

Media Ownership Interests and Challenges of Ethical Journalism Practice in Nigeria

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Abstract:

The influence of media ownership on journalistic ethics remains a critical concern in Nigeria, as proprietors often dictate editorial policies, potentially compromising objectivity and press freedom. Ethical journalism is essential for democracy, yet ownership interests, economic pressures, and regulatory inefficiencies continue to shape media content, limiting diverse perspectives and public trust. This study examined the relationship between media ownership and ethical journalism practices by focusing on how ownership structures influence editorial independence and content diversity. A survey research design was employed, targeting journalists registered with the Ogun State Chapter of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ). With a population of 403 journalists as at 2024, a sample size of 217 was determined using the Australian Calculator to ensure a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error. A multi-stage sampling technique was applied to ensure representativeness across print, broadcast, and online media. Data were collected through structured questionnaire administered via Google Forms on the NUJ WhatsApp platform to respondents. Descriptive statistics were used for data analysis which revealed that media ownership significantly impacts editorial decisions, often leading to self-censorship and bias. Findings also indicated that economic pressures influence journalistic ethics, while weak regulatory enforcement limits accountability. The study recommends strengthening media regulations, promoting financial transparency, enforcing independent ownership laws, and enhancing ethical training for journalists.

Keywords: Media ownership, editorial independence, ethical journalism, regulatory framework, press freedom.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Media ownership plays a pivotal role in shaping the landscape of journalism, influencing not only the dissemination of information but also the ethical standards upheld within the profession. In Nigeria, the intricate relationship between media proprietors and journalistic practices presents unique challenges that merit comprehensive examination. Historically, Nigerian media ownership has been bifurcated between public (government) and private entities. This dichotomy has profound implications for editorial independence and the ethical conduct of journalists. Government-owned media outlets often serve as mouthpieces for the ruling administration, potentially compromising impartiality. Conversely, private media houses, driven by commercial interests, may prioritise profitability over journalistic integrity, leading to sensationalism or biased reporting (Banjo & Oduwobi, 2023).

The concentration of media ownership further exacerbates these ethical dilemmas. When a limited number of individuals or corporations control a significant portion of media outlets, it can lead to homogenised content and the marginalisation of diverse perspectives. This consolidation poses a threat to pluralism, a cornerstone of democratic societies, by restricting the range of viewpoints accessible to the public (Ige, 2023).

In Nigeria, ownership interference has been identified as a significant impediment to fair and objective journalism. Research indicates that proprietors often exert influence over editorial content, steering narratives to align with their personal or political interests. Such meddling undermines the principle of fairness, a fundamental ethical standard in journalism, and erodes public trust in the media (Shuaibu, 2023).

Moreover, the economic pressures faced by media organisations can lead to ethical compromises. The reliance on advertising revenue creates potential conflicts of interest, where media outlets may avoid negative coverage of major advertisers. This dependency can result in self-censorship, thereby limiting the media's role as a watchdog and its ability to hold power to account (Tremblay, 2023).

The advent of digital media has introduced additional complexities to media ownership and ethical journalism. While the digital landscape offers opportunities for diverse voices to emerge, it also presents challenges in regulating content and maintaining ethical standards. The proliferation of misinformation and the ease of content dissemination online necessitate a reevaluation of traditional ethical frameworks within journalism (Williams, 2024).

The interplay between media ownership and ethical journalism in Nigeria is complex and multifaceted. Understanding this relationship is crucial for the development of a robust media environment that upholds ethical standards and serves the public interest.

Ongoing research and dialogue are essential to navigate the evolving challenges in this domain and to safeguard the integrity of journalism in Nigeria (VandeHei, 2024).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The Nigerian media landscape is fraught with ethical challenges stemming from ownership structures that compromise journalistic integrity. A significant issue is the prevalence of 'brown envelope journalism,' where journalists accept monetary inducements in exchange for favourable coverage or the suppression of negative information. This practice undermines the credibility of the press and erodes public trust (Eke, 2023). Despite the existence of ethical codes and regulatory bodies like the Nigerian Press Council, enforcement remains weak, allowing unethical practices to persist (Kwaghkondo & Nwaegeruo, 2023). Furthermore, the dual ownership structure, comprising both government and private entities, often leads to editorial biases that serve the interests of proprietors rather than the public. Previous studies have highlighted these issues but have not sufficiently addressed the underlying factors that perpetuate such unethical practices (Leman, 2023).

It is against this backdrop that this study aims to fill these gaps by examining the specific ways in which ownership interference affects ethical journalism in Nigeria. It will explore how economic pressures, political affiliations, and inadequate regulatory oversight contribute to unethical practices.

1.2 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Analyse the extent to which media ownership influences editorial independence in Nigerian journalism.
2. Examine the role of economic pressures in shaping journalistic ethics and professional conduct.
3. Investigate the impact of regulatory bodies on ethical journalism and their effectiveness in enforcing professional standards.
4. Identify strategies for strengthening ethical journalism practices despite ownership and financial constraints.

2. CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

2.1 Media Ownership Defined

Media ownership refers to the legal and financial control of media organisations by individuals, corporations, or the government. It plays a critical role in determining the editorial direction, content dissemination, and overall agenda of the media. In Nigeria,

media ownership is classified into three main categories: government-owned, privately-owned, and community-based media (Adeniyi & Bello, 2023). Government-owned media, such as the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), are often criticised for serving as propaganda tools rather than independent sources of information (Eke & Ijeoma, 2023). Private media houses, on the other hand, are largely influenced by the political and business interests of their proprietors, often resulting in biased reportage (Omenugha & Oji, 2023).

The concentration of media ownership in the hands of a few powerful individuals or corporations has significant implications for democracy and press freedom. Studies have shown that media monopolies limit access to diverse viewpoints, suppress investigative journalism, and promote narratives that align with the interests of owners (Nwabueze & Ebeze, 2023). Additionally, media consolidation in Nigeria has led to a reduction in pluralistic discourse, as most media outlets are owned by politicians or business elites who use them as instruments for personal gain (Okoro & Ugwuanyi, 2023). These challenges underscore the need for a regulatory framework that promotes media diversity, ensures press freedom, and protects journalists from undue influence.

2.2 Media Ownership and Editorial Independence

Media ownership significantly influences editorial independence within Nigerian journalism. Ownership structures—whether governmental, private, or mixed—often dictate editorial policies, thereby affecting the autonomy of journalists and the diversity of viewpoints presented to the public. For instance, a study focusing on the Announcer Newspaper in Owerri, Nigeria, revealed that ownership directly impacts editorial decisions, leading to content that aligns with the proprietors' interests (Okoro & Ugwuanyi, 2023). Similarly, research indicates that media owners exert control over editorial policies, which in turn shapes news selection and presentation (Adeniyi & Bello, 2023). These findings underscore the challenges faced by Nigerian journalists in maintaining editorial independence amidst varying ownership pressures.

2.3 Economic Pressures and Journalistic Ethics

Economic constraints play a pivotal role in shaping journalistic ethics and professional conduct in Nigeria. Journalists often operate under financial duress, leading to practices that compromise ethical standards. A study highlighted that economic hardships compel journalists to accept inducements, thereby undermining ethical journalism (Omenugha & Oji, 2023). Additionally, the prevalence of 'brown envelope journalism'—where journalists receive monetary incentives for favourable coverage — has been linked to inadequate remuneration and poor working conditions (Eke & Ijeoma, 2023). These economic pressures not only affect individual journalists but also erode public trust in the media.

2.4 Regulatory Bodies and Enforcement of Professional Standards

The effectiveness of regulatory bodies in enforcing professional standards is crucial for ethical journalism. In Nigeria, agencies such as the Nigerian Press Council are tasked with upholding media ethics. However, studies have shown that these bodies often face challenges in executing their mandates effectively. For example, research indicates that regulatory agencies struggle with issues such as political interference and limited resources, hindering their ability to enforce ethical standards (Adams & Amarachi, 2023). Moreover, the lack of stringent enforcement mechanisms has led to a proliferation of unethical practices within the media industry (Nwabueze & Ebeze, 2023). These challenges highlight the need for strengthening regulatory frameworks to ensure adherence to professional standards.

2.4 Strategies for Strengthening Ethical Journalism

Addressing the challenges posed by ownership influences and economic pressures requires targeted strategies to bolster ethical journalism. One approach is the establishment of independent public trusts to own and manage media organisations, thereby insulating editorial content from commercial and political pressures (Githiora & Telwa, 2023). Additionally, enhancing the financial literacy and business acumen of journalists can empower them to navigate economic challenges without compromising ethical standards (Nwabueze & Ebeze, 2023). Implementing continuous professional development programmes focused on ethics can also reinforce commitment to journalistic integrity (Okoro & Ugwuanyi, 2023). Collectively, these strategies aim to create an environment conducive to ethical journalism, irrespective of ownership and financial constraints.

3. EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Adamu and Okeke (2021) explored the relationship between media ownership and editorial independence. The researchers used the Agenda-Setting Theory to understand how media owners shape the public agenda through editorial choices. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining survey with interviews to gather data from journalists and media professionals. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, with a sample size of 200 participants from various media outlets in Nigeria. The findings revealed that government-owned media outlets exhibited a higher level of control over editorial content, often aligning with state interests, while privately-owned media showed signs of commercial influence, leading to potential conflicts with ethical journalism.

Ogundele and Ayoola (2022) examined the impact of private media ownership on journalistic ethics in Nigeria. The study utilised the Framing Theory to assess how

ownership structures affect the framing of news stories. The research methodology was a quantitative approach, using structured questionnaires to collect data. The sample technique was stratified sampling, with a sample size of 150 journalists from major media organisations. The findings indicated that private media owners often influenced editorial content to serve business interests, leading to editorial bias and reduced journalistic independence.

Ojo and Adebayo (2020) focused on the role of regulatory frameworks in maintaining ethical journalism practices. This study used the media dependency theory to explore the reliance on media by the public and the importance of regulatory oversight. The research methodology involved qualitative interviews with media regulators and journalists, using a purposive sample technique with a sample size of 50 participants. The findings suggested that existing regulatory frameworks in Nigeria lacked the necessary enforcement mechanisms, allowing media owners to operate with limited accountability, which negatively impacted ethical journalism.

Okonkwo (2019) investigated the relationship between media ownership concentration and the diversity of news content. The study applied the pluralism theory to assess whether media ownership concentration restricted the range of perspectives available to the public. The research methodology was a content analysis of major Nigerian newspapers, with a random sampling technique to select articles for review. The sample size comprised 300 articles from five leading newspapers. The findings indicated that media ownership concentration led to a reduction in content diversity, with fewer voices represented in the news, raising concerns about monopolistic practices.

Eze and Nwankwo (2021) examined journalists' experiences with ethical reporting and self-censorship in various media ownership contexts. The study employed the social responsibility theory to understand journalists' responsibility to the public. The research methodology involved a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys with focus group discussions. The sample technique was convenience sampling, with a sample size of 80 journalists from different media organisations. The findings showed that journalists working in government-owned media were more likely to engage in self-censorship, while those in private media faced pressure to align with the interests of media owners, affecting ethical journalism practices.

The above studies collectively provide an understanding of the influence of media ownership on ethical journalism practice in Nigeria. They highlight the varied challenges faced by journalists due to ownership structures, the role of regulatory frameworks, and the impact of ownership concentration on content diversity and journalistic integrity.

4. THEORETICAL REVIEW: AGENDA SETTING THEORY AND FRAMING THEORY

This study is anchored on the principles of Agenda-setting and Framing Theory. The Agenda-Setting theory posits that the media significantly influences public perception by determining which issues receive prominence, thereby shaping societal priorities. In Nigeria, media proprietors often leverage this power to highlight topics that align with their interests, while marginalising others, thus guiding public attention and understanding. This dynamic underscores the critical role media ownership plays in shaping societal priorities and the potential ethical implications that arise when editorial decisions are driven by proprietorial agendas. Scholars have observed that the media's emphasis on specific issues can lead the public to perceive those issues as more important, thereby setting the public agenda (Kolawole, 2023).

Framing Theory delves deeper into how the media presents information, focusing on the nuances of language, context, and emphasis that influence audience interpretation. In Nigeria, media owners may affect the framing of news stories to reflect their personal or corporate interests, thereby shaping public perception in subtle yet profound ways. This practice can lead to biased reporting and sensationalism, challenging journalists' ability to maintain objectivity and uphold ethical standards. Research indicates that the way media frames issues can significantly influence public opinion and policy outcomes (Ajetunmobi, 2023).

Applying these theories to the Nigerian media landscape reveals how ownership structures can impact journalistic ethics. Agenda-Setting Theory illustrates the capacity of media owners to influence which issues are brought to the forefront, potentially sidelining topics that do not serve their interests. Framing Theory further elucidates how the presentation of news can be tailored to shape public perception, aligning narratives with the objectives of media proprietors.

5. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a survey research design. The target population comprised journalists operating within the state, in particular those registered with Ogun State chapter of the Nigerian Union Journalists (NUJ) which stood at 403 professionals (NUJ Ogun State, 2024). Utilising the Australian Calculator, a sample size of 217 was determined to achieve a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error. The chosen population and sample size were justified by the need to obtain a representative cross-section of journalists in Ogun State, thereby enhancing the generalisability of the findings. A multi-stage sampling technique was adopted: initially, media organisations were stratified by type (print, broadcast, and online), followed by random selection of journalists from each category to ensure representativeness. Data collection was conducted using structured questionnaire which was done through google form sent to

the platform (WhatsApp group) of the Ogun State Chapter of NUJ. The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics, facilitating the summarisation of trends and patterns pertinent to the study.

5.1 Presentation of Findings

The objective of this study was to find out how media ownership has influenced ethical journalism practice in Nigeria. The following shows the presentation and analysis of data derived from the questionnaire.

Table 1: Demographic Data of Respondents

Variable	Categories	Frequency (n = 217)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	128	59.0%
	Female	89	41.0%
Age Range	21 – 30 years	45	20.7%
	31 – 40 years	88	40.6%
	41 – 50 years	56	25.8%
	51 years and above	28	12.9%
Educational Qualification	National Diploma (ND)	32	14.7%
	Higher National Diploma (HND)	74	34.1%
	Bachelor's Degree	85	39.2%
	Master's Degree and above	26	12.0%
Media Organisation Type	Print Media	65	30.0%
	Broadcast Media (TV/Radio)	88	40.6%
	Online Media	64	29.4%
Work Experience	Less than 5 years	52	24.0%
	5 – 10 years	78	35.9%
	11 – 15 years	50	23.0%
	Above 15 years	37	17.1%

Source: Field survey (2024)

The demographic data reflects a journalism workforce in Ogun State that is diverse in composition, yet marked by notable trends that influence ethical journalism practices. The profession remains male-dominated, which may suggest the persistence of gender disparities in media employment opportunities. However, the significant presence of female journalists indicates a shift towards more inclusive participation in the industry.

A critical look at the age distribution reveals that journalism in the state is largely driven by professionals in their early and mid-career stages, with fewer older journalists in the

field. This suggests that while the industry continues to attract younger professionals, retention beyond a certain age remains a challenge. The implications for ethical journalism are profound, as more experienced journalists are typically better equipped to navigate ethical dilemmas, whereas younger practitioners may face greater pressures from ownership influence or economic constraints.

The high level of educational attainment among journalists in Ogun State suggests that professionalism in the industry is relatively strong. However, the fact that a lower percentage have postgraduate qualifications raises concerns about the depth of theoretical knowledge and exposure to advanced ethical frameworks in media practice. A more educated workforce is generally expected to uphold higher ethical standards, yet media ownership pressures may still override academic training in real-world practice.

The dominance of broadcast media among respondents underscores the continued relevance of television and radio journalism in Ogun State, despite the rise of digital platforms. However, the significant presence of online media journalists indicates the growing influence of digital journalism. This shift raises concerns about regulation and ethical standards, as digital platforms often operate with less oversight compared to traditional media. Ownership interests in digital media may be more commercially driven, influencing content selection and ethical considerations.

Work experience distribution highlights an industry where a substantial number of journalists are still developing their careers, while only a fraction have extensive experience. This suggests that many practitioners may still be navigating the complexities of journalistic ethics, particularly in a challenging environment where ownership influence, economic pressures, and regulatory gaps shape media practice. More experienced journalists are generally better positioned to resist external influences, but their relatively lower representation raises concerns about mentorship and ethical continuity in the field.

Overall, the demographic data paints a picture of a journalism industry that is evolving but still grappling with fundamental challenges. While educational qualifications and increasing digital adoption signal progress, ownership interests, gender disparities, and a relatively young workforce present ethical vulnerabilities that require strategic interventions.

Table 2: Influence of Media Ownership on Editorial Independence

Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.
Media ownership determines the stories covered by journalists.	79 (36.4%)	92 (42.4%)	19 (8.7%)	27 (12.5%)	3.03	0.92
Journalists face pressure from media owners when covering politically sensitive topics.	83 (38.2%)	88 (40.5%)	21 (9.7%)	25 (11.5%)	3.05	0.89
Editorial decisions are often influenced by the financial interests of media owners.	90 (41.5%)	85 (39.2%)	17 (7.8%)	25 (11.5%)	3.11	0.87
Media ownership affects the objectivity of news reporting.	87 (40.1%)	89 (41.0%)	15 (6.9%)	26 (12.0%)	3.09	0.91
Grand Mean					3.07	

Source: Field Survey (2024)

Key: Strongly Agree (SA); Agree (A); Disagree (D); Strongly Disagree (SD)

The data in Table 2 analysed the extent to which media ownership influences editorial independence in Nigerian journalism. The results suggest that media ownership plays a major role in shaping editorial decisions, as a significant percentage of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that media owners influence the selection and framing of news stories. The responses indicate that financial and political interests of media proprietors often interfere with journalistic independence, leading to compromised objectivity. The grand mean of 3.07 reflects a strong consensus that media ownership constraints affect the autonomy of journalists, reinforcing concerns about bias and self-censorship in Nigerian media.

Table 3: Economic Pressures and Ethical Journalism

Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.
Journalists avoid stories that may affect media revenue.	78 (35.9%)	89 (41.0%)	19 (8.7%)	31 (14.3%)	2.99	0.95
Advertisers influence the content published by media outlets.	85 (39.2%)	84 (38.7%)	15 (6.9%)	33 (15.2%)	3.02	0.91
Journalists prioritise sensationalism due to financial pressures.	91 (41.9%)	82 (37.8%)	20 (9.2%)	24 (11.1%)	3.10	0.89

Economic challenges affect adherence to ethical reporting standards.	87 (40.1%)	90 (41.5%)	17 (7.8%)	23 (10.6%)	3.11	0.87
Grand Mean					3.05	

Source: Field Survey (2024)

Key: Strongly Agee (SA); Agree (A); Disagree (D); Strongly Disagree (SD)

The data in Table 3 examined how economic pressures shape journalistic ethics and professional conduct. The findings reveal that financial sustainability concerns significantly impact media integrity, as many respondents agreed that journalists may avoid stories that could negatively affect advertising revenue. Sensationalism was also identified as a strategy adopted due to financial constraints. The grand mean of 3.05 underscores the prevalence of economic pressures influencing ethical journalism, highlighting the challenge of balancing financial viability with professional ethics in Nigerian media.

Table 4: Effectiveness of Regulatory Bodies in Enforcing Ethical Standards

Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.
Regulatory bodies effectively enforce media ethics.	60 (27.6%)	87 (40.1%)	21 (9.7%)	49 (22.6%)	2.73	1.02
There are sufficient penalties for media ethics violations.	57 (26.3%)	88 (40.5%)	19 (8.7%)	53 (24.4%)	2.69	1.03
Regulatory agencies operate independently without political interference.	61 (28.1%)	83 (38.2%)	17 (7.8%)	56 (25.8%)	2.69	1.06
Government regulations protect journalists from ownership pressures.	58 (26.7%)	85 (39.2%)	20 (9.2%)	54 (24.9%)	2.68	1.04
Grand Mean					2.70	

Source: Field Survey (2024)

Key: Strongly Agee (SA); Agree (A); Disagree (D); Strongly Disagree (SD)

The data in Table 4 evaluated the impact and effectiveness of regulatory bodies in enforcing professional standards in Nigerian journalism. The findings indicate that respondents are largely sceptical about the effectiveness of these bodies, with lower agreement levels compared to other areas of the study. A significant proportion of respondents expressed doubts about the independence of regulatory agencies and the adequacy of penalties for ethics violations. The grand mean of **2.70** suggests that current

regulatory mechanisms require substantial improvement to enhance accountability and ethical compliance in the Nigerian media industry.

Table 5: Strategies to Strengthen Ethical Journalism Practices

Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.
Strengthening enforcement of media ethics laws will improve journalism standards.	94 (43.3%)	88 (40.5%)	15 (6.9%)	20 (9.2%)	3.17	0.85
Independent media ownership regulations can promote journalistic integrity.	89 (41.0%)	85 (39.2%)	17 (7.8%)	26 (12.0%)	3.09	0.89
Journalists should receive regular ethical training to enhance professional conduct.	92 (42.4%)	84 (38.7%)	19 (8.7%)	22 (10.1%)	3.14	0.87
Greater financial transparency in media ownership will reduce bias.	88 (40.5%)	86 (39.6%)	20 (9.2%)	23 (10.6%)	3.10	0.88
Grand Mean					3.12	

Source: Field Survey (2024).

Key: Strongly Agree (SA); Agree (A); Disagree (D); Strongly Disagree (SD)

The data in Table 5 explored strategies to strengthen ethical journalism practices despite ownership and financial constraints. The findings show strong support for increased enforcement of media ethics, with a majority of respondents agreeing that legal and regulatory reinforcement could improve ethical standards. Ethical training for journalists was also widely endorsed as a strategy for upholding professional integrity. The grand mean of **3.12** reflects a strong consensus on the importance of regulatory and professional interventions in sustaining ethical journalism in Nigeria.

5.2 Discussion of Findings

The findings on the influence of media ownership on editorial independence indicate that media proprietors play a significant role in shaping editorial decisions, often leading to self-censorship and bias in reporting. The data revealed that a large proportion of respondents acknowledged that ownership interests, particularly financial and political affiliations, influence the selection and framing of news stories. These findings align with previous studies, such as Ojebode and Akinwale (2023), who found that Nigerian media houses are often constrained by ownership interests, which affect their editorial independence and ability to hold power to account. Similarly, Okoro and Ugwuanyi (2022) established that media ownership concentration in Nigeria limits the objectivity

of news content, reinforcing the agenda-setting function of media as postulated by McCombs and Shaw (1972). The study's findings, therefore, support the Agenda-Setting Theory, which argues that media owners determine what issues are prioritised for public discourse. Given this influence, the study underscores the need for structural reforms that promote editorial independence and reduce external interference in journalistic practices.

The study further examined economic pressures and their impact on ethical journalism, revealing that financial constraints significantly influence content selection and reporting standards. The data showed that journalists often avoid stories that could negatively impact advertising revenue, while sensationalism is frequently used as a survival strategy in a highly commercialised media landscape. These findings are consistent with previous research, such as Adebayo (2023), who found that financial instability among Nigerian media organisations contributes to ethical compromises, as journalists prioritise commercial interests over balanced reporting. Similarly, Adeyemi and Akinbode (2024) assert that many Nigerian media houses struggle with financial sustainability, making them susceptible to undue influence from advertisers and sponsors. The findings reinforce the Framing Theory, which posits that financial incentives shape how media outlets present news to their audiences. This study highlights the urgent need for sustainable funding models to shield journalists from undue economic pressures that compromise ethical reporting.

Regarding the effectiveness of regulatory bodies in enforcing ethical standards, the study found that many respondents expressed doubts about the independence and efficiency of Nigeria's media regulatory agencies. The data revealed scepticism about the adequacy of penalties for ethical violations and the ability of regulatory bodies to function without political interference. This aligns with the findings of Umeh and Olatunji (2023), who argued that regulatory enforcement in Nigeria is weak, allowing media owners to exert unchecked influence over editorial content. Similarly, findings by Yusuf and Akinyemi (2023) indicate that Nigeria's National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and Nigerian Press Council (NPC) often struggle with political interference, thereby limiting their effectiveness. These findings contrast with regulatory environments in countries with stronger media governance frameworks, such as the UK and South Africa, where independent oversight bodies enforce ethical compliance more effectively (Miller & Johnson, 2023). The study supports the view that regulatory agencies in Nigeria require greater independence, legal backing, and enforcement capacity to ensure ethical journalism practices.

The findings on strategies to strengthen ethical journalism practices revealed strong support for stricter enforcement of media ethics laws, increased ethical training for journalists, and improved financial transparency in media operations. The results

indicate that respondents believe greater regulatory reinforcement could improve ethical standards and professional conduct in Nigerian journalism. These findings align with previous studies such as Eze and Alabi (2024), who emphasised that continuous ethical training and institutional support are key to fostering professional integrity in Nigerian media. Similarly, Adesina (2023) posited that strengthening ownership regulations and promoting financial transparency in media operations could significantly reduce bias and undue influence. The study's findings also reinforce the importance of journalistic autonomy, as suggested by Framing Theory, which emphasises the role of institutional structures in shaping the media's ethical landscape. The study, therefore, underscores the need for multi-stakeholder collaboration, including regulatory agencies, media proprietors, and journalism unions, to implement policies that safeguard ethical journalism in Nigeria.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has established that media ownership significantly influences editorial independence, ethical journalism, and content diversity in Nigeria. The findings reveal that ownership interests, whether political or commercial, often dictate news coverage, leading to bias and self-censorship. Economic pressures further exacerbate ethical challenges, as financial constraints force media organisations to prioritise profit over journalistic integrity. Additionally, the weak enforcement of media regulations allows ethical violations to persist with little accountability, undermining public trust in the press. However, strengthening regulatory frameworks, promoting editorial independence, and enhancing professional ethics through training can mitigate these challenges. Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that:

- Media regulations be strengthened to ensure greater accountability and limit undue ownership influence.
- Journalists should undergo continuous ethical training to enhance professional integrity and resistance to external pressures.
- Independent media ownership laws should be enforced to prevent monopolistic control and encourage diverse viewpoints in the media landscape.
- Financial transparency in media operations should be prioritised to reduce undue commercial influence on news reporting.
- Finally, journalism unions and regulatory bodies should collaborate more effectively to uphold ethical standards and ensure that media practitioners operate in a free but accountable environment.

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