

Editorial Power and Primordialism: A Political Economic Analysis of Harian Fajar Newsroom Practices

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ABSTRACT

This study examines *primordialism* in news decision-making within local media in Makassar, Indonesia, with a particular focus on *Harian Fajar*. This news organisation was selected because it is run by a family network. This family connection assumes that a family run media may compromise journalists' professional roles. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach and the political economy of media perspective, the research draws on in-depth interviews with editorial staff to explore how news decisions are made. The study refers to Chomsky and Herman's propaganda model, which highlights the structural constraints imposed by media ownership and advertising interests, often at the expense of editorial independence. The findings reveal that media ownership, particularly by individuals and their families exerts a significant influence on editorial decisions. This influence frequently overrides formal editorial policies and the journalistic code of ethics. The phenomenon of news primordialism, identified in this study refers to a pattern of unconditional obedience to media owners by newsroom staff. Journalists are often compelled to conform to the preferences of those in power rather than uphold the principles of independent journalism. This culture tends to prioritize business and personal interests over the public's right to transparent and critical reporting, thereby undermining the role of the press as a watchdog and as a platform for public accountability. This study recommends limiting commercial interference in editorial processes and urges media institutions to reaffirm their commitment to serving the public interest as the primary purpose of journalism.

Keywords: *Primordialism, news decision making, journalist, independent, editorial process.*

INTRODUCTION

The ownership of media companies by individuals or families has long concerned scholars of the political economy of media, especially in relation to the concentration of power (Mosco, 2009). In Indonesia, control over mainstream media dates back to the President Suharto's New Order regime (1965–1998), where television was used to legitimize his image as the 'father of development', while the print press was tightly regulated (Tapsell, 2017). This trend persists today, where major television stations are owned by conglomerates with political affiliations. Aburizal Bakrie, former Golkar chairman, controls *ANTV* and *TVOne*; Surya Paloh, a former Golkar politician and NASDEM Party founder, owns *MetroTV*; and Hary Tanoesoedibjo, head of *MNC Group* (which controls *RCTI*, *GlobalTV*, *MNCTV*, and *MNC TV*), has been affiliated with various parties and now lead by Perindo, one of political party in Indonesia. Such media conglomeration raises ethical issues, as public frequencies are often used to serve private interests rather than the public good (Junaedi, 2019).

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E-ISSN: 2289-1528

<https://doi.org/10.17576/JKMJC-2026-4203-01>

Received: 26 May 2025 | Accepted: 8 December 2025 | Published: 30 September 2026

In practice, political and business ties influence editorial content, as seen in outlets like *TVOne* and *MetroTV* (Sonni, 2023). Although mainstream media content is supposed to reflect public interest, advertisers frequently dictate the narrative by embedding promotional material within editorial formats, blurring the line between journalism and advertising (Lauerer & Beckert, 2024). Amidst the development of digital media and commercial pressures, journalist is faced with a dilemma, making journalist ethics standards important for maintaining media credibility and supporting democracy through informed public discourse (Ghose & Gupta, 2013).

At the regional level, family ownership can directly affect newsroom decisions. At *Harian Fajar* in Makassar, for example, the media owner has intervened in editorial matters. This was evident during coverage of the arrest of South Sulawesi Governor Nurdin Abdullah by the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) on February 27, 2021. While other media outlets emphasized the arrest, *Harian Fajar* opted for a softer headline - an editorial reflecting ownership influence. This case demonstrates that media institutions are not as autonomous as often assumed. As Mosco (2009) claims, today's media conglomerates often exert systemic influence without relying on direct ownership.

While primary scholars of political economy of media such as Chomsky and Mosco have explored political and economic pressures on media content, they have largely overlooked the role of primordialism in newsroom decision-making. In the case of *Harian Fajar*, editorial choices often reflect cultural deference to authority figures, regardless of competence revealing how kinship ties and hierarchical obedience can shape journalistic practices alongside economic and political interests. This study therefore aims examining how primordialism is implemented in the newsroom decision- making.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have explored the processes by which editorial decisions are made within newsrooms, outlining the stages of news production that vary according to each media institution's policies. Some of these studies also highlight the increasing role of analytical algorithm technologies in shaping editorial choices (Gibemba, 2021; Moyo et al., 2019; Wouters & Lefevere, 2023; Ivask et al., 2023; Ilan, 2019). Gibemba for instance, investigated the editorial processes in news organizations in the Democratic Republic of Congo, documenting the various stages from information gathering to news dissemination. To provide a comprehensive understanding of decision-making, Gibemba also analysed the editorial departments involved and the factors influencing decisions at each stage (Gibemba, 2021).

In relation to technological advancements, Moyo et al. (2019), examined how analytical tools are increasingly employed in editorial decision-making and advertising negotiations, particularly for capturing audience attention. These tools are integral in identifying content deemed newsworthy. In contrast, Wouters & Lefevere (2023) found that decisions about newsworthiness are also shaped by public protests and civil society actions, which prioritize certain issues for coverage. This underscores the ethical responsibility journalists have in selecting stories that serve the public interest, especially when sensitive issues capture public attention (McCombs & Valenzuela, 2020).

When dealing with sensitive content, such as visual depictions of death Ivask et al. (2023) found a significant absence of formal editorial guidelines. In the absence of clear directives, journalists must rely on their professional judgment and personal norms. On the other hand, Ilan (2019) analysed decision-making processes in national television newsrooms

in Israel. He found how news prioritization and gatekeeping are applied, as well as how certain stories are excluded from coverage.

In the case of breaking news events, such as terrorist attacks, the urgency to disseminate information rapidly requires significant editorial adaptation. Rupar (2020) conducted interviews with editors during the March 15 terrorist attacks in Christchurch, New Zealand, focusing on how 'first responders' in the newsroom adapted to the speed and accuracy demands of the situation. This highlighted how journalistic norms were adapted under extreme circumstances. Waldenström et al. (2019) explored the evolving news business in Sweden and discovered a fundamental tension between journalistic professionalism and managerial imperatives. Their observational study in four Swedish daily newspapers revealed how managerialism, with its focus on centralized decision-making and efficiency, undermines collegial decision-making and the peer review process, ultimately compromising journalistic values. In the context of technological integration Mizgajski and Morzy (2019) explored the impact of emotion-aware systems on news recommendation algorithms. They found that incorporating emotional responses into collaborative filtering algorithms led to more effective news recommendations. Additionally, Kim and Kim (2020) analysed how AI-generated journalism influences editorial decisions through a survey using the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP). Their study showed that media reliability and content quality were prioritized over novelty or perceived value, suggesting that journalistic credibility remains critical, even with AI-generated content. The use of AI technology has reshaped the landscape of journalism in terms of news production and delivery. Study (Aziz, 2025) shows that AI is useful for improving the efficiency and accuracy of news. However, it also raises other issues, such as ethical concerns, potential bias, and changes in the role of journalists in a technology-driven industry. Lastly, Tenor (2023) examined the use of digital audience metrics in Swedish newsrooms, finding that such metrics have led to a new balance in editorial practices, aligning audience preferences with professional journalistic values. However, he emphasized that these metrics must remain under editorial control to ensure that editorial independence is maintained.

a. Chomsky's Propaganda Model and Media Reporting Practices

Chomsky and Herman's Propaganda Model (1984) offer a critical framework for analysing the structural forces that shape news production in media institutions. The model outlines five filters through which information must pass before it reaches the public, thereby revealing how media content is often shaped not by journalistic ideals, but by political and economic interests (See Figure 1).

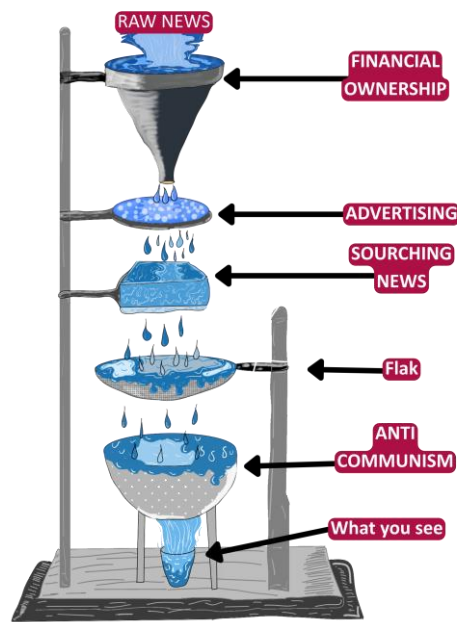


Figure 1: The propaganda model
Source: Herman & Chomsky (2021)

The first filter is ownership and profit orientation, where media are controlled by wealthy individuals and conglomerates with ties to broader corporate networks, allowing institutional investors like banks to influence editorial policies. The second filter is advertising, as media depend on advertisers for revenue, leading them to avoid controversial content and favour consumer-friendly narratives, which compromises editorial independence. The third filter involves sourcing, with media relying on official sources like government and corporate leaders, while marginalizing dissenting voices. The fourth filter, flak, refers to negative feedback or pressure against media content that challenges elite interests, creating a risk-averse media culture. Lastly, the fifth filter is ideology, originally anti-communism, now expanded to include dominant narratives like nationalism and the war on terror that reinforces existing power structures and legitimizes the status (Herman & Chomsky, 2021).

Overall, the Propaganda Model critiques the ways institutional, economic, and ideological pressures shape media content, ultimately serving elite interests rather than fulfilling the ideal of independent public enlightenment.

b. Understanding Primordialism in the Editorial Room

Primordialism can be understood as a concept that emphasizes the inherent bonds among individuals, whether based on blood ties, shared sentiment, or deeply embedded cultural affinity, according to Edward Shils in Moftizadeh (2022). Shils was among the first to introduce the term 'primordial', situating it within the context of familial and relational attachments. According to Shils, such attachments are not limited to interpersonal relationships, but are directed toward individuals who possess particular relational qualities of profound significance or qualities that can only be described as primordial (Coakley, 2018). These bonds are perceived as natural, intuitive, and enduring, forming the foundation of group identity.

This interpretation aligns with the views of Della Gatta (2018), who argue that primordialism does not necessarily require biological ties or intimate closeness. Della Gatta

maintains that primordial attachments are situational rather than biologically determined, and that socio-political identities are fluid, contextual, and constructed. Similarly, Olomojobi (2016), defines primordialism as a strong sense of group identity rooted in primary affiliations, which may not always stem from kinship or descent but still carry powerful emotional and symbolic resonance, such as religion.

According to primordialism such as Shils, these primordial bonds have a binding effect on humans, making them necessary for the development of society (Yan, 2018). Shils offer a more detailed conceptualization of primordialism by identifying three core dimensions. First, primordial attachments are a given, they precede personal experience and social interaction and are perceived as natural or even spiritual rather than sociologically constructed. Second, such attachments are ineffable, they are deeply felt, emotionally compelling, and often defy rational explanation. Belonging to a group, in this view, entails a strong emotional connection to its members and cultural practices. Third, primordialism is fundamentally rooted in emotion and affect. These features distinguish primordial identity from other forms of social identity, making it more than a matter of rational interest or institutional affiliation (Özkırımlı, 2017).

Shils concept of primordialism parallels that of nationalist thinkers, who often treat identity as essential and rooted in symbolic heritage. National identity, in this framework, is imagined through notions of descent, blood ties, kinship, and genealogy; all of which play a central role in shaping a sense of shared belonging (Mutnansky & Huseynli, 2025). Kinship is frequently intertwined with territory, reinforcing the idea that birthplace and ancestral homeland are integral to one's identity.

Steven Grosby further develops this idea by interpreting primordialism not in racial or genetic terms, but as a reflection of inherent vitality expressed through structures of birth - namely, kinship and territory. For Grosby, these elements are intrinsically connected and bound by a sense of devotion to one's origins. He emphasizes that both familial lineage and the physical territory of one's birth are fundamental to the construction of identity (van den Broek, 2020).

In addition to kinship and territory, language plays a central role in primordialism thought. Language is not merely a tool of communication, but a symbolic and emotional vessel of collective memory and identity, as identified by (Tan & Mishra, 2021) that thinkers such as Herder, along with other nationalist scholars, underscore the sentimental and intuitive dimensions of language as crucial to the imagination of national identity.

c. Primordialism in Journalism

Building on the earlier discussion, this study proposes that primordialism may manifest within journalistic practices, drawing on Shils conceptualization of the term. In this context, primordialism emerges in the transformation of facts into news, where journalists in mainstream media often exhibit a pattern of loyalty toward powerful individuals regardless of editorial guidelines or professional standards. This loyalty, though not based on kinship, reflects an affective bond with influential figures within the media organization. As such, journalists may prioritize instructions from owners or stakeholders over institutional norms. This phenomenon is referred to in this study as *News Primordialism*, a condition in which allegiance to power undermines journalistic autonomy and professionalism.

A unique feature of the primordialism culture at *Harian Fajar* is that families play a very significant role in determining the direction of the business and news content of *Harian*

Fajar. This tendency results in the marginalization of editorial standards in favour of decisions that benefit media proprietors' personal or political interests. Media institutions often function as corporate monopolies, with information flows shaped by economic and political elites (Pedro-carañana et al., 2018). Such intervention violates established principles of editorial independence, triggering self-censorship that limits information reaching the public and conceals important detail (Mokaya, 2020). As (Artz, 2016) observes, power in media organizations is enacted through complex networks that foster compliance and reproduce dominant hierarchies. In this system, media serves as a vehicle for transmitting ruling-class ideologies. Similarly, (Hardy, 2017) argues that media performance is shaped by economic imperatives and advertiser influence, leading journalists to subordinate editorial principles to economic power. This study seeks to analyse how such primordial attachments operate within the newsroom, particularly in relation to loyalty toward capital owners over journalistic codes of ethics.

d. Critical Theory and the Political Economy Perspective of Media

The concept of news primordialism is reinforced by the critical tradition of the political economy of media, which views media institutions as instruments of dominant class control, particularly through ownership concentration. This approach highlights the link between economic structures and ideological content. (Hassan et al., 2024) claims that media function within economic systems shaped by political arrangements, leading to diminished news diversity, preference for mass audiences, and avoidance of high-risk or resource-intensive content like investigative journalism. As a result, marginalized groups are often underrepresented in media narratives.

Political economy focuses on how the media industry's organization - ownership, funding, and external influence - shapes meaning-making processes. (Hardy, 2021) emphasizes how labour conditions, managerial control, and creative freedom are central to media production. A key concept is commodification, which Mosco (2009) defines as the transformation of media labour, content, and audiences into commodities. Journalists' work is monetized, and audience attention is sold to advertisers, prioritizing profit over democratic function.

In this context, news primordialism can be seen as a consequence of capitalist media structures. Journalists operating within hierarchical, profit-oriented institutions often align with power-holders, compromising editorial independence, reflecting the interplay between primordial loyalty and economic control.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive approach to explore and analyse the phenomenon under investigation as comprehensively as possible (Lim, 2024). The study is grounded in the critical paradigm, using the political economy of media approach to examine the phenomenon of *primordialism* in news making decision processes at *Harian Fajar*. This approach is appropriate for investigating the intersection of power, ownership, and editorial practices in contemporary media institutions.

The research was conducted within the editorial newsroom of *Harian Fajar*, enabling understanding of how news making decisions are made. In this regard, this study focuses on uncovering the influence of internal power dynamics on editorial choices. In order to gather rich contextual data, this study utilizes in-depth interviews with seven informants consisting of four editorial board and three reporters of *Harian Fajar* (see table 1).

Table 1: Information about informants at *Harian Fajar*

Number of Informants	Position	Years of Experience
Informant 1	Reporter	2016 - present
Informant 2	Reporter	2020 - present
Informant 3	Reporter	2020 - present
Informant 4	Editor	2012 - present
Informant 5	Editor	2014 - present
Informant 6	Editor-in-Chief	2006 - present
Informant 7	Former Editor-in-Chief	1999-2017

The selected informants are three journalists, two editorial journalists, one editor-in-chief, and one former employee who resigned due to concerns over news primordialism. The inclusion of a former insider allows for comparative insights that may not be accessible through current staff alone. The chosen informants were elicited to critically uncover which decision making process used by journalists.

To analyse the data, the study employs Miles and Huberman's interactive model of qualitative analysis, which involves four interrelated steps: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Saleh, 2017). This iterative approach enables the researcher to continuously refine emerging themes and patterns. Additionally, the qualitative data will be managed and coded using MaxQDA and NVIVO, which facilitates organise systematically, categorise, and analyse large amounts of textual data thematically.

This methodological design ensures a rigorous and context-sensitive investigation into how primordialism manifests in the newsroom, and how it affects the autonomy and ethics of editorial decision-making in a media organization operating within a political-economic structure.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

News Decision Making in Harian Fajar

As a routine process, editorial decision-making at *Harian Fajar* begins with nightly meetings attended by reporters and editors from various desks, including metro, politics, economy, sports, and crime. Reporters present their coverage plans based on field observations or input from sources, while those based in regional areas coordinate remotely via WhatsApp. Editors assess these proposals using three editorial criteria: public relevance, depth of reporting, and the richness of supporting data. At times, regional reporters are explicitly directed to produce control news - stories intended to shape public narratives or maintain favourable public perceptions. As stated by Informant 1:

Usually, controlled news is intended to be further examined, investigated, verified, and substantiated with data. So, it is not just information. (Informant 1)

Refined proposals are forwarded to the editor-in-chief, who holds final authority over selection and placement, particularly for front-page content. These decisions are finalized during afternoon meetings involving editors, but notably exclude reporters. (Informant 4)

Reporters are not involved in news decisions or in assessing the newsworthiness of a story. (Informant 4)

Editorial autonomy is further complicated by interference from the Business Department, particularly when coverage risks affecting commercial partnerships. In such instances, business interests tend to override editorial considerations. This institutional dynamic reflects broader tensions within media organizations, where journalistic values often confront the structural imperatives of political economy. Figure 3, below illustrates the model of the intersection of interests between editors and businesses during the news decision-making process at *Harian Fajar*.

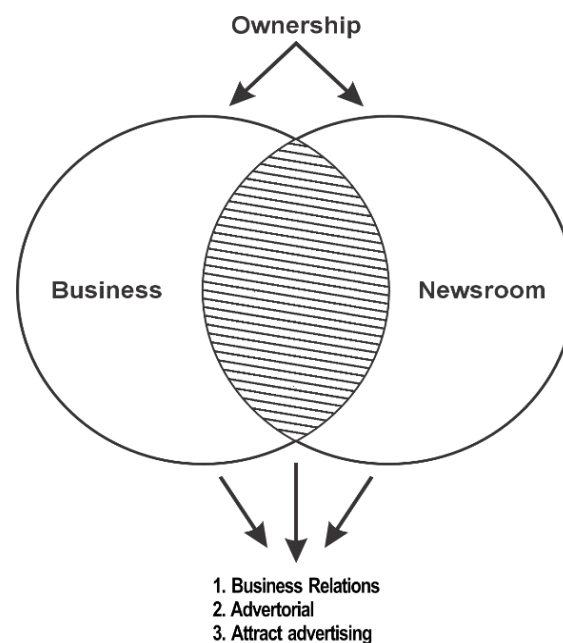


Figure 3: The intersection of interests
Source: Designed and formulated by researchers (2024)

Based on the interviews with the seven informants conducted at *Harian Fajar* (in and outside the newsroom) in Makassar over a three-month period from July to September in 2024, this study finds that business interests exert significant influence on its editorial decision-making. The data revealed that representatives from the Business Department frequently intervene, particularly when editorial content intersects with the company's commercial relationships. Before finalizing decisions on sensitive news items, the editor-in-chief is known to consult with business management, either during morning gatekeeping meetings or through informal coordination. This pattern of influence was confirmed by Informant 4, who has worked at *Harian Fajar* since 2012, who acknowledged that editorial decisions are often shaped by business considerations. These findings highlight the convergence of editorial and commercial agendas, reflecting broader issues within the political economy of the media, where corporate interests may override journalistic independence.

When reporters cover sensitive issue that are critical and affect advertisers, the business management of the media outlet will directly intervene with the editorial team to ensure that the coverage is in line with the advertisers' wishes. (Informant 4)

Initially, this research aimed to observe the newsroom's editorial process through direct participation in meetings. However, access was formally denied by Limited Liability Company (Ltd) Media Fajar Indonesia via official letter No. 021/MFI-PSDM/IV/2024, signed by HR Manager Ardhi Syamsu on April 28, 2024 (see Appendix 1). In the letter, the company denied the presence of any form of primordialism in its editorial practices and rejected the proposal to investigate internal newsroom mechanisms, citing the confidential nature of such processes.

Despite these restrictions, the editorial secretary, via WhatsApp, granted permission for in-depth interviews with selected editorial staff, although observation, recording, and documentation of meetings remained prohibited. This closed access stands in contrast to other media organizations such as *Harian Kompas* and *Republika*, which have previously allowed researchers into their editorial spaces. Given the sensitive nature of the study and internal tensions within *Harian Fajar*, all informants have been anonymized to ensure their protection and uphold ethical research standards.

a. Editorial Policy

In the news selection process, the editorial staff at *Harian Fajar* emphasize journalistic idealism and uphold the principle of independence from external influence. This commitment is seen as part of *Harian Fajar*'s institutional integrity and its prioritization of public interest in news production. Based on interviews with all seven informants, the news selection process begins with a routine evening planning meeting. This meeting involves both field reporters and page editors and serves as the primary forum for deliberating on news content.

During the editorial meeting, various aspects of news production are discussed in detail, including coverage ideas, emerging issues, news angles, depth of reporting, presentation style, and supporting visuals such as photos, graphics, and illustrations. The presence of reporters is considered essential, as they possess firsthand insights into current developments. Their contributions help shape the editorial direction and ensure that the selected angles reflect the most relevant and up-to-date information.

One of the main objectives of the editorial meeting is to identify unique and compelling news angles that distinguish *Harian Fajar* from other media outlets. This is crucial in a competitive media environment, where the risk of publishing redundant or similar content is high. The editorial policy acknowledges the limitations of print media in competing with the speed of online news platforms. Therefore, *Harian Fajar* strives to add value through in-depth analysis and distinctive perspectives, maintaining reader engagement and relevance in an evolving media landscape, as stated by Informant 4:

Every decision, such as headlines, photos, and illustrations contained in news reports, is part of the planning process. (Informant 4)

The selection of news for *Harian Fajar*'s front page is closely tied to the dynamics of current events and prevailing issues. Priority is given to timely, relevant news that meets established news values and criteria. The gatekeeper, usually the editor-in-chief or senior editor evaluates potential headline stories based on their appeal to readers and the depth of coverage. Momentum also plays a role in shaping editorial priorities. For example, during the General Election (*Pemilu*), the political news section, typically occupying one page, may be expanded to two pages to accommodate heightened public interest.

In certain cases, when reporters encounter high-impact, unexpected events, such as sting operations (OTT) by the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), fires, flash floods, or natural disasters, there is flexibility in the editorial workflow. Under such circumstances, news may be published without going through the usual editorial planning meeting. Instead, coordination occurs directly between the field reporter and the page editor responsible for the relevant section. This policy recognizes that incidental events are inherently unpredictable and require immediate editorial response.

However, not all field-reported stories proceed to publication. If a news item is perceived to pose reputational or legal risks, such as lacking balanced reporting or containing information detrimental to national interests, the editor retains the authority to withhold the story from publication. This discretionary power underscores the editorial team's responsibility not only to ensure journalistic quality but also to protect institutional integrity while adhering to ethical and legal standards.

b. Editor's Rejection of Interventions Outside of Editorial Work

In several instances of news decision-making at *Harian Fajar*, attempts at intervention by external parties, particularly from the business management division, have been reported. However, such interventions are often met with resistance from editorial staff within the newsroom. This resistance stems from a collective effort to maintain the integrity of the editorial process and ensure that news content remains aligned with the public interest. While gatekeepers within the newsroom consider the readership potential of news stories, particularly those likely to attract advertisers, they also exercise editorial judgment to reject external influences that might compromise journalistic values.

For instance, in certain cases, business representatives have requested that editors withhold coverage of news related to advertisers involved in controversial or unfavourable incidents. Despite these pressures, when such stories are recognized as serving the public interest, editorial staff have chosen to reject the interference and proceed with publication. This editorial stance reflects a principled commitment to journalistic independence, even in the face of potential commercial consequences. This was revealed by Informant 4:

Not all intervention that enter the editorial room and are related to the interests of media owners are carried out and obeyed by the editorial staff. This is because advertisements do not always work together because we have subscribers. The editor rejects this intervention by refining the news so that it remains present to maintain readers. (Informant 4)

To reinforce its editorial independence, *Harian Fajar* has implemented a firewall policy designed to separate editorial and business functions. This structural boundary aims to prevent undue influence from media owners or commercial entities over newsroom operations. Although such policies may not completely eliminate all forms of pressure, they

serve as institutional safeguards that help maintain the newsroom's autonomy and ethical commitment to serving the public good.

Informant 7, explained that when an unfavourable issue involves an advertiser, the editorial team generally proceeds with publication. This decision is driven by two considerations: first, the widespread presence of online media outlets that would inevitably cover the incident, making it publicly known regardless of *Harian Fajar*'s editorial choices; second, the recognition that failing to report such events could damage the newspaper's reputation for credibility and transparency.

Even if the entire business team forbids it, for example, if the business management says that the party you are reporting on is working with us, don't report it. But if the editor-in-chief says to report it, then it must be reported.
(Informant 7)

In such instances, *Harian Fajar* often publishes two versions of the related coverage: one stemming from pre-existing cooperative agreements (e.g., sponsored content or advertorials) and the other addressing the newly emerged incident. This practice was more feasible when the newspaper published up to 44 pages, which allowed for greater editorial flexibility. Despite pressures from external stakeholders, particularly those with business ties to the media company, the decision to publish or withhold news ultimately rests with the editor-in-chief, who holds full responsibility for all published content.

Nonetheless, when news involves business affiliates or advertisers, the coverage may be presented in a more refined or softened tone. While the factual content is not omitted, the language and framing may be adjusted to mitigate reputational harm. This editorial strategy illustrates the delicate balancing act between journalistic duty and business considerations. It further highlights the nuanced ways in which editorial autonomy is both exercised and negotiated within the context of commercial media operations.

c. Company Management

In several cases of conflict between the Business and Editorial Departments at *Harian Fajar*, the company's business interests, such as advertising, business partnerships, and strategies to attract advertisers are often prioritized over editorial considerations. This tendency is linked to the high operational costs of the media outlet. Before determining news content, financial, business, and HR teams, along with the editor-in-chief and editorial secretary, a morning meeting is held to discuss revenue updates and news planning. When business representatives report incoming advertisements, planned coverage proposed by reporters and editors may be revised to accommodate the commercial space.

Coverage issues that have been planned by reporters and editors in planning meetings will usually be reselected when, at the same time, advertisements come in and want to be placed on the pages where the planned news is to be published. (Informant 2)

The study also highlights a rigid leadership hierarchy. The media owner reportedly does not interact directly with reporters and is more focused on business matters than journalism. In cases where critical coverage targets a public official closely associated with the owner, the editor-in-chief may be summoned, as conveyed by Informant 3:

His coffee friend is [the owner of the company] the Editor [editor-in-chief] and the managing director. (Informant 3)

d. Business Relations

In every decision making of a news story in *Harian Fajar*, the company's business relations also influence editorial decisions, for example, gatekeepers tend to give special treatment when the business relationship is hit by unpleasant public issues. An example that has happened in *Harian Fajar* was the arrest of the Governor of South Sulawesi, Nurdin Abdullah by the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) in 2021. At that time, almost all news media that covered the incident took a critical angle that highlighted the alleged corruption. *Harian Fajar* chose a more subtle title as *Nurdin Abdullah's Test, Brilliant Career, Positive Track Record, and Deputy Governor and supporters pray for Nurdin Abdullah* (see Appendix 2). This decision was caused by the intervention of the company owner who participated in determining news decision-making, considering the close business relationship between *Harian Fajar* and South Sulawesi Provincial Government. The editor-in-chief supervised the news production process that was laid out by the editor.

It remained in the spotlight through news coverage, but with more subtle language. For example, in the news about the arrest of Nurdin Abdullah, which was published in the *Harian Fajar* with a more subtle headline. This was because Nurdin Abdullah was a business associate of *Harian Fajar*, so the owner of the media company intervened directly to influence the editorial team. (Informant 5)

In some cases when there is a news story that is considered urgent, the owner of the company uses his power to intervene in the editorial process through the leadership structure under him. For example, by calling the editor-in-chief to determine the direction of the news because the news is related to the company's business relationship. Meanwhile, the editor-in-chief who had been summoned, conveyed instructions from the owner of the company to the editor of *Harian Fajar* during a meeting in the morning, as stated by Informant 4:

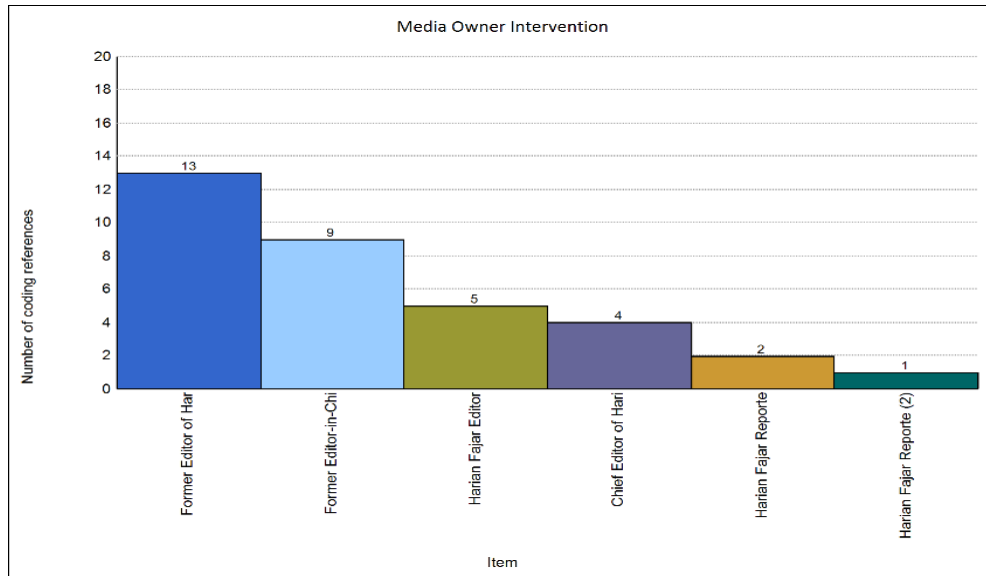


Figure 4: Illustrates the intervention model of media owners who participate in determining the decision-making of a news story in the *Harian Fajar*
 Source: NVivo coding software results

Media owner usually tells editors-in-chief to pressure their staff who are too critical in highlighting the governor's case through their reporting. (Informant 4)

In addition, the editor-in-chief of *Harian Fajar* will also review all the news that has been laid out by the page editor, before the news is sent to the printer. If there is a news piece that is considered disruptive to the company's business relations, then the editor-in-chief will ask for the news to be changed to be more subtle. This was revealed by Informant 5:

Don't be too harsh [in the news], just be gentle. (Informant 5)

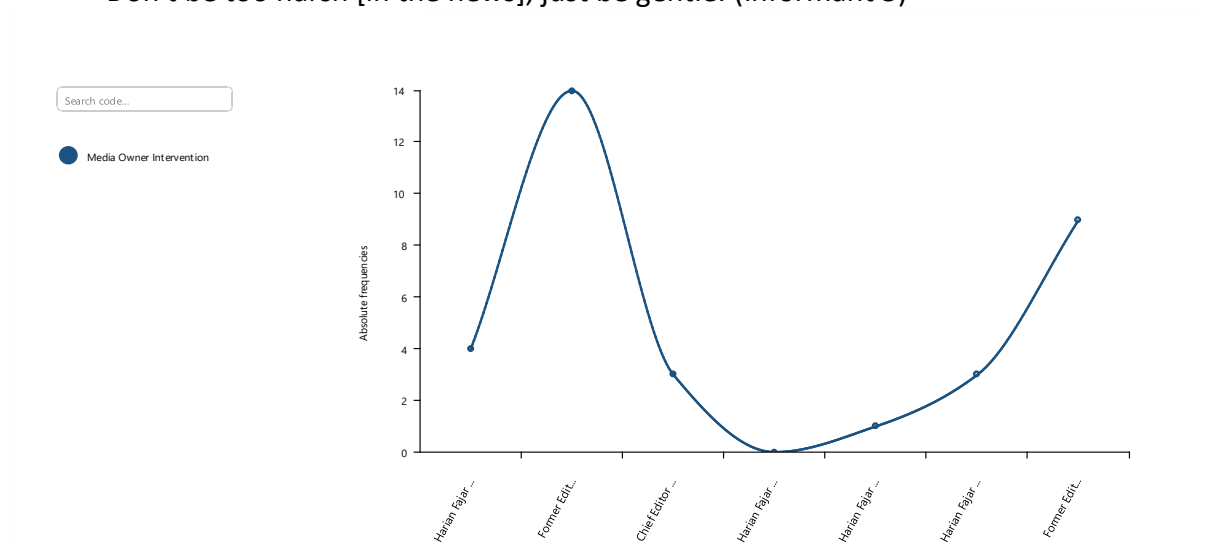


Figure 5: Illustrates the trend of media owners' intervention that contributes to the decision-making of news in the *Harian Fajar*
 Source: MaxQDA software coding results

i. Advertising and News Acquisition

One of the key factors influencing news decision-making at *Harian Fajar* is advertising. Verbatim coding of interviews with seven informants indicates that advertising holds substantial power in determining which news content is produced. This influence stems primarily from the Business Department's efforts to maintain favourable relationships with advertisers, placing them in a prioritized position during editorial decision-making. For instance, the South Sulawesi Provincial Government, as a regular advertiser for a full year, receives special treatment in the form of image-based news derived from official press releases, published without being paired with other potentially critical news. However, when such advertisers become embroiled in negative public issues, the resulting news coverage tends to be more subtle and less confrontational.

We softened it by not publishing news that was overly critical because we are in a dilemma right now. The government is the owner of the money, while the media needs money for operational costs. (Informant 4)

News filtering processes often intensify during evening editorial reviews, where page layouts are finalized. The editor-in-chief conducts a final assessment to determine not only the composition of the page but also to ensure that business relationships with advertisers remain undisturbed.

If the editor-in-chief sees a news story that is too critical, he will ask for it to be toned down because it could disrupt the cooperation desired by the business management. (Informant 2)

This filtering process also begins earlier during coverage planning meetings. When reporters are assigned to cover activities involving business partners, they are pre-briefed by editors to align the reporting tone with business expectations. While *Harian Fajar* reporters were once granted autonomy to define their news angles, particularly in critical coverage, this freedom is constrained when business relationships are involved. A notable case occurred in June 2022, when a reporter's critical headline about the Gelora BJ Habibie Stadium was changed unilaterally by the editorial team.

I've never been removed [from the news], but the headline has been changed and softened. (Informant 3)

Advertising's influence is further magnified by limited print space - currently only 16 pages - often resulting in news displacement, especially when advertisers request last-minute placements. The most dominant ads replacing editorial content are economic and government-sponsored advertisements.

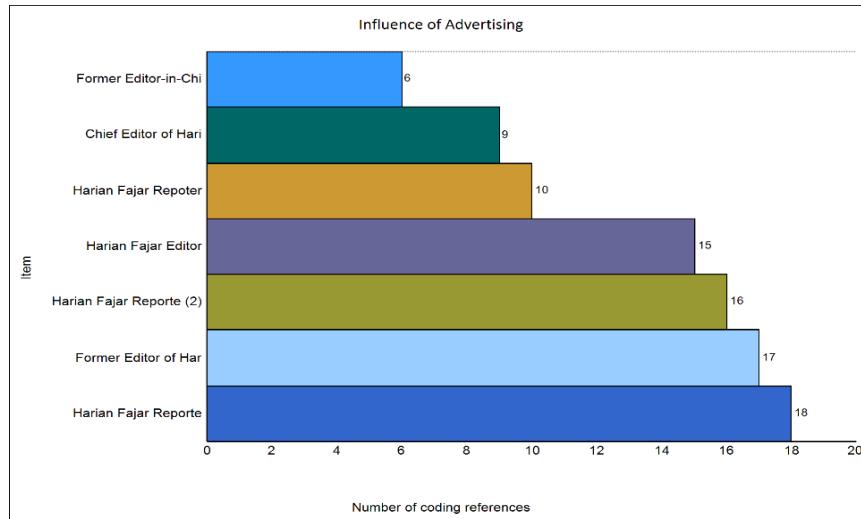


Figure 5: Illustrates the advertising model that helps determine news decision-making in *Harian Fajar*
 Source: Coding results using NVivo software.

Once upon a time, my page had already been laid out, the news had been edited and was ready to go. Suddenly, a half-page advertisement came in and the client asked for it to be placed on the business page. As the business page editor, I was given the decision. So, there were four news stories that got bumped at that time. (Informant 5)

On weekends, *Harian Fajar* typically presents lighter news through its E-Paper format. However, during periods of high advertising demand, the newspaper is also printed. On special occasions, such as automotive or property exhibitions, government inaugurations, and official birthdays often prompt the appearance of numerous congratulatory advertisements. During the General Election Commission (KPU) advertising period, particularly around Pilgub or Pilbup registration, advertising space dominates the print edition. According to Informant 4, advertisements can occupy up to 90 percent of the newspaper's pages, leaving only 10 percent available for editorial news content.

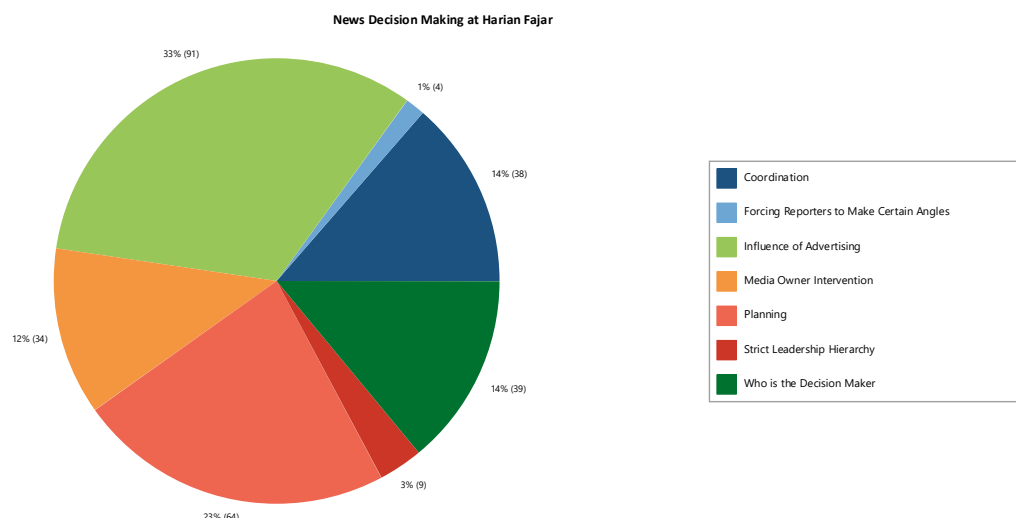


Figure 6: Advertising always being prioritized over news on the pages of the *Harian Fajar* newspaper
 Source: Coding results using MaxQDA software

News can be pushed aside when advertising intervenes because advertising has the power to push news aside, for example in terms of the media company's main priorities as they relate to operation. (Informant 4).

ii. News Stimulus to Attract Advertisers

To attract advertisers, gatekeepers at *Harian Fajar* tend to prioritize producing news with the potential for high readership, as advertisers are only interested in placing ads in media with a large audience. Verbatim coding of interviews with seven informants reveals that the most frequently published advertisements in *Harian Fajar* include advertorials, real estate, banking, automotive, government, and congratulatory ads. Advertising rates are determined by size and page placement, with the front page commanding the highest prices reaching tens of millions of rupiah per issue due to its prominence and visibility. For instance, during the Makassar International Eight Festival & Forum (F8 Makassar) 2024, the Business Department proposed ceremonial-style news coverage in the morning editorial meeting, justifying it as a profit-driven strategy for the paper.

Business management usually proposes offering services to attract advertising. All media seem to have this service because it brings in a lot of money. (Informant 5)

Advertisers generally resist critical coverage directed at them and often exert influence over editorial content by determining the type of news they expect to see. When critical reports are published, advertisers may respond with complaints or threats to withdraw their ads. One such case occurred in 2020, when *Harian Fajar* ran a critical story on Large-Scale Social Restrictions (PSBB) in Gowa Regency, prompting the local government to threaten to cancel its advertising contract.

Many threatened to withdraw their advertisements when criticized, but they communicated through their leaders, who sometimes instructed changes to the news. In addition, in one case, a reporter was suspended from reporting for several days. (Informant 4)

Conversely, when a critical story targets an institution not tied to *Harian Fajar* through advertising, the editorial team tends to proceed with publication. In one case, the Makassar City DPRD failed to finalize an ad deal due to miscommunication. The newsroom responded by assigning reporters to frame coverage favourably until the issue was resolved through advertising.

As was the case with banking in the past, we still publish critical news. But when they ask for positive news, they are still welcome to advertise. So, the [news] page can still be rented. That is what sets us apart from other media outlets, which are told to remove the news. (Informant 6)

DISCUSSION

Media Owner's Intervention to the Editor

Cases of owner intervention in *Harian Fajar's* newsroom decision-making process are closely tied to profit motives, with business interests consistently prioritized over journalistic values. In this context, the owner leverages the newspaper's public frequency to preserve business relationships, particularly in determining editorial content. This aligns with arguments by (Herman & Chomsky, 2021) in the propaganda model, which posits that major media organizations are profit-driven enterprises owned by powerful individuals, making the media owner the first filter through which news must pass before reaching the public.

Within *Harian Fajar*, the owner exercises influence through the leadership hierarchy, particularly when coverage involves a problematic official with close personal or business ties to the owner. In such cases, interventions typically occur through the editor-in-chief, who conveys directives during editorial meetings. This practice enables the owner to shape news decisions indirectly but effectively. Additionally, the owner often contacts the editor-in-chief directly to discuss issues deemed important, especially those tied to the company's business direction.

This phenomenon also reflects the concept of media commodification, as proposed by (Mosco, 2009), who argues that media operate as market commodities aimed at profit generation. Ideally, media owners should uphold the core values of journalism, prioritizing public responsibility. At the same time, the public must hold not only journalists but also media owners accountable for serving the public interest. Without this balance, as noted by (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007), journalistic independence will continue to erode under media conglomerates driven by personal gain.

Advertising, Business and News Decision Making

In addition to the owner's intervention, advertising plays a crucial role in determining news decision-making at *Harian Fajar*. This is due to the newspaper's high operational costs, prompting managerial staff, whose focus is on revenue, to prioritize advertisers' interests over editorial autonomy. In line with this phenomenon, through the propaganda model, advertisers act as a second filter in shaping news content. Advertisers exert strong influence by selectively supporting programs or content that align with their principles and avoiding those that might unsettle consumers. For (Herman & Chomsky, 2021), this influence stems from the fact that advertisers are effectively buying space and subsidizing media production.

At *Harian Fajar*, advertisers hold significant sway, as they are perceived as key sources of profit. Consequently, when tensions arise between managerial and editorial divisions, advertising interests are prioritized over journalistic values. Beyond government agencies, *Harian Fajar* also maintains business relationships with banks. As Chomsky points out, banks and similar institutions often hold substantial media shares, enabling them to exert influence over content decisions and potentially impact the overall stability of media organizations through their financial leverage.

Primordialism in News Decision-Making in Harian Fajar

In general, primordialism can be understood as the concept that human beings are bound to one another through blood ties or emotional conditioning that fosters mutual trust and acceptance. This notion of primordialism was first introduced by Edward Shils, who used the term "primordial" to describe the role of kinship and close relationships. However, in the

context of the *Harian Fajar* newsroom, primordialism takes on a unique form, where the owner's family holds significant power in determining both business strategy and editorial direction.

When it comes to news decision-making, this primordialism manifests as journalists complying with the will and instructions of the owner, rather than adhering to editorial rules and professional standards that should guide their work. The owner exercises influence through the leadership hierarchy, using managerial channels to shape news content. Although the early planning stages may appear democratic, reporters and editors jointly discussing content, but in reality, key editorial decisions, particularly those related to the owner's business interests, are made in a top-down manner. Field reporters are excluded from these stages, especially when the news concerns sensitive corporate relationships.

The owner rarely communicates directly with field journalists, instead relaying instructions solely through the editor-in-chief. When a news story is perceived as potentially damaging to business interests, the owner summons the editor-in-chief to intervene. In turn, the editor-in-chief submits to these directives, monitoring and controlling newsroom output to align with business priorities.

Such practice of primordialism reflects how power, particularly from the owner and their family, overrides journalistic norms. Consequently, journalists often neglect editorial policies and journalistic ethics, choosing instead to obey power structures. This undermines critical journalism and limits public access to independent information, as media owners prioritize personal profit over the public interest.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals how news decision-making at *Harian Fajar* is shaped by a hierarchical structure in which editorial autonomy is compromised by the strong ownership power with familial interests, and primordialist practices, often resulting in external intervention and the subordination of journalistic ethics to business priorities. As shown in figure 3 the intersection of interests, ownership influences business and news decision-making in the newsroom. These two important elements intersect one to the other in which the intersection relates to the business relation of *Harian Fajar*, advertisements from the government and political parties, and an attempt to attract advertising. In the early stages of planning, the editorial process involves reporters and editors collaboratively developing story ideas. However, as decisions approach the publication stage, a culture of primordialism becomes evident, excluding reporters from further involvement. At critical junctures, the media owner and their family exert considerable influence over editorial content and the strategic direction of the company. A unique aspect of primordialism at *Harian Fajar* is the owner's ability to dictate editorial outcomes to safeguard business relationships, often allowing external stakeholders to participate in the newsroom's decision-making process. The owner enforces this control through a top-down leadership structure, issuing direct instructions to the editor-in-chief, who is formally responsible for editorial decisions. In practice, however, the editor-in-chief is expected to follow these directives without question, thereby overriding editorial standards and journalistic ethics. Although staff members have occasionally attempted to resist such interventions, these efforts have been largely unsuccessful due to the owner's consistent prioritization of business interests over professional journalistic values.

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