technology was limited to the 'composing' section, as reporters still filed stories on paper and newsroom staff edited them on paper. These edited stories were sent to the composing section, where the stories were typeset on computers. Upon its launch in 1998, demonstrating corporate social responsibility, *Daily Express* came up with an innovative yet environment-friendly practice and pioneered 'paperless operations' in the Urdu newsroom. For this purpose, state-of-the-art software, namely 'Century Publication System (CPS)', was designed and Urdu typing training was given to all reporters and editors. Additionally, field and newsroom staff were synergised through CPS for effective integration. The latest versions of software including Inpage, Corel Draw and Adobe Photoshop



Table 1 **Pakistani Urdu Newspapers.**

<i>Newspaper</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Ownership</i>	<i>Owner</i>	<i>Publishing Cities</i>
<i>Daily Jang</i>	1939	Private	Meer Shakeel-ur-Rehman	London, Rawalpindi, Karachi, Quetta, Lahore, Multan jang.com.pk
<i>Nawa-i-Waqt</i>	1940	Private	Rameeza Majeed Nizami	Muzaffarabad, Islamabad, Gujranwala, Lahore, Multan, Karachi, Quetta nawawagt.com.pk
<i>Daily Khabrain</i>	1992	Private	Imtihan Shahid	Peshawar, Islamabad, Muzaffarabad, Lahore, Sukkur, Hyderabad, Multan, Karachi dailykhabrain.com.pk
<i>Daily Pakistan</i>	1997	Private	Mujeeb-ur-Rehman Shami	Peshawar, Rawalpindi, Karachi, Multan, Lahore dailypakistan.com.pk
<i>Daily Express</i>	1998	Corporate	Sultan Ali Lakhani	Peshawar, Islamabad, Gujranwala, Lahore, Faisalabad, Multan, Rahim Yar Khan, Sargodha, Sukkur, Karachi, Quetta www.express.com.pk
<i>Daily Dunya</i>	2012	Corporate (University of Central Punjab)	Mian Amir Mahmood	Multan, Karachi, Gujranwala, Lahore, Faisalabad, Islamabad dunya.com.pk
<i>Roznama Nai Baat</i>	2011	Corporate (Superior Group)	Chaudhary Abdul Rehman	Quetta, Peshawar, Sargodha, Islamabad, Faisalabad, Lahore Karachi nabaaat.pk
<i>Daily 92 News</i>	2015	Corporate (Madinah Group of Industries)	Muhammad Haider Amin	Multan, Faisalabad, Islamabad, Karachi, Sargodha, Lahore, Quetta, Peshawar roznama92news.com
<i>Roznama Jehan Pakistan</i>	2012	Corporate (University of Lahore)	Awais Rauf	Karachi, Lahore, Multan, Rawalpindi, Gujranwala, Islamabad jehanpakistan.com

Source: Media Ownership Monitor Pakistan (2018b). <https://pakistan.mom-gmr.org/en/owners/>

were adopted for preparation of newspapers. These innovations helped to expedite news operations and also contributed to improving the overall editorial and technical quality of the final product. This paperless newsroom process has been widely adopted by most succeeding newspapers.

The *Daily Express* also set a new trend in the layout of Urdu newspapers by publishing more and bigger pictures on its front and back pages. It was the first Urdu newspaper publishing a three-column picture with the lead story on the front page. Earlier, special editions and magazine stories of preceding newspapers were printed with big pictures and very little content. Usually, more than 70% of the space of a special edition was consumed by pictures. *Daily Express* reversed this trend, minimising the size of pictures and printing more content, which was also a cost-saving exercise.

Following the rise of digital technology in the print media industry, the interaction between online news, social media and user participation has become crucial on newspaper websites (Olsson & Almgren, 2016: 67). User engagement, such as commenting, sharing and tweeting news, has significantly changed the relationship between the audience and journalists, allowing readers to actively participate in online news media (Engelke, 2019). Studies indicate that online readers' comments (ORCs), specifically anonymous ones following an online newspaper story or article, provide valuable insights into readers' feedback on important issues. Examples include polio vaccinations (Ittefaq et al., 2021a) and evidence of suicides (Rosen et al., 2020). In such cases, as a German study confirms (Friemel & Dötsch, 2015), ORCs become a useful indicator for perceiving public opinion. However, the risk of abuse and distortions and morphing news through such public interventions also generates wariness.

Furthermore, ORCs serve as a valuable means of gauging readers' immediate reactions to the quality of online news content (Strandberg & Berg, 2013), helping to provide consumer feedback. On the other hand, the use of social plug-ins for sharing news can help newspapers encourage readers to share their content on readers' own social media accounts, which increases such newspapers' visibility on popular social media platforms. In Pakistan, the use of both social plug-ins for sharing news and ORCs was first introduced by *Daily Express* in its online edition in 2006. Table 2 provides an overview of the offerings.

Table 2 confirms that all succeeding newspapers have more positively followed this trend than the preceding newspapers. This further reveals that online editions of both the corporately owned *Daily Express* and *Daily Dunya* have provided readers with the highest opportunities for online sharing and participation of their content. Among preceding newspapers, *Nawa-i-Waqt* is the only one offering its readers the AddThis (<https://www.addthis.com/>) service to share its contents. Add This is an organisation offering its services to online news websites, to increase audience engagement on some of the world's most popular social networks with native social buttons.

Considering the popularity of Urdu newspapers among economically disadvantaged, less educated and traditionalist elements of society (Rahman & Eijaz, 2014), it is possible that *Daily Jang* and *Daily Khabrain*, in anticipation of poor-quality

Table 2 **Summary of Readers' Participation and Sharing Tools Offered by Online Urdu Editions.**

Newspaper	ORCs Tool	Social Plugins	
		E-Paper	Online Edition
<i>Daily Jang</i>	✗	✓ (Facebook, Twitter)	✓ (Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp)
<i>Nawa-i-Waqt</i>	✓	✓ (181)*	✓ (Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, LinkedIn)
<i>Daily Khabrain</i>	✗	✗	✓ (Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, LinkedIn)
<i>Daily Pakistan</i>	✓	✗	✓ (Facebook, Email, Twitter, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Pinterest)
<i>Daily Express</i>	✓	✓ (181)	✓ (181)
<i>Daily Dunya</i>	✓	✓ (181)	✓ (181)
<i>Daily Nai Baat</i>	✓	✓ (Facebook)	✓ (181)
<i>Daily 92 News</i>	✓	✓ (Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, LinkedIn)	✓ (Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, LinkedIn)
<i>Jehan Pakistan</i>	✓	✓ (181)	✓ (Facebook, LinkedIn)

Source: First author's calculations.

\*Note: Offers AddThis service to share its contents on 181 social media platforms.

discussions, chose not to provide the ORC feature to their online readers. Among various reasons for this, prominent could be risks regarding abuse and persecution of journalists (Jamil, 2018).

### Segmentation

Although topic-based segmentation of news was present in a couple of newspapers before, *Daily Express* institutionalised this, making it a regular feature. Until recently, newspapers used to be a dry subject for elders, while young people found almost nothing attracting their interest. *Daily Express* specifically targeted young readers and, in 1998, dedicated two full pages to sports news for the first time in the history of Urdu newspapers. This trend-setting initiative attracted more readers and extra business. Other newspapers, including the most-circulated *Daily Jang*, followed this trend. Likewise, *Daily Express* started a Metropolitan Page for all editions, containing news of that particular city. This provided more space for highlighting civic issues of local importance. Earlier, news stories from the relevant place of publication were printed on page 2 in most preceding newspapers, but this page could contain stories from other cities as well. Further developing the Metropolitan Page idea, *Daily Express* also added a five-column lead of a local story. On this page, issue-based coverage, both in content and pictures, was encouraged instead of printing stories based on

Table 3 Summary of Number of Pages Dedicated to Various Segments.

<i>Newspaper</i>	<i>Sports</i>	<i>International</i>	<i>Metropolitan</i>
<i>Daily Jang</i>	One	One	One
<i>Nawa-i-Waqt</i>	Half	One	Two
<i>Daily Khabrain</i>	Half	One	One
<i>Daily Pakistan</i>	Half	One	Two
<i>Daily Express</i>	Two	One	Two
<i>Daily Dunya</i>	One	One	Two
<i>Daily Nai Baat</i>	Two	One	One
<i>Daily 92 News</i>	Half	One	Two
<i>Jehan Pakistan</i>	Quarter	One	Two

Source: First author's calculations.

press releases. Similarly, one complete page was dedicated to international news. This segmentation of content has now become an integral feature of both preceding and succeeding newspapers, as shown in Table 3.

### *Advertising*

As noted, *Daily Express* is owned by a corporate giant, the Lakhani Group, which holds the franchise rights for several multinational corporations, including McDonald's, Colgate-Palmolive and Ajinomoto Co. Inc. Japan in Pakistan, with extensive holdings in agri-business. Additionally, it has stakes in call centres, financial services, paper and board, printing and packaging, surgical instruments, technology and the travel sector. As the Lakhani Group has a huge annual marketing and advertising budget, it seems that the prime impetus behind establishing a media empire would have been to save advertising costs being given to other media houses. This strategy was largely followed by other business groups, too, particularly from the private education sector.

According to recent figures regarding the biggest advertisement sources for newspapers, the federal government remains the largest spender, followed by real estate, educational institutions, financial services and big pharma sectors in the next four positions respectively (Media Ownership Monitor Pakistan, 2018d). These figures explicitly reveal why corporate giants from financial services and educational institutions have heavily invested in launching their own newspapers in recent years.

### *Hiring*

When *Daily Express* was launched in 1998, newspaper journalism was considered an underpaid profession. Most newspaper workers and staff either complained of delayed payment or non-payment of salaries for months. According to the International Federation of Journalists (2004), many had no formal appointment

letters or were working on a temporary contract basis, without job security. In Pakistan, there are basically two types of print media employment. One is regular permanent jobs, with an optimal age limit of 60 years. The other category is temporary contract-based jobs, with at least eight months up to three years duration. In addition, of course, there are many completely casual employments.

Journalist organisations have launched protests for the implementation of the Seventh Wage Board Award for media workers (Paracha & Tahir, 2012). Many workers were struggling to ensure that their basic pay was compatible with the minimum salary set by the government. In this hostile environment for working in journalism, *Daily Express* in 1998 offered the most lucrative-ever salary packages and other perks and privileges to journalists and columnists. Consequently, many reputed names, some attached to their parent organisations for decades, eventually joined *Daily Express*. In fact, the paper set new salary standards for media workers and left no option for mainstream quality newspapers than to follow this trend to retain their workers.

Earlier, there was also no standard process for hiring and firing staff in Urdu newspapers before the arrival of *Daily Express*. Employment often happened through the personal reference of influential persons, without proper procedures. *Daily Express* then adopted corporate sector-style professional mechanisms, conducting written tests and using interview panels to hire staff in all newspaper departments. For the first time, graduates from journalism, mass communication and media studies were now given preference during the hiring process. Moreover, a paid internship programme was offered to students of journalism departments to provide the necessary skills prior to entering the journalism market. Earlier, student internship programmes had operated only on a voluntary ad-hoc basis and staff training was an alien concept in Urdu newspapers. *Daily Express* not only trained its staff from all technical departments but also conducted refresher courses. This was clearly a very significant improvement as a consequence of the commercialisation of *Daily Express* and the wider sector.

### **Areas of Improvement and Bottlenecks of Development and Science**

The adoption of new technologies and better management practices over the past two decades has certainly helped to transform all mainstream Pakistani newspapers into a modern print media industry with better working conditions for journalists. However, many aspects require further attention.

For instance, despite being newspapers of a developing country with the lowest human development index (HDI) ranking in South Asia (Haider, 2019), the local press in Pakistan provides inadequate coverage of development issues. Jamil (2020: 279) identified five major areas of sustainable development that are ‘occasionally’ covered by Pakistani news media, including affordable energy, poverty, good health and well-being, climate action and gender equality. Analysing the editorial contents of the

Urdu newspapers *Daily Jang* and *Daily Express*, Kamboh and Yousaf (2020: 646) found that instead of using valuable newspaper space to highlight voiceless people's hardships, and eventually improve the country's HDI value, disputes with neighbouring countries, irrelevant wider world issues, political scandals, show business and sports news were given excessive coverage. Kamboh and Yousaf (2020: 653–4) concluded that out of the 4,221 editorials examined, only 726 (17.2%) were advocating human development issues, while 3,495 (82.8%) covered other news categories.

More recently, Kamboh et al. (2022b) found that major English daily newspapers in Pakistan, such as *Dawn*, *The News* and *The Nation*, also publish more content on non-development issues, instead of addressing and advocating the country's environmental health and climate justice problems. Kamboh and Ittefaq (2022: 422) analysed 5,712 editorials to find the difference between editorial coverage of climate justice issues and other issues among Pakistani Urdu and English newspapers. They concluded that only 101 (1.8%) of editorials were published to advocate cases of climate injustice and confirmed that both English and Urdu language newspapers gave nearly equally low coverage to climate justice issues, publishing only 49 and 52 editorials, respectively. Shah et al. (2020) noted that both Urdu and English newspapers not only give meagre coverage to local development issues but also cover them inconspicuously on inner pages, with minimal news stories accompanied by photographs.

Qusien and Robbins (2023) note that a number of factors on individual, routine, organisational and extra-media levels can lead to environmental coverage being excluded or given less prominence in newspapers. Analysing climate change-related media coverage between 2010 and 2021, Ejaz et al. (2023) found that all mainstream Pakistani newspapers gave scant daily coverage of only 0.2% to stories related to climate change, significantly less than the international average. In this regard, we recommend that a development reporting beat should be assigned to seasoned journalists in every newspaper. Additionally, relevant bodies should organise targeted professional training for newsroom staff to sensitise them on wisely using newspaper space for advocating contemporary development issues (Ejaz et al., 2022; Hussain et al., 2022; Jamil, 2020; Kamboh et al., 2022a, 2022b; Kamboh & Yousaf, 2020; Qusien & Robbins, 2023).

Similarly, it has been noted that Global Southern newspapers, including the Urdu press of Pakistan, carry a weak science journalism culture (Jamil, 2023a, 2023b; Naik, 2022; Qusien & Robbins, 2023). Many recent studies have identified a number of impeding factors behind weak science journalism culture in Pakistan. These include journalists' lack of knowledge about science, absence of local science content and heavy reliance on foreign sources. Limited access to information and digital repositories of science publications, inadequate attention to science news stories by news executives, communication gaps between journalists and scientists, the poor presentation style of science articles and lack of science journalism training programmes were also identified (Dutt & Garg, 2012; Ejaz et al., 2022; Jamil, 2023a, 2023b; Kamboh et al., 2022b; Naik, 2022; Nguyen & Tran, 2019; Qusien & Robbins,

2023). We argue that these shortcomings can be addressed by producing local science journalism content and organising effective training programmes for journalists.

Regarding the availability of local science stories, Pakistani news media has yet to fully explore the potential of peer-reviewed research papers as a valuable source of local science stories. Globally, peer-reviewed research papers are a vital source of science news, as they undergo a rigorous process of evaluation by experts in the field before publication (Dempster et al., 2022). Interestingly, Scopus data show that Pakistani scientists have published a wealth of research articles in peer-reviewed impact factor journals during the last two decades (Ahmad et al., 2020). These articles can provide valuable insights and information to journalists (and eventually to readers) on a wide range of topics, including health, environmental issues, renewable energy and technology. Similarly, journalists' training programmes, aimed at polishing the necessary science-related journalism skills, such as fact-checking, infographics, illustration tools, visual journalism and data journalism, should be organised to produce skilled science reporters in Pakistan (Jamil, 2023a).

Moreover, a weak relationship in many regards exists between contemporary Urdu news organisations and mass communication and journalism departments (Kamboh, 2019). First, journalism courses taught at different educational institutions are solely devised by journalism academics under the supervision of the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan, without any direct or indirect input from working journalists (Kamboh, 2019: 165). Ironically, none of the journalist organisations has ever complained about this missing link. Second, neither do journalism departments offer any training workshops on theoretical aspects of practical journalism to media workers, nor have most Urdu newspapers developed any collaboration with journalism departments to offer any jobs or practical training opportunities to future journalists, nor any other liaison to benefit from academic research in journalism. Indeed, sub-standard training has chiefly been considered responsible for poor journalistic standards in the country (Saleem, 2017).

Last but not least, fierce competition between the commercial interests of Urdu newspapers, journalists' financial issues and lack of journalistic training has led to increasingly sensationalised, biased and irresponsible coverage, produced 'on the cheap'. Violations of various journalism ethics are regularly observed across both types of newspaper ownership (Sultana et al., 2020; Zafar et al., 2018). Recent studies highlight critical gaps in the existing journalism code of ethics (Kamboh & Ittefaq, 2019) and identify underpaid journalism by a few mainstream and regional newspapers as a key factor behind such non-compliance (Gul, 2020; Ittefaq et al., 2021b). Such studies have therefore suggested 'prompt action on the part of appropriate bodies to amend relevant codes of ethics' (Kamboh & Ittefaq, 2019: 2). They also demand necessary actions to establish collaboration between the government and owners of economically weak newspapers, 'to consider financial challenges encountered by journalists for the survival of the newspaper industry in Pakistan' (Nizamani et al., 2020), notably also in the context of COVID-related predicaments (Shah et al., 2021).

## **Concluding Analysis**

This article established, first of all, that irrespective of the type of print media ownership and in contrast to popular opinion about social and digital media as newly prominent information sources in Pakistan, newspapers remain important and relevant (Kamboh & Yousaf, 2020; Kamboh et al., 2022a). This business sector is thriving. One reason lies in the growing evidence that the increasingly extensive misinformation on digital platforms makes many people consider newspapers more reliable owing to their fact-based journalism (Dawn Editorial, 2022). Second, e-paper versions of popular newspapers provide convenient accessibility to digital-era readers, in addition to traditional print formats in Pakistan (Dawn Editorial, 2016). Third, through their online editions, Pakistani newspapers have adapted well to the changing digital media landscape by providing subscribers with eloquent and sufficient content to satisfy their diversified needs. Moreover, despite the rise of new media, the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent financial slump, none of the mainstream Pakistani newspapers have halted their publications. While television has significantly impacted print media revenue, there is scant proof of a decline in newspaper readership (Dawn Editorial, 2016).

However, this article has been concerned that the main threat that may divert readership from newspapers to other sources of information is the extravagant commercialisation of the print media sector. In this context, Kamboh and Yousaf (2020: 656) observe that since most print media earnings in Pakistan stem from government and private sector advertisements, influential finance controllers such as government entities, property magnates and industrialists have the power to maintain the non-development orientation of mainstream media content. This is done subtly, hampering the coverage of significant topics of public interest. For instance, issues such as controlling housing price hikes, addressing environmental issues, managing the effects of urban sprawl, improving food quality standards and addressing the high costs of private education are often overlooked or downplayed.

The ethnic newspapers' failure to represent marginalised voices and address related matters of public interest would eventually encourage readers to consult other media platforms to raise such issues and obtain relevant information. This article, therefore, indicates and concludes that the excessive commercialisation of Pakistani newspapers, too much focus on the owners' commercial interests and the resulting lack of concern for matters of wider public interest could pose a long-term risk to the wider acceptance, relevance and circulation of ethnic newspapers in Pakistan.

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