

PROPRIETARY INFLUENCE ON BROADCAST STATIONS

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Abstract

Broadcast stations play a crucial role in shaping public opinion in Nigeria. This article examines how ownership structures, particularly those linked to political officeholders and government institutions, compromise journalistic integrity through editorial control and skewed reportage. Analyzing stations including ADBN TV, AKBC, NTA, and TVC, the study reveals that proprietary influence erodes media independence, declines professionalism, and compromises public interest. The article recommends binding editorial independence charters, empowered professional associations, and transparent regulatory enforcement to restore media integrity and accountability in Nigeria's broadcast landscape.

Introduction

The media landscape in Nigeria is notably diverse, with more than 100 broadcast stations contributing to national discourse on television and radio. Broadcast media play a pivotal role in shaping public opinion, disseminating vital information, influencing voter behaviour and supporting democratic governance. Through news coverage, public affairs programming, and live reports, these stations serve as intermediaries between the government and the governed, as well as platforms for public engagement and social accountability.

However, this apparent diversity is increasingly overshadowed by concerns about media independence, particularly in relation to the ownership and control. Ownership structures, especially those linked to political officeholders and government institutions, have raised alarms over the erosion of editorial neutrality and professional ethics. Proprietary influence often manifests through direct editorial control, skewed reportage, and marginalisation of dissenting voices.

According to Hallin and Mancini (2004), ownership structures dictate the political and economic alignments of media outlets, and impact on their level of independence. In the Nigerian context, media outlets owned by sitting politicians or government bodies tend to mirror the political agendas of their proprietors at the expense of objective journalism. This has led to growing concerns about the integrity of public discourse and the watchdog role of the media in a democratic society.

This paper aims to explore the implications of proprietary ownership in Nigeria's broadcast sector, with a specific focus on ADBN TV (Advocate Broadcasting Network), which is linked to the Senate President of Nigeria; Akwa Ibom State Broadcasting Corporation (AKBC), a state-owned media institution; Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), the federal government's national broadcaster; and Television Continental (TVC), owned by a former governor and influential political figure. Through this analysis, the study seeks to

uncover the dynamics of political influence in media ownership and its effects on professionalism, neutrality, and democratic engagement.

Some of the major keywords in this paper include proprietary influence which involves to the legal possession and control over media organisations, including their content, infrastructure, and operational management. Ownership may be public, private or hybrid. Political influence in media is the capacity of political actors, such as government officials, political parties, or influential elites to sway media content, coverage angles, or journalistic decisions, often to serve political interests.

Another key word is broadcast journalism which is the practice of gathering, producing, and disseminating news and current affairs content through electronic mass communication channels, including radio, television, and increasingly, digital streaming platforms.

Theoretical Framework

Scholars have underscore the persistent dangers posed by concentrated media ownership in Nigeria's broadcast landscape. Obot (2022) emphasises that ownership concentration not only limits the diversity of voices in the public sphere but also entrenches the dominance of political narratives aligned with proprietorial interests. This, in turn, creates a systemic imbalance in the flow of information, where opposing perspectives are marginalised. Similarly, Arogundade (2023) highlights that the high degree of politicisation in media proprietorship fosters a newsroom culture where editorial choices are subtly, and sometimes overtly, shaped by the proprietor's political and economic objectives.

Building on this, Edem (2021) identifies a pattern in which broadcast stations, both government-owned and private become instruments of political legitimacy rather than platforms for impartial public discourse. Such proprietorial control manifests in agenda-setting decisions, story framing, and selective coverage, often to the detriment of investigative and critical journalism. Adeyemi (2024) notes that this trend is intensifying, with evidence of increasing "media capture" by political elites. In this environment, journalistic independence is compromised, as the professional duty to inform the public objectively competes with the proprietorial imperative to protect or advance certain political interests.

Collectively, these studies reveal that media proprietorship in Nigeria is not merely a question of economic control but one of political power consolidation. The implications for democratic accountability are significant, as public access to balanced, accurate, and

comprehensive information is curtailed, thereby weakening the role of the media as the fourth estate of the realm.

One of the foundational approaches to understanding media ownership and its implications is the model proposed by Hallin and Mancini (2004), who identify three models of media systems: the Liberal, Democratic Corporatist, and Polarized Pluralist. Nigeria's media system closely aligns with the Polarized Pluralist model, where political parallelism is high, and media ownership is often linked to political elites, resulting in clientelism and reduced journalistic autonomy.

In addition, the Political Economy of Media theory provides a lens through which media ownership is understood as an extension of capital and political power; that those who control media activities mostly revolve around the highest bidder or those who control the seat of power. Scholars such as Fuchs (2020) and Hardy (2021) argue that media institutions serve the interests of their owners and sponsors, thereby constraining their ability to operate independently. In Nigeria, broadcast stations owned by political figures tend to prioritise partisan interests over public service.

McQuail's Mass Communication Theory (2020) also reinforces the notion that media systems reflect broader societal structures. He suggests that media performance is influenced by ownership, market dynamics, and political alignment, all of which shape content and news framing.

Media Independence, Professionalism And Public Interest

The direct involvement of political figures in media ownership leads to concerns regarding journalistic integrity. As outlined by Davies (2013), broadcast stations owned by politicians often produce content that serves particular political agendas and programming often reflects the political interests of its owner. Public trust in media integrity diminishes when ownership affiliations are evident, potentially leading to a disengaged electorate (Mgbekem, 2021).

Hallin and Mancini (2004) argue that in many hybrid media systems, political influence manifests through direct ownership, regulatory interference, or partisan funding structures. According to McQuail (2010), media ownership shapes the power structure within the media system and often correlates with the level of independence or bias in content.

Editorial independence is widely regarded as a cornerstone of ethical journalism, Editorial independence ensures that news judgments are made without undue influence from proprietors, advertisers, or political actors (Hanitzsch et al., 2020). In principle, this autonomy

allows journalists to pursue truth, uphold professional integrity, and serve the public interest. However, in Nigeria, as in many other countries, ownership structures, particularly those linked to political elites, can significantly compromise this independence (Okoro & Odoemelam, 2021). In contemporary practice, media ethics also address emerging challenges posed by digital technologies, algorithmic content distribution, and the proliferation of misinformation (Silverman & Milosevic, 2022).

In the African context, media ethics remain central to debates about press freedom, political influence, and public accountability. As Ndlela (2020) observes, ethical journalism in politically charged environments requires balancing the watchdog role with the pressures of ownership, censorship, and market demands.

When proprietors are political figures or have close political ties, editorial decisions often reflect the political and economic priorities of those individuals rather than the informational needs of the public (Mutsvairo & Bebawi, 2022). This phenomenon is evident in the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), a federally funded broadcaster whose coverage tends to align with the narratives and image management strategies of the government of the day. While overt directives may not always be issued, newsroom cultures and editorial hierarchies evolve to anticipate and avoid content that might cast the government in a negative light, creating a form of implicit self-censorship (Ismail, 2023). Similar dynamics are observed in state-owned stations, where political leadership directly or indirectly shapes coverage. For instance, AKBC, being a state-owned broadcaster, is directly influenced by government policies and agendas (Nkanga, 2022).

Privately owned broadcasters are not immune to these pressures. Daar Communications, owners of RayPower FM, Faaji FM, and AIT, historically reflected the personal and political orientations of its founder, the late Raymond Dokpesi. While this influence may manifest subtly, it often translates into selective framing, omission of dissenting voices, and prioritisation of content favourable to the proprietor's interests (Saidu & Akinwalere, 2024).

The cumulative effect of this proprietary influence is threefold:

1. Erosion of Media Independence: Journalists operate in a constrained environment where editorial decisions are shaped by ownership priorities rather than public service imperatives (Hanitzsch et al., 2020; Ismail, 2023). Media Independence suffers most under these conditions: The threat of punitive action discourages broadcasters from challenging narratives that may expose misconduct or corruption tied to political elites or station owners. For instance, stories critical of government policy or highlighting political scandals may be

delayed, downplayed, or entirely suppressed, not because they lack news value but because they conflict with the interests of influential proprietors. This compromises the watchdog role of the media and transforms them into instruments of elite consensus rather than platforms for pluralistic debate.

2. Decline in Professionalism: Ethical norms such as fairness, accuracy, and balance are subordinated to loyalty toward the proprietor's political or commercial agenda (Mutsvairo & Bebawi, 2022). Journalists are compelled to align their reporting with the strategic interests of the proprietor, often prioritising access to political figures over rigorous investigative journalism. The erosion of editorial courage and critical inquiry undermines the very ethos of journalism as defined by accuracy, impartiality, and accountability. Over time, this can produce a newsroom culture where young journalists learn to avoid "dangerous" topics, perpetuating a cycle of compromised ethics and limited public trust.

3. Compromise of Public Interest: The public receives filtered information, leading to a distorted understanding of political events, reduced diversity of viewpoints, and weakened democratic deliberation (Saidu & Akinwalere, 2024). Public Interest inevitably suffers: when the stories that matter most, those exposing systemic injustice, holding leaders accountable, or amplifying marginalised voices, are filtered through the lens of proprietorial or political expediency, citizens are left with partial information or a version of reality, which distorts public perception and weakens democratic participation. This selective coverage not only narrows the range of viewpoints available in the public sphere but also diminishes the media's role in fostering informed citizenry.

This interplay between ownership and editorial control underscores the critical need for robust regulatory frameworks, transparent ownership disclosures, and institutional safeguards that protect editorial autonomy, without which Nigerian broadcast journalism risks becoming a mouthpiece for political and commercial elites rather than a guardian of the public interest. Public interest journalism prioritises the needs and rights of the audience. It serves to inform, educate, and hold power to account. Unfortunately, proprietary interference often displaces the public interest with personal or political agendas, weakening the media's role as the fourth estate.

Proprietary Influence, Legal and Regulatory Contexts

The Nigerian broadcast environment demonstrates a recurring pattern in which regulatory enforcement while ostensibly designed to uphold professional and ethical standards can be weaponised as a means of selective punishment. When regulatory agencies such as the

National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) are perceived to act in favour of politically connected proprietors, the result is an uneven playing field. Proprietors without political protection become disproportionately vulnerable to sanctions, ranging from fines to suspension of broadcasting licences. This fosters a climate of fear and strategic compliance, which often translates into self-censorship among journalists and editorial boards.

In Nigeria, the legal and regulatory environment, particularly the role of the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), intersects directly with the issue of proprietary influence on broadcast journalism. The NBC Act (as amended) and the Nigeria Broadcasting Code are designed to regulate ownership, content standards, and licensing of broadcast stations. In theory, these frameworks aim to protect public interest and uphold editorial independence. In practice, however, regulatory mechanisms often reinforce ownership influence, especially when proprietors have political power or strong ties to ruling elites (Oboh & Aiyetan, 2021).

The NBC is empowered to grant and revoke broadcast licences, monitor compliance and impose sanctions. While this could serve as a safeguard against unethical ownership interference, in reality, the process has been criticised for political selectivity and a lack of transparency (Akinwalere, 2023). Media scholars note that the threat of licence suspension or heavy fines, sometimes applied disproportionately to critical voices, creates a climate of regulatory intimidation that aligns with the interests of politically connected proprietors (Saidu & Akinwalere, 2024).

Government-owned stations such as the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) or state-run broadcasters operate under direct political control, with the government effectively acting as both proprietor and regulator. This dual role entrenches systemic bias, limits journalistic autonomy, and ensures that dissenting political voices are marginalised (Ismail, 2023). For privately owned broadcasters, proprietorship's influence is compounded by the NBC's discretionary power over licence renewals. Proprietors with political ambitions may use their platforms to protect their personal or partisan interests, knowing that regulatory oversight will be lenient toward allies and punitive toward critics.

Therefore, safeguarding media independence in Nigeria requires more than just internal newsroom policies, it demands transparent licensing processes, statutory guarantees of editorial freedom, disclosure of ownership structures, and legal protections for whistleblowers.

Conclusion

Proprietary influence on broadcast stations in Nigeria poses significant challenges to the integrity and independence of journalism. Ownership affiliations affect media content,

perspective, and public trust. The troubling trend is that political and economic interests supersede journalistic integrity. It is imperative for Nigerian media outlets to foster greater independence to promote pluralism and accountability in the broadcasting landscape.

Recommendations

1. Broadcast stations should adopt binding editorial independence charters, signed by both management and proprietors, to protect journalists from undue influence. Such charters should be enforceable under contract law.
2. Media organisations can partner with relevant establishments to empower professional associations like the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) to actively monitor and advocate for ethical standards can provide a collective shield against proprietorial interference.
3. Regulatory enforcement should be guided by clearly defined, consistently applied standards, subject to independent judicial review, to prevent selective punishment.

By implementing these reforms, Nigeria's broadcast industry can move closer to achieving true editorial independence, revitalising professionalism in journalism, and restoring the media's fundamental obligation to serve the public interest

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