

Influence Of Private Media Ownership On Credibility Of News Reporting In Nigeria

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Abstract: *The study is on the influence of private media ownership on credibility of news reporting in Nigeria. The study adopted a survey research methodology and primary and secondary data were used. The population of the study are journalists from the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) Borno State with a sample of 150 journalists selected for this study and administered research questionnaire. The study made use of systematic and cluster sampling techniques. A research questionnaire was employed as a research instruments. Data analysis was carried out using SPSS version 23.0 software. The study made use of descriptive statistics involving frequency tables and percentages. The findings of the study showed that private media owners in Nigeria significantly influence the selection of news stories published by their media organisations, editorial decisions in privately owned media houses are often shaped by the political or business interests of the owners. Furthermore, it was revealed that journalists in privately owned media organisations feel pressure to align news content with the preferences of the owners. The study recommended that media house should report accurate stories and should strive to display appreciable level of objective, balanced and fair reportage.*

Keywords: Credibility, Private media, Media ownership, News reportage

Introduction

The media is essential in modern democratic countries because it informs the public, shapes ideas, and serves as a watchdog against abuses of power. In Nigeria, the media landscape consists of government-run channels, privately held media companies, and digital platforms. The ownership structure of media organizations has long been seen to influence editorial decisions and the trustworthiness of news coverage. This means that whoever owns a media outlet, whether an individual, corporate, or government, can influence what and how it is covered, influencing public faith in the media. Broadcast media, as a crucial partner in the fourth estate, has frequently received public trust for information dissemination.

This implies that the broadcast media, like the print media, owes the society the responsibility of providing objective and truthful information. Broadcast media is intended to follow the values of news reporting, which include balance, conciseness, accuracy, impartiality, objectivity, precision, and veracity (Chukwu, 2015). Private media ownership in Nigeria has grown quickly over the last few decades, owing to liberalization laws, technical improvements, and competitive markets. Private media sources are frequently better resourced and more adaptable in content production than many public service broadcasters. Nevertheless, researchers and critics believe that privately owned media may reflect their owners' political, economic, and ideological interests, resulting in biased news reporting that favors specific storylines over balanced and objective coverage.

This circumstance raises issues regarding the accuracy and authenticity of news items distributed to the public. Numerous academic research in this topic have proved the relevance of news credibility to the media industry in the communication process, as well as its implications. The reliability of the news contributes significantly to a broadcast station's public image since it encourages viewers and listeners to participate and expand their fan base, viewership, reading, listenership, and user base (Tao & Bates, 2019). Research conducted in Nigeria has indicated that ownership affects news objectivity and editorial independence, with some viewers believing that media owners manipulate material to suit their own agendas. For instance, studies show that pressures from owners or stakeholders can cause both public and private media outlets to lack objectivity, which erodes public confidence in news reporting and restricts the media's ability to be a trustworthy source of information (Adetola Lawal et al, 2025; Fatonji & Owolabi, 2025). In Nigeria's changing democratic landscape, it is crucial to comprehend how credibility is impacted by private media ownership. It can support ethical journalism, develop media systems to serve the public interest rather than private interests, and assist academics, politicians, and media professionals in evaluating the caliber of news reporting.

Statement of the Problem

Scholars, media professionals, and viewers are growing more concerned about the reliability of news reporting in Nigeria. Even though the media is supposed to be a trustworthy information source and public watchdog, research indicates that ownership patterns, particularly private ownership, can have a big impact on journalistic practices and editorial choices. The ideological, political, or financial interests of its owners are frequently reflected in privately held media organizations, which results in skewed news framing,

selective reporting, and restrictions on editorial freedom. The fairness and impartiality that are crucial elements of reliable news reporting are compromised by such interference. According to research, media proprietors are seen by Nigerian consumers as having significant power over news content, and several of them think that this influence compromises the independence and impartiality of news.

Furthermore, the public's access to a wide range of viewpoints is further restricted by the concentration of media ownership among a few number of influential people and groups, undermining the media's ability to portray a variety of voices and concerns. The public's trust in media messaging is called into doubt by this focus, as is the veracity and objectivity of news reporting from privately held organizations. Additionally, audiences are less able to identify how proprietorial interests may influence news coverage due to the lack of transparency in ownership and editorial policies, which makes it challenging for the public to critically assess the information they are given. These difficulties draw attention to an urgent issue: despite the expansion of private media in Nigeria, the degree to which ownership affects news trustworthiness is still little understood and unaddressed. In order to strengthen ethical journalism, improve media accountability, and rebuild public trust in Nigerian news reporting, it is imperative to comprehend this dynamic.

Research Questions

- i. To what extent does private media ownership influence editorial independence in news reporting in Nigeria?
- ii. What influence do media proprietors exert on journalists' professional practices and ethical decision-making in privately owned media houses?
- iii. How do audiences perceive the credibility of news reported by privately owned media organizations in Nigeria?

Literature Review

Media Ownership

Ownership relates to the numerous forms of governance linked with specific ownership arrangements, whereas media owners are individuals and companies with power over their organization (Schlosberg, 2016, p. 8). Media ownership and control are critical factors influencing how information is produced, processed, and transmitted in any culture. The interests, beliefs, and economic capacities of individuals who own and control media institutions significantly define the contemporary media landscape, which includes print, broadcast, digital, and hybrid platforms. Ownership dictates editorial decisions, governs access to information, and limits the diversity of opinions available to the general public. As a result, it is critical for power distribution, democratic communication, public accountability, and social progress.

The ownership arrangements that support media systems must be examined in order to fully comprehend them, as academics have long stressed. The legal, monetary, and operational control of media outlets, such as newspapers, radio stations, television networks, movie studios, internet platforms, and multimedia conglomerates, is referred to as media ownership. Editorial policies, content choices, recruiting procedures, and organizational priorities are all under control, which is intimately tied to ownership. Control is the ability to affect how a media outlet functions, what it covers, and which voices it amplifies or suppresses, whereas ownership suggests the legal right to a media asset. Because ownership influences the organizational culture, political loyalty, and economic logic of media organizations, McQuail (2010) contends that ownership is the most significant structural driver of media behavior.

Owners often impose their ideological orientations or commercial interests on editorial decision-making, thereby shaping media content in ways that reflect their priorities. Curran (2002) similarly contends that ownership concentration limits the diversity of viewpoints in society and poses risks to democratic pluralism. These perspectives highlight the power held by those who own and control media systems, making ownership a central concern for scholars, policymakers, and activists.

Private Media Organizations

Private media organizations make up a large portion of the global communication environment. As commercial entities owned and run by people, families, or businesses, they are subject to market-oriented processes that influence their strategic direction, editorial decisions, content production, and organizational structure. Understanding the nature and structure of private media companies is critical for understanding information production, media impact on democratic government, and commercial agendas' influence on public debate.

Private media companies are basically profit-driven enterprises functioning in competitive markets. Their primary purpose is to earn revenue from advertising, sponsorships, subscription fees, and, increasingly, digital monetization (Picard, 2022).

Private media companies give priority to content that can draw sizable or lucrative audiences, in contrast to public service media, which value societal welfare and universal access. The political economics of communication, which highlights how ownership pressures, market rivalry, and economic interests impact media content, therefore shapes the form of private media. Decisions

concerning programming, editorial objectives, and staff or technology investments are frequently influenced by commercial imperatives.

Despite the claims of editorial independence made by private media companies, editorial orientation is frequently influenced by ownership and commercial forces. Owner interests, target audiences, and advertisers all have an impact on content choices. According to research, private media frequently underreport problems impacting vulnerable populations while favoring sensationalism, high-rated shows, and financially lucrative content (Reinemann et al, 2019).

In private media, the newsroom culture usually promotes audience responsiveness, creativity, and competition. Journalists frequently have to deliver interesting and profitable content, adjust to evolving technologies, and meet deadlines quickly. Private media companies have intricate internal systems in place to facilitate financial management, administrative oversight, content production, and strategic planning.

Credibility of News Reporting

Journalists and other media professionals continue to consider credibility as one of the established criteria for identifying anomalous or dishonest sources of information (Raji, 2019). Reputation refers to opinions or stances taken by the recipient of a message on the communicator's dependability. Nonetheless, according to some schools of thought, the concept needs to be applicable to any available communicators, companies, or individuals (Gass & Seiter, 2016). One of the problems in the fields of marketing and mass communication, which date back to the ancient Greeks, is scholarly research or analysis of reputation (Griffin, 2009).

The nature of mass communication inquiry or review as well as particular aspects of media or news audience behavior have been altered, according to Garrison (2015), by a variety of emergent mass communication tactics that have developed in the modern era. Nonetheless, according to some academics, credible evidence is essentially the availability of reliable information and is believed to reflect an individual's understanding and perception of reality. Eisend (2016) concurred with Aristotle that the secret to persuasion is altering the message-information-audience satisfaction in contrast to the conventional speaker-message-audience mechanism. In summary, a number of scholars employed diverse definitions of believability. The concepts provide credence to the notion that credibility is a dynamic, intricate, and interconnected phenomenon. In order to survive in the highly competitive broadcasting industry today, the various news broadcasting media must be worried about their public image. Source credibility, which concentrates on the communicator or message, is different from media integrity, a phrase frequently used to characterize the reliability of news media (Bucy, 2017). The media's standing will be challenging to ascertain if assessed as a single conceptual variable that accounts for the traits of message senders, such as speakers, newscasters, or experts. Media credibility is more of an operationalized term (Bucy, 2017).

Media Ownership Theory

Both publicly and privately held media are examples of media ownership. Publicly owned media are state-funded media organizations whose only purpose is to gather information and make it accessible to the public, whereas privately owned media are owned by people or businesses that invest in media companies with the goal of making a profit for the owner (Busterna & Hansen, 1990). By influencing news coverage and framing topics in ways that support their interests or viewpoints, media outlet owners can sway public opinion. The interests of those who fund the press are closely linked to its content.

This idea essentially argues that any newspaper's content is directly impacted by its owners' interests; in other words, a medium's content reflects the beliefs and interests of its owners. This means that when a media outlet is privately owned, the news organization's owners' business interests are exposed through the content.

Although there are many theories in the field of communication, such as the political economy of media theory, the choice of the media ownership theory is not implausible given that government-owned media has always been used to enhance their reputation. Depending on the kind of media, government-owned media will either support or oppose the government. The fact that these organizations are funded and run by the government is the cause of this casual workout. The idea of ownership has grown to have a significant impact on media outcomes, not only in editorials but also in how reporters and journalists cover the news, which reflects the owners' political agendas.

Empirical Reviews

Ojetola, Onaopepo & Adenuga (2024) explored the significant influence of media ownership and control on political reportage in Nigerian newspapers, employing a quantitative approach with a probability-based sampling of three politically owned newspapers. Findings revealed that the political affiliations and economic interests of media owners heavily shape editorial decisions, leading to a lack of diverse perspectives in news coverage. The study recommends shielding editors and journalists from political interference to promote independent decision-making. Oloyede et al. (2024) analyzed how media ownership structure affects press freedom in

Nigeria. They noted that media ownership often influences content, reflecting the interests of owners rather than providing unbiased news. This is linked to the theories of media ownership and political economy, revealing that concentrated media ownership among capitalists undermines democratic principles and the public's right to accurate journalism.

Research Methodology

The study made use of a descriptive survey design method. Survey was used because it is appropriate for gathering information about participants' viewpoints. The population of the study are journalists from the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) Borno State. The study made use of systematic and cluster sampling techniques and a sample of 150 journalists were administered research questionnaire which was used as instrument for data collection. A structured questionnaire with closed-ended questions served as the main instrument for data collection. This specific method was selected because it effectively and economically gathers large amounts of data while preserving the data source's confidentiality and homogeneity. The five-point Likert scale was therefore used in the questionnaire's development to measure participants' agreement with each statement. The scale contained a range of values, with 1 representing a significant degree of agreement and 5 representing a significant degree of disagreement. The Yamane (1967) formulae was used to determine the sample size was arrived at One hundred and Fifty (150). The quantitative data was processed, computed and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.0. Descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequency tables were used to analyze the data.

Data Analysis

Table 1: The extent at which private media ownership influence editorial independence in news reporting in Nigeria

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Stand Dev
1	Private media owners in Nigeria significantly influence the selection of news stories published by their media organisations	65 (43.3%)	84 (56.0%)	1 (0.7%)	-	3.37	1.29
2	Editorial decisions in privately owned media houses are often shaped by the political or business interests of the owners	108 (72.0%)	32 (21.3%)	10 (6.7%)	-	3.29	1.44
3	Journalists in privately owned media organisations feel pressure to align news content with the preferences of the owners	89 (59.3%)	55 (36.7%)	6 (4.0%)	-	3.83	1.61
4	Private ownership of media organisations limits journalists' ability to report objectively on issues involving the owners or their affiliates	66 (44.0%)	82 (54.7%)	2 (1.3%)	-	3.74	1.07

Table 1 shows that 84 (56.0%) of the respondents agree that private media owners in Nigeria significantly influence the selection of news stories published by their media organisations, 65 (43.3%) of the respondents strongly agree to the statement while 1 (0.7%) of the respondents disagree with the statement. Also, 108 (72.0%) of the respondents strongly agree that editorial decisions in privately owned media houses are often shaped by the political or business interests of the owners, 32 (21.3%) of the respondents agree to the statement while 10 (6.7%) of the respondents disagree on the statement. In addition, 89 (59.3%) of the respondents strongly agree that journalists in privately owned media organisations feel pressure to align news content with the preferences of the owners, 55 (36.7%) of the respondents agree to the statement while 6 (4.0%) of the respondents disagree.

Furthermore, 82 (54.7%) of the respondents agree that private ownership of media organisations limits journalists' ability to report objectively on issues involving the owners or their affiliates, 66 (44.0%) of the respondents strongly agree to the statement while 2 (1.3%) of the respondents disagree on the statement.

Table 2: The influence media proprietors exert on journalists' professional practices and ethical decision-making in privately owned media houses

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Stand Dev
1	Media proprietors influence how journalists in privately owned media houses carry out their professional duties	69 (46.0%)	76 (50.7%)	5 (3.3%)	-	3.83	1.37

2	Journalists in privately owned media organisations sometimes compromise professional ethics due to pressure from media proprietors	56 (37.3%)	91 (60.7%)	3 (2.0%)	-	3.33	1.09
3	Journalists feel constrained in adhering strictly to ethical standards when reporting on issues that affect media proprietors	72 (48.0%)	73 (48.7%)	5 (3.3%)	-	3.72	1.81
4	The involvement of media proprietors in editorial matters affects journalists' independence in ethical decision-making	59 (39.3%)	79 (52.7%)	12 (8.0%)	-	3.67	1.19

Table 2 shows that 76 (50.7%) of the respondents agree that media proprietors influence how journalists in privately owned media houses carry out their professional duties, 69 (46.0%) of the respondents strongly agree to the statement, while 5 (3.3%) of the respondents disagree on the statement. Also, 91 (60.7%) of the respondents agree that journalists in privately owned media organisations sometimes compromise professional ethics due to pressure from media proprietors, 61 (40.7%) of the respondents strongly agree on the statement while 3 (2.0%) disagree on the statement. In addition, 73 (48.7%) of the respondents agree that journalists feel constrained in adhering strictly to ethical standards when reporting on issues that affect media proprietors, 72 (48.0%) of the respondents strongly agree to the statement while 5 (3.3%) of the respondents disagree to the statement. Similarly, 79 (52.7%) of the respondents agree that the involvement of media proprietors in editorial matters affects journalists' independence in ethical decision-making, 59 (39.3%) of the respondents strongly agree to the statement while 12 (8.0%) of the respondents disagree on the statement.

Table 3: How audiences perceive the credibility of news reported by privately owned media organizations in Nigeria

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Stand Dev
1	Privately owned media organizations in Nigeria verify information before publishing or broadcasting news stories	55 (36.7%)	73 (48.7%)	14 (9.3%)	8 (5.3%)	3.49	1.27
2	News reported by privately owned media organizations in Nigeria is more trustworthy than information shared on social media platforms	55 (36.7%)	80 (53.3%)	10 (6.7%)	5(3.3%)	3.62	1.09
3	Privately owned media organizations in Nigeria report news objectively without political or business interference.	135 (90.0%)	8 (5.3%)	7 (4.7%)	-	3.77	1.36
4	The ownership structure of privately owned media organizations in Nigeria does not affect the credibility of their news reports.	31 (20.7%)	-	119 (79.3%)	-	3.84	1.29

Table 3 shows that 73 (48.7%) of the respondents agree that privately owned media organizations in Nigeria verify information before publishing or broadcasting news stories, 55 (36.7%) of the respondents strongly agree to the statement, 14 (9.3%) disagree while 8 (5.3%) of the respondents strongly disagree on the statement. Also, 80 (53.3%) of the respondents agree that news reported by privately owned media organizations in Nigeria is more trustworthy than information shared on social media platforms, 55 (36.7%) of the respondents strongly agree on the statement, 10 (6.7%) disagree while 5(3.3%) strongly disagree on the statement. In addition, 135 (90.0%) of the respondents strongly agree that privately owned media organizations in Nigeria report news objectively without political or business interference, 8 (5.3%) of the respondents agree to the statement while 7 (4.7%) of the respondents disagree to the statement. Similarly, 119 (79.3%) of the respondents disagree that the ownership structure of privately owned media organizations in Nigeria does not affect the credibility of their news reports while 31 (20.7%) of the respondents strongly agree on the statement.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study showed that majority of the respondents agree that private media owners in Nigeria significantly influence the selection of news stories published by their media organisations, editorial decisions in privately owned media houses are often shaped by the political or business interests of the owners and journalists in privately owned media organisations feel pressure to

align news content with the preferences of the owners. In addition, many of the respondents agree that media proprietors influence how journalists in privately owned media houses carry out their professional duties, journalists feel constrained in adhering strictly to ethical standards when reporting on issues that affect media proprietors and the involvement of media proprietors in editorial matters affects journalists' independence in ethical decision-making. These findings support the study of Ojetola, Onaopepo & Adenuga (2024) who reported that the political affiliations and economic interests of media owners heavily shape editorial decisions, leading to a lack of diverse perspectives in news coverage.

Conclusion

While government owned media houses tend towards reporting news related to achievement and agenda of government privately owned media houses tend to expose some of atrocities and lapses of government. However, the ownership of private media also has influence on the credibility of news reportage. A private media owned by a politician for example will tend to report more on news related to politics and political party activities of the ownership of the media house. Therefore, editorial decisions in privately owned media houses are often shaped by the political or business interests of the owners.

Recommendations

- i. Private media house should endeavour to report credible news and information to the public without bias or political affiliation.
- ii. Media house should report accurate stories and should strive to display appreciable level of objective, balanced and fair reportage.

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