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Research Article

Examining Media Ownership and its Effects on Journalism Practices: A Study of Electronic Private Media Houses in Lusaka District of Lusaka Province

*¹Leya Namonje, ¹Sycorax Ndhlovu

About Article

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About Author

¹ Department of Social Sciences,
Information and Communications
University (ICU), and Zambia Research
and Development Center, Lusaka,
Zambia

Contact @ Leya Namonje
namonjeleya@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The media in Africa continues to encounter significant obstacles in carrying out its mandate. The continent's little progress in advancing press freedom and freedom of expression has been masked by laws and acts by some regimes that continue to obstruct the establishment of professional and independent media. This study investigates the interplay between media ownership, ethics, and censorship, and their combined influence on the quality of journalism. It highlights the significant role of media ownership in shaping news coverage, with concentrated ownership often leading to biased reporting and a lack of diverse perspectives. The research is guided by the following objectives; to investigate the influence of media ownership in news coverage under private media, to explore the effects of media ethics rating on the quality of journalism under private media, and to assess political bias threats to democracy. The research uses both qualitative and quantitative methods. A sample of 50 respondents is used to collect data. The research found that adherence to ethical principles, such as truthfulness, fairness, and independence, directly correlates with the trustworthiness of journalism. However, the study also revealed significant challenges in this area, particularly the consequences of ethical breaches. Findings emphasize the necessity of a holistic approach to address these challenges, including promoting transparency in media ownership, reinforcing ethical journalism practices, and safeguarding against censorship. The study offers actionable recommendations, such as diversifying media ownership, strengthening legal protections for journalists, enhancing media literacy, and fostering international collaboration to uphold press freedom. By addressing these issues, the African media can evolve into a more independent, ethical, and effective institution, crucial for advancing democracy and informed public discourse.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

With the ability to reach wide audiences, media are crucial communication vehicles. According to Schramm (1964), who made this observation as early as the 1960s, there is little question that the media may have a significant impact on society. In addition, media serve as a vehicle for instilling in people the values, convictions, and conduct codes necessary for them to become integrated into the larger society's educational frameworks (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). Nonetheless, given its significant influence, media warrants special attention in any consideration of media content. The degree of study and attention that news receives serve as further examples of its relevance. The media plays a big role in casual conversations at work, in bars, and on the street. Additionally, there is a thriving book and article business at the educational level that aims to comprehend media (Hartley, 1982; Kazibwe, 2010). Fairness and impartiality support media outlets and foster public confidence in the media coverage and viewpoints they disseminate. News media independence is crucial, as is their ability to discern between advertising and news, present facts and opinions independently, and fully disseminate opposing ideas (Van, 2014; Kazibwe, 2018).

The media in Africa continues to encounter significant obstacles in carrying out its mandate. The continent's little progress in advancing press freedom and freedom of expression has been masked by laws and acts by some regimes that continue to obstruct the establishment of a professional and independent media. According to the World Press Freedom Index 2021, 23 of the 48 African nations surveyed have a severe or extremely bad state. Many areas of journalistic activity have been criminalized, with the implementation of cybercrime legislation in countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, and Tanzania that outlaw the dissemination of fake news or material judged to jeopardize national security or public health. In Egypt, cybercrime laws empower investigative authorities to prohibit or suspend locally or internationally based websites that include information deemed damaging to national security or the national economy. According to Reporters Without Borders (RSF), violations of press freedom are common on the continent and include arbitrary censorship, particularly on the internet, arrests of journalists on the grounds of combating cybercrime, fake news, or terrorism, and acts of violence against media personnel that usually go unpunished.

Significant political and economic shifts have changed Zambia's media environment in the past. The colonial authority maintained strict control over the media during that time, mostly using it to forward its own agenda (Phiri, 1999). The first president of Zambia, Kenneth Kaunda, created a one-party state when the country gained independence in 1964. The media was mostly under state control, with publications like Zambia Daily Mail and Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC) representing official government viewpoints (Banda, 2007). President Frederick Chiluba's early 1990s restoration of multi-party democracy signaled the beginning of the media sector's liberalization and the establishment of independent and commercial media outlets that offered a diversity of viewpoints and views (M'mbokela, 1994). But even with this liberalization,

there were still many obstacles to media independence and freedom, such as punitive legislation, governmental meddling, and financial limitations (Lush, 1998). It is for this reason that the research seeks to examine media ownership and its effects on journalism practices.

1.2. Statement of the problem

The concentration of media ownership in Zambia presents significant challenges to journalistic practice, impacting media diversity, editorial independence, and overall media freedom. A small number of influential individuals and entities, often with political affiliations, dominate the media landscape (Makungu, 2004). This concentration undermines the plurality of voices and viewpoints, leading to biased reporting that serves the interests of media owners rather than the public (Freedom House, 2021). Additionally, economic pressures drive media outlets to prioritize commercial interests over journalistic integrity, resulting in sensationalism and underfunding of investigative journalism (Chama, 2014). The media's role in promoting democratic debate is made more difficult by the regulatory framework, which is frequently attacked for its bias while being meant to regulate media activities (Freedom House, 2021). As a result, the standard and integrity of journalism in Zambia are jeopardized by conflicts of interest, moral conundrums, and professional difficulties that journalists encounter (Jere, 2019). To propose solutions that improve media plurality, editorial independence, and journalistic standards in Zambia, a detailed analysis of media ownership structures, legal frameworks, and economic factors impacting media operations is required. It is for this reason that the research seeks to examine media ownership and its effects on journalism practices.

1.3. Objectives

- i. To investigate the influence of media ownership in news coverage under private electronic media.
- ii. To explore the effects of media ethics rating on quality of journalism under private electronic media.
- iii. To assess political bias threats to democracy in private electronic media.

To explore the level of censorship in private electronic media.

1.4. Research questions

- i. What are the influences of media ownership on news coverage under private electronic media?
- ii. What effects does media rating effects have over the quality of journalism under private electronic media?
- iii. How does political bias cause a threat to democracy under private electronic media?

What is the level of censorship in commercial media coverage in private electronic media?

1.5. Theoretical framework

The guiding theory for this research is the liberation theory. The Libertarian theory is one of the "Normative theories of press". The theory which is originally came from libertarian thoughts from 16th century in Europe. One of the "Normative theories of press" is the Libertarian hypothesis. Libertarian ideas from the 16th century in Europe inspired the thesis. Authoritarian ideas



are opposed by libertarian theorists (Siebert, 1956) According to liberalism, information is knowledge, and knowledge is power. Libertarianism is free of any power, control, and censorship. Libertarianism is the belief in individualism and minimal government that is not damaging to others. According to libertarian philosophy, humans are capable of distinguishing between good and bad ideas. According to the view, individuals are reasonable, and their reasoning thinking drive them to discover what is good and wrong. The press should not be restricted in any way since even unfavorable articles may provide information (Siebert, 1956).

The libertarian theorists are against the authoritarian thoughts. According to libertarian philosophy, humans are capable of distinguishing between good and bad ideas. According to the view, individuals are reasonable, and their reasoning thinking drive them to discover what is good and wrong. Even if the information is bad, it may provide knowledge and help people make better decisions in the worst-case scenario. The libertarian ideas are diametrically opposed to the authoritarian philosophy, which states that "all forms of communication work under the control of government or elite like king."

In libertarian theory, the media is viewed as a means to present evidence and arguments based on which the government is subject to the control of their work, and people have the sole right to form their own opinions about politics and the job of rulers and office holders. According to this view, the media must be free of government control and influence. Man is a rational being with a goal, according to libertarian thought. The objective of society is the individual's pleasure and wellbeing, and man as a thinking creature is capable of organizing the environment around them and making decisions customized to their own interests.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Media ownership is the crucial factor influencing the internal gatekeeping of the news media in agenda setting. The media ownership pattern takes many forms, such as state ownership, private ownership, family ownership, party ownership, trust ownership, public or corporate ownership, etc. (Sjøvaag & Ohlsson, 2019). The effect of the news media on public opinion also varies depending on the form of these ownership patterns. There have been numerous empirical studies to identify how election coverage varies with media ownership patterns. These studies have confirmed that media owner patterns affect public opinion by transferring owners own political agendas (media agenda) into the public agenda. However, empirical studies that examine the effect of media ownership patterns on public opinion toward voter intention are still somewhat lacking.

The primary goal of this study is to fill this research gap in the Sri Lankan context. According to this objective, the primary research question of the study is, "Is there an effect of media ownership patterns on public opinion toward voter intention?" A level playing field is an important principle of a democratic election (ACE Encyclopaedia, 2023). The media is the most powerful force in establishing a level playing field. If the agendas of media owners have a negative impact on public opinion, it creates an uneven electoral playing field. As a result, new laws to regulate media ownership's electoral behavior are required

to ensure a level playing field during elections (Sooriyabandara, 2023; Ranasinghe, 2019; Levitsky & Way, 2009). The findings of this study will provide academic guidance for that. Also empirical studies identifying the mediating role of public opinion in the context of elections are scarce, so this study will also fill that research gap. This study will also address a research void because there aren't many empirical studies identifying the mediating role of public opinion in the context of elections. Existing research on this question (VanBelle, 2000; Slantchev, 2006; Choi & James, 2007) mostly argues that a free press might facilitate peaceful conflict resolution, by raising the domestic political costs of war. Yet such conclusions require considering whether and how media institutions vary in their coverage of foreign policy. Do all media report on the same events, and write roughly the same things about them? Or do they diverge in systematic ways, with potential consequences for public debate over foreign policy? Previous research on media coverage of an array of topics ranging from politics (Iyengar, 1991) to protest movements to public health (Higgins *et al.*, 2006) to black bear management in New York State (Siemer *et al.*, 2007), to name only a few, has shown that differences in the framing of news can generate quite distinct public responses. In particular, hard news-oriented, thematically framed reporting, with an emphasis on public policy themes and an issue's broader political, or military context, tends to engender sense of collective responsibility for a policy problem. This, in turn, raises the likelihood that consumers will look to the government for a solution

Every profession has its ethics; they are the code of conduct, a set of moral principles or values that guide a profession, and the behavior and actions of individuals in a particular profession. Plaisance (2021) points out that "in journalism, truth is considered an "absolute" rather than an instrumental value: it is important not only for what it does but as an end in itself. Truth seeking is what sets journalism apart from all other forms of communication" Therefore, as an institution with the responsibility of protecting public interest, the mass media strive to play this noble role which the society bestowed on them, that is to be socially responsible Nkwachi (2015) cited in (Pepple & Acholonu, 2018). In Ifedayo (1999), "the thrust of ethics is on individual culpability. He notes that while law emphasizes accountability, ethics emphasizes responsibility". Professional ethics in journalism serves as a framework for professionals to make informed decisions and choices based on the best interests of the society, that is why the importance of impartiality, accuracy, transparency, and fairness in reporting cannot be overlooked in engendering a well-informed society. In a diverse country like Zambia, the media serves as a crucial platform for information dissemination and public engagement. The ethical conduct of journalism and the accurate portrayal of information are fundamental in ensuring that the media is objective as rightly put by Nkwachi (2015), cited in Pepple and Acholonu (2018) that "as an institution bestowed with the responsibility of protecting public interest, the mass media strive to play this noble role which the society bestowed on them, that is to be socially responsible". This article critically examines the role of media ethics in shaping public perception, with a specific focus on biased reporting and its impact on public opinion in Nigeria.



The ethical principles that underpin journalism are essential for safeguarding the integrity and credibility of the media. Ethical reporting upholds the public's right to accurate, balanced, and fair information and that is why Nasidi (2016) expatiates that "media can contribute a lot to a society, it can change opinions because they have access to people and this gives it a lot of strength, this strength can either be used constructively by educating the people or it can be used destructively". In Nigeria, the prevalence of biased reporting across various media platforms has raised significant concerns about its implications for public opinion and democratic governance, it further endorsing the submission by Tsegysu and Asemah (2014).

The relationship between media and ethics is crucial in shaping public discourse, influencing societal values, and promoting well-informed citizens as emphasized by Merrill, (2011) that media ethics concerns right and wrong, good and bad, better and worse actions taken by people working in the field of journalism and mass communication while reporting on issues in Egbulefu and Adeyeye (2018). Black *et al.* (1995) observed that "for excellent journalism practice, ethical issues must be considered paramount by journalists to stem the tide of mounting resentment from a highly critical public. The approach is doing ethics, a belief that good ethical decision making in journalism is a craft and skill comparable to good writing, good photography and good editing. If done it will ensure that journalists can maximize the truth telling obligation, while minimizing harm to vulnerable news sources and consumers". Good ethical decision making is crucial for maintaining the profession's integrity and trustworthiness. In journalism, ethics has to do with duty to self and to others, Merrill (2011) cited in Egbulefu and Adeyeye (2018) as Enobakhare (2013) pointed out in Egbulefu and Adeyeye (2018) that "journalists should realize that their social responsibility requires them to always act within the ethics of their profession".

In a representative system of government, policy outcomes are affected by the political preferences and the beliefs of the voters. The media play a key role in shaping these preferences and beliefs. They collect, summarize, and frame the information that voters use in their voting decisions. As a result, many have expressed concern that the media may be able to systematically manipulate political beliefs. Media slant may bias voters and thereby bias policy decisions. Concerns of this type are relevant in the United States (U.S.), given that over 70 percent of Americans believes that there is a great deal or a fair amount of media bias in news coverage. Media bias is at least as common, if not more common, in countries with less media freedom than the U.S. Is media bias necessarily a problem? The effect of media bias depends on how the audience processes the information presented by the media. If the audience is aware of the media bias and filters it from the information, distortions in reporting are unlikely to have large effects on voter beliefs (Bray & Kreps, 1987). In this rational world, media bias does not persuade voters. Alternate theories hold that media bias does persuade voters. This may occur because voters do not sufficiently account for bias in the media (De Marzo *et al.*, 2003). This, in turn, may be a direct effect of the framing of the news (Lakoff, 1987). Ultimately, understanding the impact of media bias on voter beliefs and preferences is an empirical task.

Censorship is used to formally restrict and repress any expression that may undermine the state's order. Censorship has historically been used to monitor public morality, regulate public awareness, and quiet resistance. In 399 BC, Socrates was forced to swallow poison for acknowledging unorthodox divinities, making him one of the earliest victims of censorship. The origins of governmental censorship may be traced back to Rome, when the position of censor was founded in 443 BC. China passed its first censorship legislation in 300 AD (Newth, 2010). Traditionally, government censors analyze newspapers, periodicals, books, news broadcasts, and movies – generally before they are released – to remove anything that is objectionable (Bennett & Naim, 2015).

3. METHODOLOGY

A research design refers to the researcher's overall plan or blueprint of how the research is to be conducted. It defines a research design that is formulated to enable the researcher find valuable means of finding out 'what is happening to seek new insights. Research design 'deals with a logical problem and not a logistical problem' (Yin, 1989). The research design employed in the study will be qualitative and quantitative methods. This approach will be used in order to gather views of reporters, editors, advocacy institutions and media houses in Zambia and Lusaka in particular. This approach intends to examine the effects of media ownership on journalism practices. Qualitative research allows for the demonstration of social behaviors as well as the development of explanatory models and.

According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), a population is an entire collection of humans or things who share observable characteristics. The study's population will consist of journalists, media houses, and advocacy institution government workers from Lusaka Province.

White (2005) defines a sample as a group of subjects or situations selected from a larger population. It is part of the population from which information is to be gathered adds, (Kombo & Tromp, 2009). Sampling is the process of selecting units or small proportion that is representative of the population for observation and analysis (Sidhu, 2006). Furthermore, Peit *et al* (1982) adds that the purpose of selecting representatives of the entire population is for generalization. Purposive sampling will be carried out in this research. This entails selecting respondents based on the precise traits that comprise their relationship with a given subject and is frequently employed in research requiring the observation, analysis, and identification of specific characteristics around a subject (Robinson, 2014).

A sample is a group that is supposed to be representative of the population being researched and from which generalizations about the population may be made (Bailey, 1994). According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), a sample size is the number of respondents chosen for interview from a study population. The sample size is determined by the required precision, population size, population heterogeneity, whether or not the sample will be subdivided, and the resources available (Bailey, 1994). The sample size for this research was 50.

The research relies on both primary and secondary data. The researcher collected data primarily through interviews, administered questionnaires, focus discussion groups and



participant observation. Structured questionnaires were used to obtain primary data. The researcher will conduct interviews with respondents in groups and with individuals at the convenience of the respondents.

The questionnaire replies will be analyzed and grouped. The data from respondents will be summarized using frequency distribution tables. Data analysis tools such as STATA will be used to analyse the data. The information from the interviews will be recorded in such a way that responses will be put into categories. The qualitative analysis of the questionnaires allows more meaningful explanation of the data revealing the effects of media ownership on journalism practices. The analyzed data will then be displayed in frequency distribution tables and figures to facilitate understanding and analysis.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Presentation of results

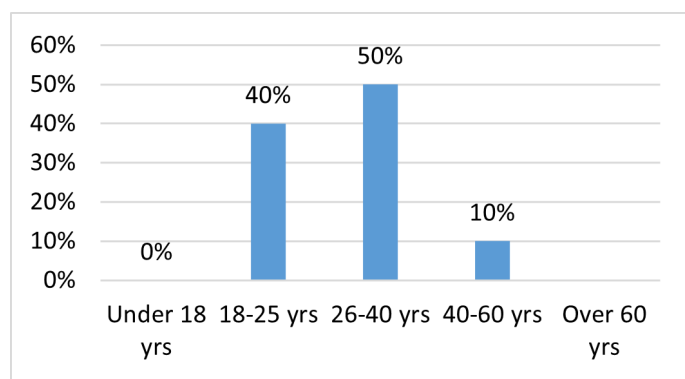


Figure 1. Age distribution of respondents

Figure 1 above presents the age distribution of respondents, according to the results obtained, 40% of the respondents were between the age of 18-25 yrs, 50% of the respondents were between the age of 26-40 yrs, 10% of the respondents were between the age of 40-60 yrs. The results indicate that there was no representative from respondents under the age of 18yrs and over 60 yrs. This suggests that the survey or study predominantly captured the perspectives of younger adults and those in their early to mid-careers. Additionally, the absence of respondents under 18 years and over 60 years suggests that the survey did not reach or engage with these age groups, either due to the study's design, the sample selection criteria, and a lack of interest or availability from individuals within these age ranges.

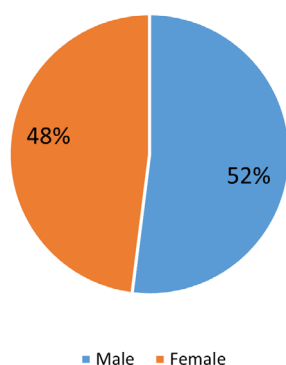


Figure 2. Gender distribution of respondents

Figure 2 presents the gender of respondents. According to the results obtained, 48% of the respondents were females and 52% of the respondents were males. This near-equal split indicates that both genders are almost equally represented in the survey or study, with a slight majority of male respondents. This balanced gender representation suggests that the perspectives captured in the study are likely reflective of both male and female viewpoints, reducing the risk of gender bias in the findings. The small difference between the two percentages implies that the responses should fairly represent the opinions and experiences of both genders within the population studied.

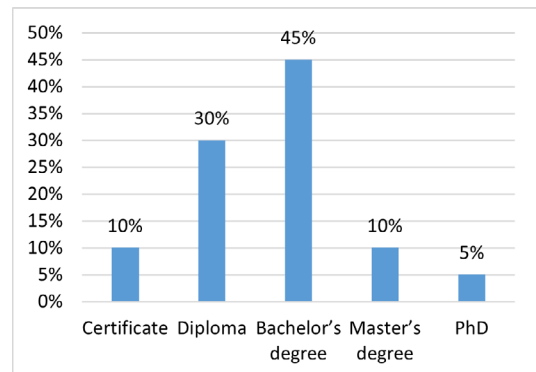


Figure 3. Level of education

Figure 3 presents the level of education of respondents. According to the results obtained, 10% of the respondents had certificates, 30% of the respondents had diplomas, 45% of the respondents had bachelor's degrees and 5% of the respondents had PhDs. The education level distribution among respondents, as depicted in Figure 4, indicates that the majority of participants hold bachelor's degrees, suggesting a well-educated sample with substantial higher education.

4.2. Influence of Media Ownership in News Coverage in private electronic media houses.

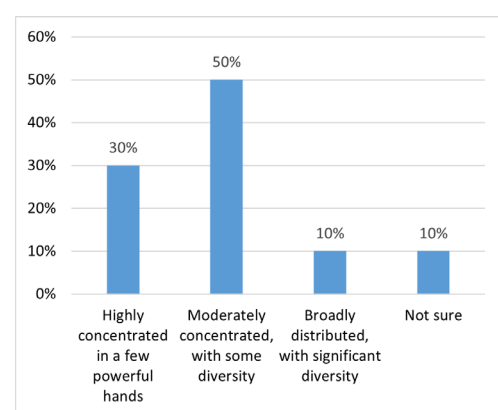


Figure 4. The current state of media ownership in Zambia

The results reveal a predominant concern about media ownership concentration in Zambia. Half of the respondents perceive media ownership as highly concentrated in the hands of a few powerful entities. This suggests significant apprehensions about the control that a limited number of owners may exert over media content and perspectives, potentially impacting

media diversity and independence.

In contrast, 30% of respondents view the media landscape as moderately concentrated but still with some degree of diversity. This indicates that while there is notable concentration of media ownership, there is also recognition of some pluralism within the media sector. Only 10% of respondents believe that media ownership is broadly distributed and diverse, suggesting that they see a more pluralistic environment where ownership is spread across various entities, leading to a greater variety of voices. The remaining 10% of respondents are unsure about the current state of media ownership, highlighting a lack of clarity or detailed knowledge on the subject. Overall, these findings suggest that while there is considerable concern about media concentration, there is also a recognition of some diversity and a need for more comprehensive understanding of the media ownership dynamics in Zambia.

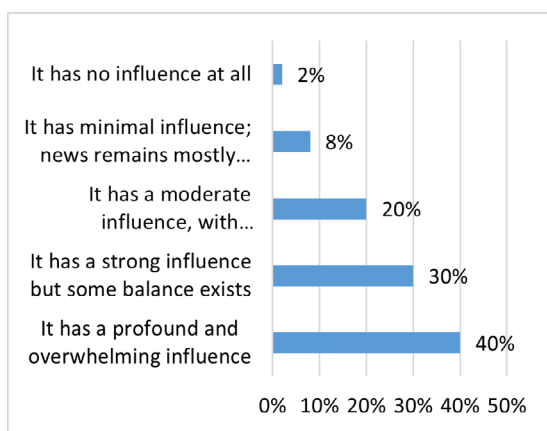


Figure 5. Extent to which media ownership influences the content and quality of news coverage in Zambia

The results reveal that media ownership significantly influences news content and quality in Zambia, according to the majority of respondents. A notable 40% believe that media ownership has a profound and overwhelming impact, indicating concerns that ownership structures heavily shape and potentially skew

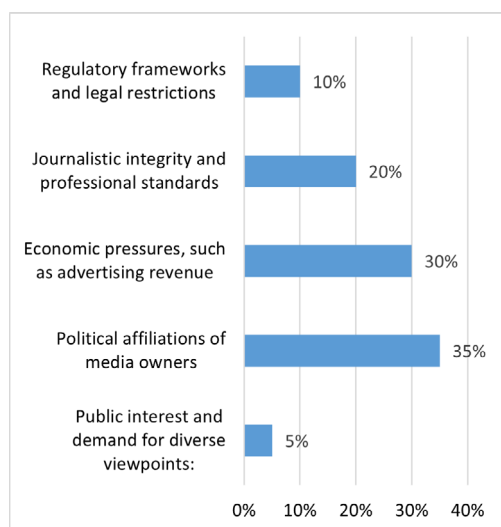


Figure 6. Factors affecting news coverage in Zambia

news reporting. Additionally, 30% of respondents recognize that while media ownership does affect news coverage, there is still some level of balance and diversity, suggesting that mechanisms or practices exist to mitigate extreme biases.

The distribution of factors influencing news coverage in Zambian media reveals that political affiliations of media owners and economic pressures, such as advertising revenue, are considered the most significant influences. A substantial 35% of respondents believe that political biases of media owners heavily shape news content, suggesting that media outlets often reflect the agendas of their owners, leading to potentially skewed reporting. Additionally, 30% of respondents see economic pressures, particularly related to advertising revenue, as a major influence. This indicates that financial considerations can drive editorial decisions, sometimes at the expense of journalistic integrity and depth of reporting.

Effects of Media Ethics on Journalism Quality under private electronic media

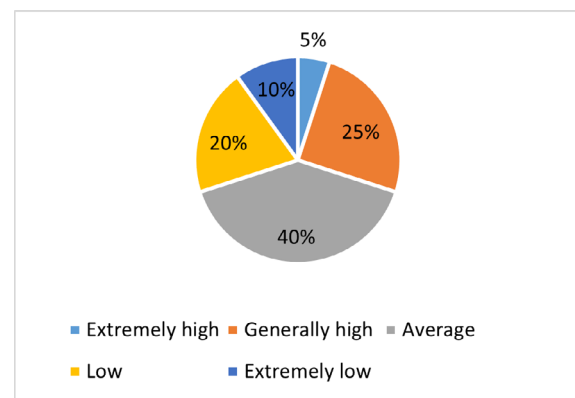


Figure 7. Extent to which media ownership impacts the ethical conduct of journalists in Zambia

The impact of media ownership on the ethical conduct of journalists in Zambia is perceived to vary among respondents. A quarter of them (25%) believe that media ownership has a profound and pervasive effect, often compromising journalistic ethics. This view highlights concerns that ownership pressures frequently lead to ethical breaches. A larger proportion, 35%, feels that media ownership has a strong impact, causing frequent ethical challenges and dilemmas for journalists, suggesting that the influence of ownership is a significant factor in compromising ethical standards. Meanwhile, 30% of respondents perceive that media ownership has a moderate impact, resulting in occasional ethical compromises but not entirely undermining journalistic integrity. In contrast, 8% believe that the impact is minor, with ethics generally maintained despite ownership influences. Finally, only 2% of respondents think that media ownership has no impact on ethical conduct, asserting that journalists maintain full ethical independence. This distribution of views reflects a spectrum of opinions on the extent to which media ownership affects ethical practices in Zambian journalism.

The impact of media outlets' ethical ratings on the overall quality of journalism in Zambia is viewed through a range of



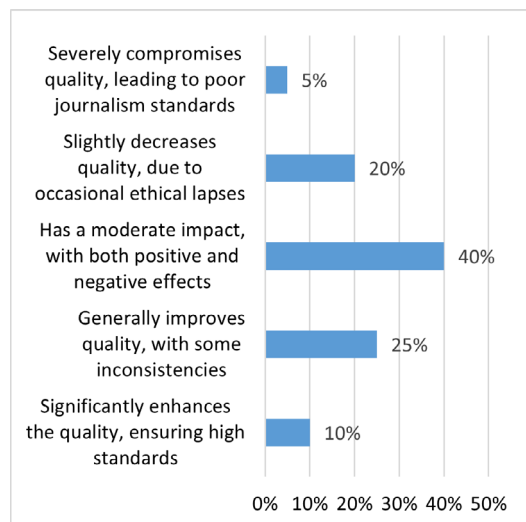


Figure 8. Effects of ethical rating of media outlets on the overall quality of journalism in Zambia

perspectives. A small minority of respondents (10%) believe that high ethical standards significantly enhance journalism quality, ensuring consistently high standards across media outlets. In contrast, 25% of respondents think that ethical practices generally improve quality but acknowledge some inconsistencies in their application. The largest group, comprising 40%, perceives a moderate impact, suggesting that while ethical ratings contribute to both positive and negative effects on journalism quality, they reflect a balance between high standards and occasional issues. About 20% of respondents feel that ethical lapses slightly decrease quality, indicating that while problems are not pervasive, they do affect overall journalism standards. Finally, only 5% of respondents believe that ethical issues severely compromise journalism quality, leading to poor standards. This distribution of opinions highlights the complex relationship between media ethics and journalism quality in Zambia.

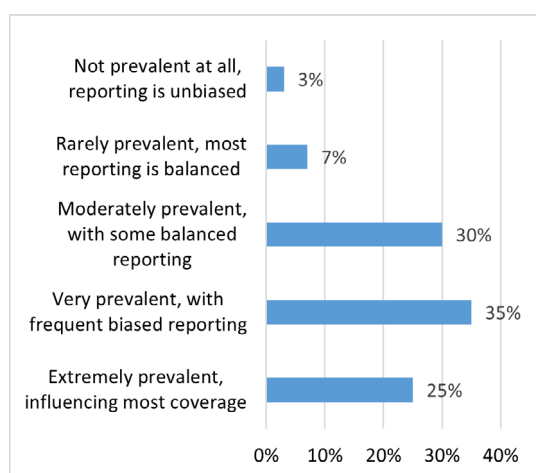


Figure 9. Political bias is in Zambia media coverage

The responses regarding the prevalence of political bias in Zambia media coverage reveal a diverse range of perceptions.

A quarter of respondents believe that political bias is extremely prevalent, significantly influencing most media coverage, indicating a strong concern that media reports are heavily skewed by political agendas. In contrast, a larger group of 35% view political bias as very prevalent, suggesting frequent biased reporting but not necessarily to the extent that it dominates every piece of news. Meanwhile, 30% of respondents perceive political bias as moderately prevalent, acknowledging its presence but also noting that there is some balanced reporting amidst the bias. A smaller percentage, 7%, feel that political bias is rarely prevalent, with most reporting remaining balanced and impartial. Only 3% believe that political bias is not prevalent at all, reflecting a minority view that media reporting is entirely unbiased. This distribution highlights a widespread concern about political influence in media coverage, with a majority of respondents perceiving varying degrees of bias, while only a small fraction sees the media as free from political influence.

Censorship and Media Freedom in private electronic media

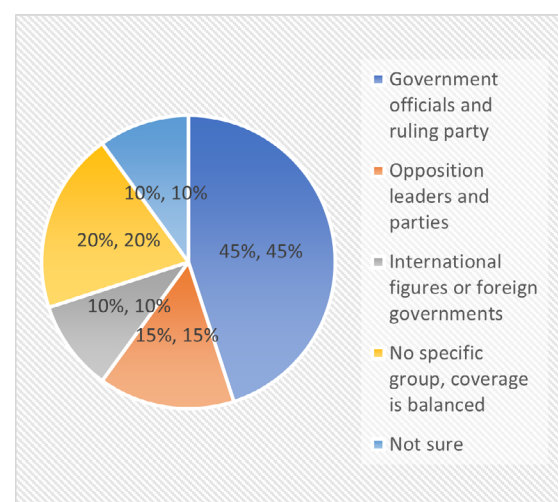


Figure 10. Witness of censorship in Zambia

The distribution of responses regarding personal experiences or observations of censorship in Zambia media highlights a notable perception of media suppression. With 35% of respondents indicating that they have frequently experienced or witnessed censorship, there is a significant perception that censorship is a recurring issue in Zambia media. This suggests that media content may often be suppressed or controlled, affecting the diversity and freedom of information available to the public. Another 30% report occasional experiences or observations of censorship, which implies that while not constant, censorship is still a relevant concern and occurs intermittently.

A significant portion of respondents, 40%, believes that censorship has a profound impact, severely limiting the content available to the public. This perspective suggests that censorship plays a major role in constraining the diversity and breadth of news reporting, potentially leading to a narrow and biased media landscape. Another 30% feel that censorship has a strong impact, often curtailing what is reported, indicating that



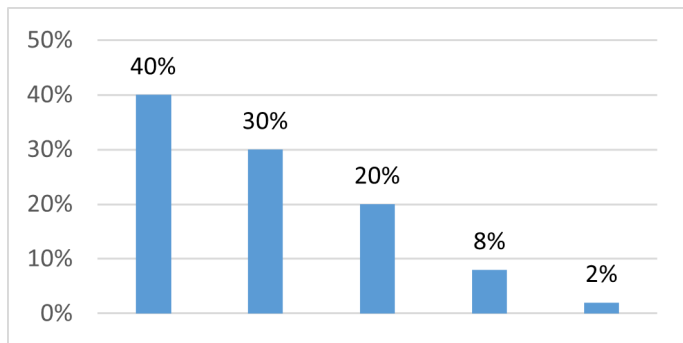


Figure 11. Effects of censorship in news content

while the restrictions may not be as extreme as in the profound impact category, they still notably influence the news content. Approximately 20% of respondents perceive censorship as having a moderate impact, suggesting occasional but not overwhelming restrictions. In contrast, 8% see censorship as having a minor impact, implying that most news content remains relatively unaffected. Only 2% believe that censorship has no impact at all, reflecting either a perception of high media freedom or a lack of awareness of media constraints.

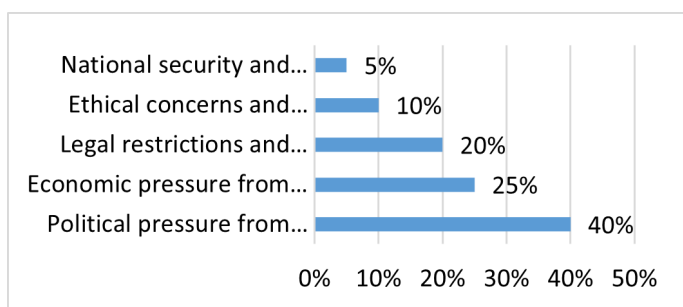


Figure 12. Primary reasons for censorship in Zambian media

The distribution of responses regarding the primary reasons for censorship in Zambian media highlights several key factors influencing media restrictions. Political pressure from the government or ruling party is perceived as the most significant reason, with 40% of respondents identifying it as a major influence. This suggests that governmental control and political interests heavily shape media content and restrict journalistic freedom in Zambia. Economic pressure from advertisers or media owners follows, with 25% of respondents citing it as a contributing factor. This indicates that financial interests and the influence of advertisers or media proprietors also play a substantial role in shaping and potentially limiting media coverage.

To enhance media plurality and editorial independence in Zambia, several key measures are essential. Strengthening legal frameworks and protections is crucial to ensure that media outlets operate without undue political or economic interference. Transparency in media ownership and funding sources is important for preventing biases and conflicts of interest, while supporting independent media organizations helps diversify voices and reduce reliance on potentially influential funding sources. Public engagement and media literacy initiatives can empower individuals to critically

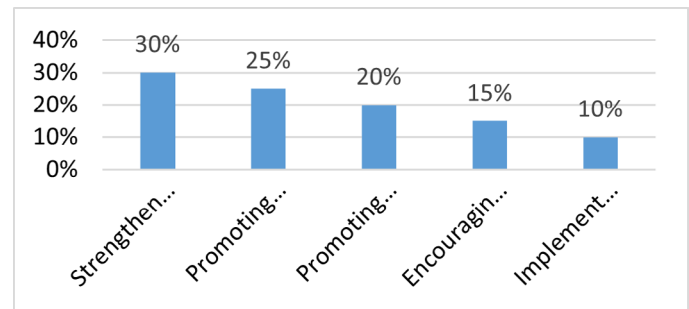


Figure 13. Measures could be taken to improve media plurality and editorial independence in Zambia

evaluate information and demand higher standards from media outlets. Additionally, implementing and enforcing clear ethical standards ensures that journalism remains fair and objective. Together, these strategies can foster a more balanced and independent media environment in Zambia.

4.2. Discussion

The gender distribution among respondents is balanced, with 52% male and 48% female, reducing potential gender bias and reflecting a broad range of perspectives. Occupationally, the sample features diverse professionals: 30% students, 10% government officials, 20% media professionals, and 40% journalists and reporters, offering relevant insights on media ownership and ethics. Educationally, 45% hold bachelor's degrees, followed by 30% with diplomas, 10% with certificates, and 5% with PhDs, indicating general educational well-being. The study reveals that media owners with political or economic interests can significantly impact editorial decisions, often leading to biased reporting. Profit-driven media outlets tend to prioritize sensationalism over serious journalism, affecting public discourse negatively. Conversely, independent media maintain journalistic integrity, focusing on investigative reporting and diverse perspectives, demonstrating their crucial role in fostering an informed public.

The influence of media ownership significantly affects news prioritization, where topics aligned with owners' interests receive more attention, while others, like corporate misconduct or government corruption, may be downplayed. This selective reporting can create an uninformed public on certain issues, ultimately shaping opinions to favor owners' interests rather than the common good. Research indicates that fairness and balance are essential for quality journalism, with audiences favoring unbiased news sources. Ethical practices bolster public trust, particularly when organizations are accountable—promptly correcting errors boosts credibility and fosters a positive media-public relationship. Furthermore, censorship deeply hinders media freedom, leading to self-censorship as journalists avoid reporting sensitive topics to escape repercussions. This creates a homogenized media landscape, limiting the public's access to diverse information and critical perspectives, which is detrimental to informed citizenry and democracy.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This research has delved into the multifaceted dynamics of



media ownership, ethics, censorship, and their collective impact on the quality of journalism. The study's findings underscore the profound influence that media ownership exerts on news coverage, with ownership patterns often dictating the framing, selection, and presentation of news stories. The concentration of media ownership in the hands of a few can lead to a homogenization of perspectives, where certain narratives are amplified while others are marginalized. This concentration has raised concerns about the potential for biased reporting, where the interests of owners can overshadow journalistic objectivity. The research suggests that greater transparency and diversity in media ownership are essential to safeguard the plurality of voices necessary for a vibrant democratic society. The study also highlights the critical role of media ethics in determining the quality of journalism. Ethical standards in journalism are not merely guidelines but the foundation upon which credible, accurate, and responsible reporting is built. The research found that adherence to ethical principles, such as truthfulness, fairness, and independence, directly correlates with the trustworthiness of journalism. However, the study also revealed significant challenges in this area, particularly the consequences of ethical breaches. The study calls for concerted efforts from policymakers, media organizations, and civil society to ensure that journalism can thrive in an environment that supports truth, fairness, and independence. Only then can the media serve its purpose as a reliable source of information and a platform for diverse voices in society.

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