

Media ownership and news coverage: a critical appraisal of private media organisation

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Abstract - Information is central to all forms of human activity no matter the field, be it medicine, agriculture, tourism or engineering. There is the need for exchange of information to ensure completion of tasks. Inefficiency will be the results, where this exchange of information is slow or there is a break down. For this reason, information is regarded as a vital resource that needs to be properly developed, because it has boomerang effect on society. News media ownership assumes different characteristics depending on whether and when it is profitable or politically interesting to own media. When investing in news production is economically beneficial, it typically attracts corporate owners aiming to maximize profit on the public stock market. When investments in news production are politically beneficial, it typically attracts industry, military, or partisan ownership. When news media ownership is not economically beneficial, as has been the development in Western media systems in recent years, it attracts a variety of owners with different motives.

Keywords: media ownership; news coverage; journalists and journalism, information dissemination

I. INTRODUCTION

Following the military regime's deregulation of the broadcast business, Ray Power FM became Nigeria's first privately-owned radio station to go on the air in 1994 (Akashoro et al, 2013). Nigeria's radio broadcasting history stretches back to 1933, with the foundation of the British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC) Empire Service, and the radio business has seen moderate but steady improvement since then. General Ibrahim Babangida's regime deregulated the broadcasting industry in 1992 with Decree 38, which was then changed as Act 55 of 1999 and is currently known as the National Broadcasting Commission rules of 2004, CAP 11. This deregulation resulted in a rapid proliferation of privately held radio stations throughout Nigeria during the next two decades (ISAAC, 2010).

Sjøvaag and Ohlsson underlined in their work titled "Media Ownership and Journalism" that ownership is a topic of great interest among journalism scholars because to its possible impact on news content, journalistic autonomy, freedom of expression, and professional practices (Reese, 2001). They also claimed that media ownership is relevant to journalism scholarship because journalism may impact legislation, culture, and public discourse. Media owners may use their platforms to shape societies in specific directions, primarily for the advantage of their own interests or to influence political developments.

Sjøvaag and Ohlsson (2019) continue their argument by stating that media ownership is still a significant subject in journalism studies because of the underlying idea that journalism has the power to influence public discourse, legislation, and culture. They contend that owners of news media outlets may use their clout strategically to steer society in different directions, advancing the objectives of particular groups or seeking to sway political processes. This highlights the necessity of investigating how media ownership affects the wider field of journalism and its possible impacts on society.

Sjøvaag and Ohlsson (2019) divided research on journalism and media ownership into four categories. (1) With an emphasis on monopolization and the monitoring of ownership affects, the effects of ownership concentration on the news industries are thoroughly investigated. (2) The commercialization and homogenization component looks into the effects of ownership concentration while accounting for the ideological, political, and commercial drivers of media ownership. (3) The effects of clientalism, patrimonialism, and parallelism on democracy and the public sphere are examined in relation to how business, politics, and the military indirectly influence news media content. (4) The effect of diverse ownership on the independence and caliber of journalism is another subject of research.

The media ownership literature is contested and congested (Sjøvaag et al, 2019). In the United States and the United Kingdom, news media earnings peaked in the 1980s and 1990s, and critical political Economics opinions emerged as a significant theme in media studies. Four key elements of the research on new media ownership are (1) Media ownership is viewed as problematic in the research, which frequently adopts a normative stance, especially from critical political economics positions. On the other hand, research on ownership in other industries typically views ownership as a valuable resource. (2) Anglo-American viewpoints predominate in the research, with a focus on American or British media systems that might or might not be applicable to other media systems. (3) The research may be largely anecdotal and lack much scientific rigor in terms of its use of data, presumptions, and findings. The actual effect of news media ownership on journalistic quality is therefore a topic of discussion. (4) Operationalizing ownership studies raises methodological problems. There is conflicting data about ownership's potential influence on journalistic practice and content in general since it is challenging to isolate ownership as an independent variable in journalism studies.

A significant part of society is played by mass media, which includes things like radio, television, newspapers, magazines, and the internet. Every day, these sources expose people and communities to a wide range of messages. These messages influence our emotions, moods, and what we value in life addition to promoting items (Cesario et al, 2004).

The emergence of radio has significantly influenced Nigeria's political, social, and economic growth. Radio broadcasting can support or undermine the political system and have an impact on a country's social and economic development. Radio has the ability to influence a nation's political, social, and economic growth (Sanni, 2013).

In many facets of life, including medical, agriculture, tourism, and engineering, information is essential. A society with a strong infrastructure for communication and information tends to advance more quickly than one with weak infrastructure. The development of rural areas is greatly aided by rural radio. It serves as a tool for teaching citizens on vital subjects like politics and current affairs and teaches them about various issues and events happening in their society (Aderinoye et al, 2007).

The media has a significant impact on culture and society. Nigeria's development has been significantly influenced by radio in particular. Information is regarded as a useful resource that advances society. Rural radio plays a crucial role in raising awareness and encouraging development in outlying areas.

1.2 Media ownership structure and news coverage

Media Ownership

According to 2019 research by Sjøvaag and Ohlsson, ownership of news media varies depending on its profitability or political goals. Corporate owners looking for maximum profits typically take control when news production proves to be commercially viable. On the other hand, ownership by business, the military, or partisan entities becomes more noticeable if news output results in political gains. However, when media ownership doesn't yield financial rewards, a wide range of owners with differing goals are drawn to it. Given the alleged "crisis" in journalism, the emergence of the digital economy has contributed to four observable trends in news media ownership.

- (1) There is an increase in foundations, trusts, and other non-commercial ownership forms, signaling a boom in ownership diversity. Simultaneously, well-known "digital tycoons" come to dominate financially troubled legacy organizations.
- (2) Publicly traded news firms are being forced to leave stock markets due to the fall in profits, which is mostly attributable to competition from new advertising platforms like Facebook and Google.
- (3) There are growing disagreements on state regulation and participation in the media. Government lobbying is becoming more and more competitive, which is why laws governing media ownership are now more concerned with financial than cultural policy.
- (4) Challenges are facing state-owned public service media, particularly in Europe, where decreased public funding and independent control have spurred accusations of unfair competition from commercial interests, particularly in online markets.

The digital era has affected the present trends in news media ownership, yet much of the literature on the subject was written when media ownership was lucrative (Sjøvaag et al, 2019). Therefore, from a normative and analytical standpoint, profit incentives and associations with market failure predominate the research. The critical viewpoints from the 1990s have not been sufficiently updated, despite the fact that traditional news media in Western nations no longer make the same profits.

It is critical to understand that media marketplaces evolve differently in various parts of the world. The motivations behind and outcomes of media ownership rely on the distinctive qualities of each media system. While there is a funding issue for journalism in the U.S. and UK markets, most other countries around the world are not affected by this (Dunaway & Graber, 2022).

However, the research that is presented at major conferences and in prestigious journals generally concentrates on the American and British contexts, maintaining a narrative of the Anglo-American crises that future research frequently refers to.

Different people have different reasons for owning media outlets in Nigeria, and some see radio station ownership as a means of achieving their own personal, political, economic, and business objectives. Politicians possess a large number of private media outlets in Nigeria, which may have an impact on the type of news and editorials that are published there.

For the simple reason that "all capital comes with conditions" (Sjvaag & Ohlsson, 2019), media ownership is significant. The content of the media reflects the interests of those who fund it, and property rights involve media owners in the administration of media organizations (Price, 2003). Because of this, understanding journalism's many organizational forms is important for understanding the limitations and conditions that affect journalism (Pauly, 2009).

1.3 Types of Media Ownership in Nigeria

According to Sjvaag and Ohlsson (2019), the peculiarities of the media systems in which ownership evolves influence how ownership has historically changed. While concentration is a frequent trend in nations where private media ownership predominates, how ownership affects news and journalism depends on how the media, the government, and other industries are interconnected.

The historical ownership of news media has typically been noncorporate and private in various regions of the world. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, newspapers were frequently owned by families, small businessmen, or politicians in Europe and the United States. However, in the second half of the 19th century, particularly in the United Kingdom and the United States, a shift towards concentration and ownership by affluent individuals emerged.

When radio broadcasting first began in the 1920s, most radio stations were started by private businesses. The future broadcasting markets in these regions were impacted by a trend towards corporate ownership in the United States and state control in Europe by the 1930s.

Government ownership, corporate ownership, campus radio ownership, and community ownership are the four divisions of media ownership in Nigeria. The nation's media environment is significantly shaped by each type of ownership.

Government ownership: The majority of media outlets were owned and run by the government prior to the emergence of private radio stations in Nigeria as a result of the media industry's liberalization. Examples include the Federal Radio Co-operation of Nigeria, the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), TSBS, and TTV. The broadcast sector was monopolized by the government up until 1992, when Gen. Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida's administration deregulated it and allowed private companies to enter the market. Both the federal and state governments still play a substantial role in the media sector. As partisans are chosen to key positions, government-owned media frequently exhibits significant support for government policies (Sibert et al, 1956).

Private ownership: Private persons or groups own and run private radio stations. After the passage of Decree 38 of 1992, which was later changed by National Assembly Act 55 of 1999 and is now known as the National Broadcasting Commission Laws of the Federation 2004, CAP N11, the rise of private media ownership exploded. The right to establish and run independent broadcast stations in the nation was granted by this law. The private radio stations AIT, Channels TV, and TVC News are examples.

Campus radio stations: These outlets are run by colleges and technical schools with the goal of educating future journalists and public speakers.

Community radio stations: Community radio stations are locally owned and geared toward serving the needs of the specific needs of its members.

Issues in Media Ownership in Nigeria

Allocation control and operational control are two separate types of control that media outlet owners can exercise over their businesses. Allocation control includes managing the business's money and resources, creating policies and strategies, choosing whether to merge with another company or make an acquisition, making decisions about budget cuts, and managing earnings. On the other hand, operational control involves selecting leadership models, allocating resources internally, determining editorial strategies, and selecting leaders and managers (Currie et al, 2008).

In the case of private media, the group or person holding the majority of the stock has more influence over the business.

On the other hand, the political make-up of the ruling coalition has an impact on finances, provisions, and management appointments for state-owned media. The distance between political power and broadcasting regulations is also determined by oversight processes (Benson et al, 2017). Media ownership is frequently more concentrated than is permitted in other businesses. While the telecommunications sector suffers monopoly and the newspaper industries are dominated by oligopolies, monopolies or oligopolies are common in the broadcasting sector. There is increasing competition for magazine and book publication (Leurdijk et al, 2012).

Different forms of ownership have unique traits. While stock market ownership offers more flexible ownership arrangements and quarterly reporting, public ownership is subject to public funding and oversight. Control is exercised by a single owner or owner group in a family business, and rights are frequently passed down through the generations. Newspapers acted as champions of a political platform due to party ownership, which has mostly disappeared (Allen et al, 2011).

The "ideal" type of ownership is thought to be trust and foundation ownership, which offers long-term operational assurance and more lenient profit expectations. Journalism is subject to a variety of regulations and pressures depending on the ownership structure.

The significance of various ownership forms in particular media systems depends on how the media interacts with the state, market, culture, economy, and organized life. Public service broadcasting in European nations serves as an example of arm's length distance to its owners, ensuring editorial freedom and journalistic professionalism (Raboy et al, 2008). State ownership is perceived as more or less advantageous in diverse media systems.

When it comes to media regulation, ownership is especially important for radio. It can be difficult for media managers to strike a balance between the needs of the media owner and the general public without breaking the law or going against professional ethics, which might cause them to self-censor. Whether a media company is privately or publicly owned, the owner's interests heavily influence the decisions that media management make. Owners may use a variety of tactics to exert control over media managers, including giving staff assignments, relocating personnel, granting or denying promotions, offering bribes or gifts, and instilling fear and anxiety among the media establishment (Sampson et al, 2010).

1.4 Ownership Diversity and Its Impact on Journalism

The sorts of owners, ownership structures, and competition in a news market have a considerable impact on how journalism is organized, what it covers, and how it conducts itself in various circumstances. Journalism does not work in a vacuum. The degree of journalistic autonomy, which refers to the independence of reporters to carry out their professional duties, is frequently constrained by corporate control and commercialization. As a result of owners' profit-driven demands and resource reductions, news becomes more market-driven and frequently favours owners' commercial and ideological interests, which is thought to be a factor in a fall in journalistic quality.

Additionally, different forms of ownership have varying effects on journalism, with some encouraging higher quality than others. In contrast to concentrated ownership, which is thought to result in more concentrated content, a diverse ownership landscape is thought to provide a more diverse output of journalism. For instance, separate ownership prevents competing media owners from consolidating or sharing editorial responsibilities or material. It is thought that a market with scattered ownership results in a more equitable distribution of communicative power.

However, in media systems, variables other than ownership diversity also have a big impact on how news and journalism are covered. When examining problems with news uniformity, quality, or concentration, ownership alone is difficult to isolate as an independent variable. There is scant evidence to support either the assertion that various ownership arrangements inevitably result in diverse content offers, or that ownership concentration or monopoly circumstances actually cause less diversified content.

In conclusion, there are many factors other than ownership diversity that have an impact on how media ownership affects journalism. To fully understand how news and journalism are shaped within various media systems, it is crucial to comprehend how ownership structures interact with other influences.

II. CONCLUSION

The study looks at the difficulties private radio stations in Nigeria face, as well as how their ownership arrangements affect how they cover news and current events. It explores how laws affect people, advertisers' interests, ownership goals, and the nature of laws governing things like court contempt, seditious speech, copyright, privacy laws, and more. These elements work together to influence how radio stations cover and display news material.

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