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Audience Perception of the Influence of Government Ownership of NTA on Journalism of Truth, Fairness and Balance: A Study of Residents of Owerri Metropolis, Nigeria

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Abstract. The paper investigated the audience's perception of the influence of government ownership of NTA on the principle of truth, fairness and balance. The media ownership theory and the social responsibility theory served as the theoretical underpinnings for the study. The study used a mixed method design, including an in-depth interview for the qualitative data and a survey for the quantitative data. The Wimmer and Dominick online sample size calculator was used to determine a sample size of 384 from the population of 555,500. Data was collected using a questionnaire and interview guide. Multi-stage and purposive sampling procedures were used. The results showed the respondents' high knowledge of the journalistic principles of truth, justice, and balance in news reporting. The respondents have a negative perception towards government ownership of NTA and the practices of the journalists regarding truth, fairness, and balance in news reportage, as the ownership affects the practices of journalists in upholding the principle of truth, fairness, and balance in news reportage. The study further revealed that the respondents perceive that the influence of government control of NTA limits the freedom of the press, which is against the ethics and demands of professional journalism. The paper concluded that when news stories are written and framed in the interest of the owners rather than the public interest, it kills journalistic ethics and professionalism as well as the social responsibility role of the media.

Keywords: journalism of truth; fairness; balance; media ownership.

INTRODUCTION

Within the framework of a democratic society, the media is commonly acknowledged as the "Fourth Estate of the Realm". This implies that the media assumes a subsequent position following the Executive, Legislative, and Judiciary branches. In one of the proceedings of the British Parliament, Edmund Burke posited this assertion after his reference to the three widely recognised estates of the realm: the spiritual lords, the temporal lords, and the commons [1]. He gestured towards the press gallery and remarked, "Furthermore, situated there is the Fourth Estate, which holds a greater significance than the oth-

ers". President John F. Kennedy's statement regarding the American press when he stated that while the president's term lasts for four years, journalists hold enduring influence, serves to affirm the notion that the media functions as a collaborative force in advancing societal development alongside the government, rather than merely serving as a tool. The primary roles of the media encompass serving as a vigilant overseer of the government, protecting the rights of individuals, and providing truthful and impartial reporting of events free from bias or prejudice [1]. According to [2], there is a widely acknowledged global understanding of the media's ability to disseminate information and mobilise popular

support for matters of public importance. Buying this force necessitates comprehending the media's capacity to shape or guide public sentiment.

The place of the mass media in the functioning of society is a global phenomenon. Whether a society is democratic or otherwise, the media are a crucial force as they concern information dissemination and the formation and substitution of public opinion, the construction of social reality and the mobilisation of support of members of the public (the audience). This accounts for why the media are used to advance national interest in a democratic regime [2]. The author [3] aptly argues that the media are considered a threat to the government except under an oppressive regime.

However, ownership has remained a critical factor in understanding content creation in the media due to ownership influence on media content [4]. The issue of ownership holds significant relevance for scholars in journalism, as it is believed to influence several aspects, such as news content, journalistic autonomy, freedom of expression, and organisational and professional practices. In this context, the term "ownership" pertains to the diverse modes of governance linked to specific ownership frameworks, whilst the individuals and companies who exert influence over media organisations are considered the owners [5]. The relevance of news media ownership to scholars in the field of journalism stems from the underlying assumption that journalism possesses the capacity to influence policy, culture, and public discourse significantly. It is believed that media owners, driven by their desire to control political developments, utilise media platforms to steer societies in specific directions that serve the interests of particular stakeholders [6].

The performance of media organisations as the "Fourth Estate of the realm" is often influenced by their ownership. The level of autonomy exhibited by government-owned media outlets is not comparable to that of privately-owned media entities. It appears that state-controlled media outlets purposefully refrain from criticising government actions and downplay stories that have the potential to reveal undisclosed government events, even when it is in the public's best interest for such stories to be disclosed. As an illustrative example, the Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) refrains from broadcasting any reports that reveal confidential information or offer criti-

cal analysis of the actions undertaken by the Federal Government [1].

Lending credence to [7], it is agreed from the ethical precepts guiding journalism that truth, fairness and balance in news reporting are the core significant principles of journalism practice that should be upheld anytime, any day and under any circumstances by media organisations. Nevertheless, state-owned media outlets are deliberately established to provide extensive coverage to the government and its endeavours. Consequently, journalists wishing to maintain employment must adhere to this strategy, thereby marginalising the principles of truth, fairness, and balance. It is against this gamut that the study seeks to examine audience perception of the influence of government ownership of NTA on the principle of truth, fairness, and balance reflected in journalists' news reports under the government-owned broadcast station.

Statement of the Problem

In the submission of [8], journalism in a developing country like Nigeria faces many problems ranging from ownership, censorship, the law, etc. The media is commonly recognised as society's fourth estate due to its assigned role. The media is entrusted with the duty of disseminating information and providing education to the public regarding the daily operations of the government. The code of ethics for Nigerian journalists, encompassing private and government-owned media, emphasises the journalist's societal obligation to advance universal concepts such as human rights, democracy, justice, equality, peace, and international understanding. The broadcast industries in Nigeria, particularly those owned by the government, have faced allegations of conforming to the desires and demands of the respective governments that operate them, as exemplified by the famous saying, "He who pays the piper dictates the tune." The phenomenon above has significantly impacted their societal contributions as the Fourth Estate, which functions as a vigilant entity overseeing the government's actions.

Hence, there is no gainsaying that journalists in government-owned media, NTA, for instance, slant the news to favour whoever is in power and are also conspicuously silent about official corruption from these government officials. This is why the author [8] submits that journalists and

journalists have often faced many challenges that inhibit their proper functioning and the performance role that society has assigned to them. This, therefore, raises the question: what could be responsible for the lack of professional journalism in government-owned media (NTA), which has seemingly militated against its social responsibility? As the saying goes, could it be that he who pays the piper dictates the tune?

Objectives of the Study

The study's main objective is to examine the audience's perception of the influence of government ownership of NTA on the principle of truth, fairness and balance. Specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Determine the audience's knowledge level on the principle of journalism of truth, fairness and balance in news reportage.
2. Find out the audience's perception of government ownership of NTA on the practices of the journalists about truth, fairness, and balance in news reportage.
3. Find out the influence of government ownership of NTA on the principle of truth, fairness and balance on the station's news content.
4. Find out the audience's perception of the influence of government ownership of NTA on the principle of truth, fairness and balance in news reportage.

Research Questions

1. What is the audience's knowledge level on the principle of journalism of truth, fairness and balance in news reportage?
2. What is the audience's perception of government ownership of NTA on the practices of the journalists regarding truth, fairness and balance in news reportage?
3. What influence does government ownership of NTA have on the principle of truth, fairness, and balance in the station's news content?
4. What is the audience's perception of the influence of government ownership of NTA on the principle of truth, fairness and balance in news reportage?

Literature Review

Principle of Truth, Fairness and Balance in Journalism: An Overview. Reporters covering an issue must remember that most stories have two sides, if not more, and that each news item should offer roughly equal space to the opposing opinions. In journalism, fairness is investigating both sides of a topic and truthfully presenting the results [9]. It is never appropriate to use the public to inflate the significance of a story. It is your duty as a journalist to assess your motivations and ensure that they don't affect the stories you cover, the people you speak with, or the details of the story you choose to focus on. Good journalism is built on fairness [10]. Giving all sides of an issue is what balances and is fair; choosing sides is not what is appropriate. It also entails refraining from endorsing political parties, organisations, localities, people, etc., in the newspaper's columns. It is a professional reporter's quality and a subeditor's responsibility to put it into practice. In actuality, this one is as challenging as accuracy is easy. Fairness is frequently a subjective concept [10]. Fairness in journalism entails, among other things, hearing opposing views and incorporating them.

Fairness and balance extend beyond a reporter's written coverage of a story to their public persona. Balance and fairness, according to [11], are traditional journalism ethics that guarantee an attempt to adequately convey both sides of a topic without slanting a story so that a reader derives the reporter's preferred conclusion. A reporter must project an air of objectivity and fairness and be impartial and balanced. For an article to be fair and balanced, reporters or journalists must refrain from biased reporting.

Truth: Professional journalists must tell the truth to satisfy their social responsibility. In journalism, the pursuit of truth always comes first, and other ethical considerations must take a back seat when decisions need to be made. Three fundamental ideas comprise truth-telling: accuracy, fostering knowledge, fairness and balance. Reporters and journalists should always present accurate and true news to the public, supporting it with substantial proof and disclosing any discrepancies.

Government Ownership of the Media: An Overview. According to [7], government ownership is an integral part of community ideology, where the state owns the means of production, distribution, and exchange. Here, the profit motive is removed

from the media. Instead, the media are seen as an integral part of the government that helps to educate the citizens and to defend the ideal of socialism. Under this form of ownership, the government controls the media organisation's budget. The government influences the editorial content of specific media since they receive direct financing or subsidies from the government. The result is that the media will want to follow government policy, and the government will, in one way or another, make sure it decides what may or may not be broadcast. The Nigerian government owns and finances the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA).

Media Responsibility in News Reportage. The author [12] submits that a medium must show concern for the welfare of its audience and the general public. To him, responsibility entails that the incredible power of the press must not be used for self-serving purposes by its practitioners. All media activities must promote goodwill and the greater good of the most significant number of people. Media owes the public the right to give out the proper quality information no matter the type of ownership.

An Overview of Professionalism in Media Practice. A journalist's credibility is based on their professional ethics. According to [13], democracy and justice are based on public awareness. Additionally, truthful, impartial, and comprehensive information should be freely exchanged, which is the goal of ethical journalism. To explain this, the author [14] claimed that journalists and media owners have consistently prioritised striking a compromise between their social responsibility requirements and the need to maximise profit throughout the entire media management and organisation enterprise. However, this has been a great challenge for the journalists who wrestle between pleasing their owners on the one hand and the public on the other while keeping to journalistic ethics guiding the profession.

Implications of Ownership Structure on Media Professionalism. The control of the media by the government as a result of ownership structure significantly affects what the editorial content of the medium will eventually be. For this reason, the author [15] asserts that government influence can be observed in the unwavering backing that government-affiliated media outlets give the ruling party. Government agents quickly remove anyone in control of a media organisation who opposes the government. However, media control due to ownership means the media's checks

and controls are based on legal demands, the influence of the proprietors, restrictions on what to broadcast or not to broadcast, observance of the regulatory body's stipulations, etc.

Empirical Review

The findings [4] indicated that ownership impacted news content creation in the two newspapers under study and that journalists and editors served the owners' interests by direct intervention and self-censorship. His research found that objective journalism suffers and impairs journalistic professionalism when news is moulded by the newspaper owners' business motivation or ideological purposes.

In the same agreement, the author [8] discovered that the Nigerian media environment looks free on the surface. Control of the government media is widespread; there is also control of private media, but control of government media is greater.

Authors [2] corroborated this finding with their results. Authors [7] registered their findings with the previous result when they revealed that the ownership pattern of Radio Rivers 99.1 FM and Rhythm 93.7 FM does not allow the media organisation's reporters to operate optimally. Their investigation also showed that while Radio Rivers 99.1 FM serves as the government's mouthpiece, it is censored and does not provide fair and balanced coverage of actions by opposition groups and state governments. It was revealed that Rivers Radio programmes are usually tailored to favour the government rather than the public, thereby lacking objectivity and professionalism.

Another supporting finding from [1] was that news coverage is oriented towards the owner's (government) interests rather than the interests of the general public. These interests heavily influence journalist practices. The outcome additionally demonstrated that the government affects journalistic practices.

An alternative viewpoint was provided by [16], which found that respondents understood the principles of balance and fairness in news reporting at an average mean of 3.7 (N=271). They use very little justice or balance in their news reports; it was also discovered. Further results showed that respondents, on average (N=271), agreed that journalists should continue to look for balance and justice when covering news.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical underpinning for this study was anchored on media ownership theory and the social responsibility theory.

Media Ownership Theory. Altschull first proposed the media ownership idea in 1984, and Shoemaker and Reese improved it a year later in 1991. According to Altschull, the proprietors, or those who provide the funding, control the press content [17]. It is sufficient that a media's independence be dependent on its owners' interests or profits. The owners, advertisers, and those providing the funding decide the commercial objective and other media interests. The author [4] proposes that the owners of a media organisation exercise absolute power over media content. They continued that the ideological goal may sometimes be the media organisation's primary interest rather than a profit motive. Commercially funded media tend to be more objective and promote the standard of news values in content production by the expectations of readers and advertisers on quality news. In contrast, media companies funded by ideological groups will likely not emphasise objectivity and news values in content making. Therefore, the content of such media is more likely to emphasise the idealistic goal of the funders [4, 18].

Media ownership theory, which highlights that those who fund the medium decide its content, is highly appropriate and directly relevant to this study.

The Social Responsibility Theory. Theodore Peterson, Fred Siebert, and Wilbur Schramm introduced the social responsibility hypothesis in 1963. This theory was developed as a result of issues raised by its predecessor. According to [16], the core tenet of this theory is that the press should have the freedom to carry out the tasks for which libertarian ideology allows it that freedom, but that freedom should be used responsibly. According to social responsibility, the government should exert control over the media to force them to conform if they are not fulfilling their obligations to society. According to [16], the social responsibility theory emphasises the moral and social commitments of those who run the mass media and the institutions that do so. It is sufficient to state that the theory of journalistic ethics and its adoption signalled the emergence of professional journalistic groups, whose members are encouraged to behave responsibly

through official journalistic standards and self-formulated codes of ethics.

According to [11], the social responsibility philosophy holds that media ownership is a kind of stewardship or public trust rather than an unrestricted private franchise. This theory emphasises the necessity for media practitioners to be ethical in their job performance, making it relevant to the study being conducted. The public and society at large are the owners of the press. When journalists exhibit prejudice, the public's confidence in the media is destroyed.

METHODOLOGY

The present investigation utilised a mixed-methods research methodology to enhance the validity of the findings from both the audience and practising journalists' points of view. According to Cresswell's theory, a mixed method entails gathering qualitative and quantitative data to elucidate and explain an inevitable occurrence. A hybrid methodology combines the best features of the two methods to present a more comprehensive view of the topic as a whole. The survey design was used to gather quantitative data, while an in-depth interview was used to generate qualitative data. With a population of 555,500, according to the 2016 National Population Commission of Nigeria (web) and National Bureau of Statistics (web), a sample size of 384 was derived using the Wimmer and Dominick online sample size calculator for the quantitative sampling. The sample size of 8 was drawn from journalists whose populations are subsumed in the population of Owerri metropolis for the qualitative sampling. The sampling techniques used for this study were the multi-stage and purposive sampling techniques. The method required that Owerri metropolis be divided into three local government clusters. From each local government area, two communities were purposively selected considering the literacy level of the people, proximity and accessibility. A purposive sampling technique was used to sample 64 persons in each established community. A questionnaire and interview guide served as the instrument for data collection. Simple percentages and mean analysis were used to analyse the data. The code names ascribed to the interviewees for identification purposes of the interview were JNT1, JNT2, JNT3, JNT4, JNT5, JNT6, JNT7 and JNT8.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Three hundred eighty-four copies of the questionnaire were given to the study sample. Of this number, 371 (96.6%) were filled and returned, while 13 (3.4%) were found invalid for the anal-

ysis. Thus, data presentation was based on the 371 (96.6%) copies produced and found valid. Data presentation was done using tables and mean analysis.

Table 1 – Responses of the respondents on their knowledge level on the principle of journalism of truth, fairness and balance in news reportage

Options	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
It entails reporting news stories without bias	211	160	-	-	3.6	Accepted
It entails reporting news stories without favouritism and prejudice	202	167	2	-	3.5	Accepted
It means journalists presenting a balanced story from the two sides involved	188	171	9	3	3.5	Accepted
Reporting/presenting news stories without suppressing the truth for any purpose	234	137	-	-	3.7	Accepted
Being impartial with news reportage	174	181	11	5	3.4	Accepted
Average Mean					3.5	Accepted

Decision rule: Given that the benchmark of a 4-point Likert scale for decision is 2.5, if the calculated mean is 2.5-4.0, then the item in question is accepted. However, the item is rejected if the estimated mean is 1-2.4. Let 1.0-1.5 (Very Low),

1.6-2.2 (Low), 2.3-2.9 (Moderate), 3.0-3.5 (High) and 3.6-4.0 (Very High).

The data analysis showed that, on average, 3.5 out of the respondents said they were aware of the journalistic principles of truth, fairness, and balance in news reporting.

Table 2 – Responses of the respondents on their perception towards government ownership of NTA on the practices of the journalists with regards to truth, fairness and balance in news reportage

Options	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
It suppresses the freedom of journalists in news reportage	180	167	15	9	3.4	Accepted
The medium serves the interest of the government and not the interest of the people	162	174	22	13	3.3	Accepted
The journalists slant stories to favour the government that finances the station	186	141	28	16	3.3	Accepted
It does not give room for the journalists to operate freely and professionally	156	169	34	12	3.3	Accepted
Government ownership and control of the station affects the contents of their news report	190	157	18	6	3.4	Accepted
Average Mean					3.3	Accepted

The data analysis result showed that, on average (N=371), Owerri metropolis residents have an unfavourable perception of the government's control of NTA regarding journalists' practices regarding truthfulness, justice, and balance in news reporting. They perceive that government ownership of NTA affects the practices of the journalist in upholding the principle of truth, fairness and balance in their discharge of journalistic duties.

At an average mean of 3.3 (N=371), the means analysis showed that the respondents confirmed the existence and actuality of the government's ownership of NTA's influence on the values of truth, justice, and balance in the station's news content. This means the government ownership of NTA greatly influences the station's media content.

Table 3 – Responses of the respondents on the influence of government ownership of NTA on the principle of truth, fairness and balance on the news content of the station

Options	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
News contents are slanted in favour of the government as a result of government ownership and control	139	196	21	15	3.2	Accepted
The principles of truth, fairness and balance are compromised	183	151	17	20	3.3	Accepted
Freedom of the press in media content is trespassed and suppressed	164	177	19	11	3.3	Accepted
In-depth coverage is not given to some stories	148	190	25	8	3.3	Accepted
Some worthy news stories are not reported sometimes	194	150	10	17	3.4	Accepted
Average Mean					3.3	Accepted

Table 4 – Responses of the respondents on their perception of the influence of government ownership of NTA on the principle of truth, fairness and balance in news reportage

Options	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
It kills journalistic ethics and professionalism	201	155	5	10	3.5	Accepted
It kills the social responsibility role of the media and journalists	185	159	16	11	3.4	Accepted
I think it kills competition with other media organisations	166	183	11	11	3.4	Accepted
It kills the trust and believability of the media audience towards the station	170	179	18	4	3.4	Accepted
Average Mean					3.4	Accepted

The analysis of means showed that, with an average mean of 3.4 (N=371), respondents' perceptions of how government ownership of NTA affects news reporting's commitment to truth, justice, and balance indicate that government control over NTA restricts press freedom, which runs counter to professional journalism's ethical standards.

Findings from the quantitative data revealed that the respondents affirmed being knowledgeable about the principle of journalism of truth, fairness and balance in news reportage at an average mean of 3.5. This implies that the respondents' knowledge of journalism of truth, fairness and balance in news reportage is high at an average mean of 3.5 (N=371). This affirms the qualitative findings, which showed that the interviewees are quite knowledgeable about the principles of journalism: truth, fairness, and balance in news reportage to a considerable extent. JNT2 corroborated by stating that "as a journalist who has been in this noble profession for a quite number of years with good experiences, the principle of truth, fairness and balance entails absoluteness and wholeness reflective in reportage and this is the core principle that guides the profession. As a trained journalist operating under the aegis of NUJ, you must strive for truth, fairness and balance in your reportage at all times and all costs". JNT7 shared the same opinion by stating that

"truth, fairness and balance are what we owe the society through news reports. We are mandated always to carry out our duties in that regard". These results are consistent with those of [16], who found that respondents understood the principles of fairness and balance in news reporting at an average mean of 3.7 (N=271).

Quantitative findings on the perception of the audience towards government ownership of NTA on the practices of the journalists with regards to truth, fairness and balance in news reportage indicated that the respondents have a negative perception towards government ownership of NTA on the practices of the journalists with regards to truth, fairness and balance in news reportage. They perceive that government ownership of NTA affects the practices of the journalists in upholding the principle of truth, fairness and balance in their discharge of journalistic duties as it suppresses the freedom of journalists in news reportage.

Qualitatively, the result agrees with the quantitative findings as JNT5 noted, "of a truth, the media, both the government and privately owned media are inundated with ownership interest and control. However, the government ownership of NTA greatly limits the kind of stories that see the light of the day because the government owns the medium and the staff are under federal government employment and payroll". Sharing another

opinion, JNT8 responded, "Well, it has always been a case of the popular cliché, "he who pays the piper dictates the tune", the media obviously cannot work against the media that employed them, the station will always be the tool of the government and the journalists are bound to write the stories that concern them favourably. Furthermore, it violates the profession's ethics and code of conduct; this is not how the job is done, confirms the conclusions of [7], who found that because the government censors Radio Rivers 99.1 FM and serves as its mouthpiece, it does not present fair and balanced coverage of opposition group activities with state government activities. It was also revealed that Rivers Radio programmes are usually tailored to favour the government rather than the public, thereby lacking objectivity and professionalism. The author [8] concurred when it was found that the Nigerian media environment looks free on the surface, and government media control is widespread. There is also control in the private press, but government media control is more significant.

This finding validates the media ownership theory, which emphasises that the owners, or those who provide the funding, control the content of the press. The owners of a media organisation exercise absolute power over media content. Here, NTA's contents reflect the government's interest and favour.

The qualitative analysis showed that at an average mean of 3.3 (N=371), the respondents affirmed that the influence of government ownership of NTA on the principle of truth, fairness and balance in the station's news content exists and is a reality. This means the government ownership of NTA greatly influences the station's media contents in that the news contents of the medium are in favour of the government and not always the public.

The result is in tandem with the qualitative findings JNT1 expressed thus: "Government control of the news process in NTA is not a fiction nor a mirage; it is a reality, and it is because the station is just like the instrument in the hands of those that control it." Similarly, JNT3 shared, "It is just like saying cutting one's nose to spite one's face. In NTA, there is no such freedom of the press due to ownership Influence. The station cannot critique the government that kept them on the job, the fears of truncating their job". In the same vein, JNT6 aptly hinted, "Truly, journalists in the government-owned media do not exercise their

full freedom. Professional journalism's principles, demands and ethics are often not 100% in practice." This is in line with the result [2], which revealed that the principle of objectivity is threatened by ownership interest. It was also revealed that Port Harcourt journalists tailor news reports in compliance with ownership interests. Their study showed that worthy news reports could be discarded due to ownership interest. This corroborates the results [7], which found that Rivers Radio programmes are usually tailored to favour the government rather than the public, thereby lacking objectivity and professionalism. Resources [1] also showed that news coverage is geared towards the owner's (government) interests rather than the interests of the general public and that these interests heavily impact journalistic practices. The results of this study support the media ownership theory, which was first put forth by Altschull in 1984 [17] and then improved upon by Shoemaker and Reese in 1991 [18]. This theory maintains that the owners of a media organisation have complete control over the content of the media. The idea of social responsibility, based on the media's acceptance and fulfilment of specific obligations to society through professional standards of truth, accuracy, objectivity, and balance, is betrayed and refuted by this outcome.

Quantitative results showed that respondents' perceptions of how government ownership of NTA affects news reporting on the principles of truth, fairness, and balance averaged 3.4 (N=371). This indicates that government control over NTA restricts press freedom, which goes against professional journalism's ethics and standards. Qualitatively, the result of the quantitative findings is in affirmation with the result of the in-depth interview; JNT6 succinctly stressed that "government control of NTA is a deep cut on the principle of professional journalism". From JNT8's view, "the control does not give that leverage and latitude of the journalists to operate, express and exercise their full press freedom". The station selects what news is and what gets broadcast due to government censorship borne out of personal interest other than public interest. JNT3. This goes against the social responsibility theory of the press, which holds that the media should always be allowed to operate freely and without government intervention to fulfil its social responsibility to the people and meet its needs.

CONCLUSIONS

The foundation of a journalist's credibility is their professional ethics. The media is meant to operate from the confines of being the "Fourth estate of the realm" and not "a praise tool" in the hands of the owner. The control of the media by the government as a result of ownership structure significantly affects what the editorial content of the medium will eventually be. The study concludes that when news stories are written and framed in the interest of the owners rather than the public interest, it kills journalistic ethics and professionalism, the social responsibility role of the media and mars the trust and believability of the media audience towards the station.

The study suggests that journalists apply the professional journalism principle, regardless of the kind of media ownership, since the respondents have a high degree of knowledge about the journalism principles of truth, fairness, and balance in news reporting.

Having found out that the respondents have a negative perception towards government ownership of NTA on the practices of the journalists with regards to truth, fairness and balance in news reportage as the ownership affects the

practices of journalists in upholding the principle of truth, fairness and balance in news reportage, the paper recommends the absolute freedom of the press in totality irrespective of media ownership and as well serve the public interest.

Having established that government ownership of NTA has a significant influence on the station's media contents, the news contents of the medium are in favour of the government and not always the public. The paper recommends the orientation, re-orientation, training and retraining of journalists by the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) always to report news stories the way they are, no matter whose ox is gored.

Given that the perception of the respondents on the influence of government ownership of NTA on the principle of truth, fairness and balance in news reportage shows that the impact of government control of NTA limits the freedom of the press, which is against the ethics and demands of professional journalism, the study recommends a total closure sanction by the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) of any media organisation found operating on ownership interest instead of public interest in serving general needs.

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