

ASSESSING MEDIA OWNERSHIP AND THE COVERAGE OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN KANO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how patterns of media ownership and control influence the coverage of social movements in Kano State, Nigeria. Anchored on Framing Theory and Agenda-setting theory, the research investigates the relationship between ownership structures, editorial independence and the framing of social movements such as the #EndSARS protests, the 2020 palliative-looting crisis and the #JusticeForHanifa campaign. A survey design was adopted with 120 questionnaires distributed among journalists, mass communication students and media consumers in Kano; 90 valid responses (75%) were returned. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and chi-square tests. Findings revealed that media ownership significantly influences how social movements are framed in the news. Ownership control often constrains journalistic independence, forcing reporters to align with the owner's interests. Additionally, audiences are highly perceptive of media bias, which affects their trust in news reports. The study concludes that ownership is a key factor shaping media content in Kano. It recommends stronger professional ethics for journalists, clearer regulatory frameworks to protect editorial independence, and increased media literacy for the public to critically evaluate news sources.

Keywords: media ownership, control, social movements, Kano State, framing theory, propaganda model, Marxist theory

Introduction

The media is a powerful institution in any society. It is often called the fourth estate. This means it acts as a watchdog over the government and other powerful groups. The media informs the public. It sets the agenda for public discussion. It also shapes how people understand social and political events. According to Mohammed (2021), the media does not just report events; it constructs reality for its audience. How it chooses to cover an issue can influence public opinion significantly. The media perform essential functions in any democracy by informing citizens, promoting public dialogue and serving as a watchdog over political power. However, the ability of media organizations to perform these roles depends largely on their ownership and control structure. In Nigeria, ownership patterns remain highly politicized and commercialized, giving rise to concerns about bias and journalistic dependence (Oso, 2012).

Media ownership refers to who owns and controls media outlets. These outlets include television stations, radio stations, newspapers, and online news platforms. Owners can be the government, private individuals, political parties, or business corporations. The nature of ownership can affect the content of the news. An independent media is essential for a healthy democracy. It can hold power to account. But when media is controlled by a few powerful interests, it can be used to promote their agendas. As noted by Bello (2020), media ownership in Nigeria is highly politicized. Many owners are actively involved in politics or have strong political affiliations.

Social movements are collective actions by groups of people. They come together to promote or resist social change. In Nigeria, social movements often address issues like good governance, human rights, and public services. In Kano State, there have been several notable social movements. These include youth-led protests against police brutality, such as the #EndSARS movement. There are also movements focused on religious and cultural identity. The coverage of these movements by the media is very important. Positive coverage can help a movement grow. Negative coverage can weaken it. Therefore, how the media frames these movements matters a great deal.

The problem is that media coverage is not always neutral. Owners may have political or business interests. These interests can influence how reporters cover social movements. For example, a movement that criticizes the government might be ignored by a government-owned media outlet. A movement that challenges a powerful businessperson might be portrayed negatively by a media outlet owned by that person's friend. This is a major concern for democratic practice. Audiences may not be getting a fair and accurate picture of events. According to Sani (2022), the framing of social movements in Kano's media often reflects the political alignment of the owners rather than the facts on the ground.

Kano State is one of Nigeria's most populous and media-active regions, hosting both government-owned outlets such as Radio Kano and Abubakar Rimi Television (ARTV) and private stations including Freedom Radio, Cool FM Kano and Arewa Radio. During major civic movements like #EndSARS (2020), the palliative looting crisis and the #JusticeForHanifa campaign (2022), these media houses provided competing narratives influenced by their ownership interests.

This study therefore assesses how ownership structure influences the framing and depth of reportage of social movements in Kano State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Despite constitutional guarantees of press freedom, Nigerian journalists often operate within ideological boundaries determined by media owners. In Kano State, both public and private media exhibit editorial patterns reflecting ownership priorities rather than public interest. Reports on protests or civic agitation are frequently diluted or framed to favour elites. Existing studies have analyzed ownership and democracy broadly, but few have examined how ownership dynamics in northern Nigeria shape the framing of specific social movements. This study fills that gap by empirically analyzing perceptions among journalists, students and audiences in Kano.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to assess the influence of media ownership on the coverage of social movements in Kano State, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Examine how media ownership affects the editorial framing of social movements in Kano State.
2. Identify the extent to which ownership control constrains journalistic independence.
3. Assess how audiences perceive bias and credibility in media reportage of social movements.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How does media ownership affect the editorial framing of social movements in Kano State?
2. To what extent does ownership control constrain journalistic independence?
3. How do audiences perceive bias and credibility in media reportage of social movements?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between media ownership and the editorial framing of social movements.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between ownership control and the level of journalistic independence.

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between media ownership and audience perception of bias.

Literature Review

Concept of Media Ownership and Influence

Media ownership is about who has control over a media outlet. This control can be held by different entities. The main types are government ownership, private ownership, and political party ownership. Each type has implications for content. Government-owned media are often seen as mouthpieces for the ruling party. Their reporting tends to favor government policies and actions. Private media may be more independent. But they can also be influenced by the business or political interests of their owners. According to Galadima (2021), private media owners in Nigeria often use their platforms to gain political influence or protect their business empires.

The influence of ownership on content is a global concern. Owners can influence the news through various means. They can hire editors who share their views. They can set editorial policies that guide reporting. They can also give direct instructions on how to cover specific

stories. Sometimes, the influence is subtle. Journalists may internalize the owner's preferences and censor themselves without being told. This is known as self-censorship. A study by Nwosu (2020) found that journalists in Lagos often avoid stories that are critical of their media owners' business partners.

In Nigeria, the media ownership structure is a mix of public and private. The federal and state governments own broadcast stations and newspapers. There are also many privately owned stations and papers. However, the line between private ownership and political affiliation is often blurred. Many private owners are either politicians or have very close ties to politicians. This makes it difficult for their media outlets to be neutral. As argued by Shehu (2022), the concept of an independent press in Nigeria is largely an ideal, as most media houses serve one interest or another.

Theoretical Framework: Agenda-Setting and Framing

This study is anchored on two key communication theories: Agenda-Setting and Framing. Agenda-Setting Theory was developed by McCombs and Shaw in the 1970s. The core idea of this theory is that while the media may not tell people *what to think*, it is stunningly successful in telling them *what to think about*. By giving prominence to certain issues and ignoring others, the media sets the public agenda. It decides which issues are important. In the context of this study, a media owner can influence which social movements get coverage and which are ignored. For instance, a government-owned station might downplay a protest against the government, thereby reducing its perceived importance to the public.

Framing Theory complements Agenda-Setting. While agenda-setting is about the salience of issues, framing is about how those issues are presented. Frames are patterns of interpretation. They are ways of selecting and highlighting certain aspects of a story to promote a particular definition or moral judgment. According to Entman (1993), to frame is to *select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation*. A media owner can frame a social movement as a "legitimate protest for justice" or as an "illegal gathering of unruly youths." The choice of words, images, and sources used in the story creates a specific frame that guides the audience's understanding.

In the context of Kano State, these theories are highly relevant. A media outlet owned by a politician in the ruling party is likely to set its agenda against movements that oppose the government. It will frame such movements as threats to public order. Conversely, an outlet owned by an opposition figure might give extensive coverage to the same movement and frame it as a heroic struggle for rights. By applying these theories, this study can systematically analyze how ownership influences both the visibility (agenda-setting) and the interpretation (framing) of social movements in Kano.

Social Movements and Media Coverage in Nigeria

Social movements are a key part of democratic expression. In Nigeria, they have a long history. From the anti-Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) protests in the 80s to the more recent #EndSARS movement, citizens have used collective action to demand change. These movements rely heavily on the media to get their message across. Before the internet, traditional media was the main channel. Today, social media is also important. But traditional media still holds significant power in shaping the narrative for the mass population.

The coverage of social movements in the Nigerian media is often contentious. Studies have shown that coverage is rarely neutral. The media tends to follow what is called a "protest paradigm." This is a pattern of reporting that marginalizes protesters by focusing on drama and disruption rather than the underlying issues. It often relies on official sources like the police for information, which can be biased against the protesters. A study of the #EndSARS coverage by Adebayo (2021) found that many newspapers initially framed the protesters as violent, before public opinion forced a shift in the narrative.

In Northern Nigeria, and Kano in particular, social movements often have religious or cultural dimensions. There are movements advocating for the application of Sharia law. There are also movements focused on youth empowerment and political inclusion. The coverage of these movements is influenced by the region's unique socio-political context. Media owners, who are often embedded in the existing power structures, may be wary of movements that challenge the status quo. According to research by Ibrahim (2022), media coverage of Shiite Islamic movements in Kano is overwhelmingly negative, reflecting the government's stance and the sectarian tensions in the state.

Journalistic Independence in Nigeria

Journalistic independence is the ability of journalists to report news without interference from internal or external forces. It is a cornerstone of professional journalism. In Nigeria, this independence is constantly under threat. The threats come from many sides. These include government pressure, ownership influence, and commercial interests. Journalists often work in a difficult environment. They must balance their professional ethics with the demands of their employers.

Ownership control is a major constraint. Many journalists have shared stories of direct interference. An editor might kill a story because it is critical of the owner's friend. A reporter might be instructed to write a positive story about a politician who is a business associate of the owner. Those who resist such pressures may face sanctions. They could be demoted, sidelined, or even fired. This creates a climate of fear. A survey by the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) in 2023 found that over 60% of reporters in Kano State have experienced some form of editorial pressure from management related to ownership interests.

This lack of independence affects the quality of democracy. When journalists cannot report freely, the public is not properly informed. Corruption and abuse of power can go unchecked. Social movements that challenge powerful interests are misrepresented. This undermines the watchdog role of the press. Strengthening journalistic independence is therefore crucial for the health of Nigeria's democracy.

Audience Perception of Media Bias

Audiences are not passive receivers of media messages. They actively interpret what they see, read, and hear. In today's media-saturated world, audiences are becoming more aware of media bias. They can often tell when a news report is slanted. This perception of bias affects their trust in the media. When trust is lost, the media loses its credibility and influence.

In Nigeria, public trust in the media has been declining. Many people believe that the media is biased. They think it serves the interests of the rich and powerful. A study by Okeke (2022) found that audiences in the North are particularly skeptical of government-owned media.

They see them as propaganda tools. Private media are trusted more, but not completely. People are aware that private owners have their own agendas.

The perception of bias also affects how people engage with social movements. If a person believes that a media outlet is biased against a movement they support, they may reject the outlet's coverage. They might turn to alternative sources of information, like social media. This can lead to the formation of "echo chambers" where people only hear opinions that confirm their existing beliefs. Understanding audience perceptions is therefore key to understanding the overall impact of biased media coverage on society.

Methodology

Research Design

This study used the descriptive survey research design. This design is suitable because it helps in describing the characteristics of a population. It allows the researcher to collect data from a sample and use it to describe the larger group. This design was appropriate for this study because it aimed to gather information on the perceptions and experiences of journalists, students, and media consumers in Kano State regarding media ownership and its influence.

Population and Sampling

The population of this study consisted of three distinct groups within Kano State. The first group was practicing journalists from various media houses. The second group was mass communication students from Bayero University, Kano. The third group was general media consumers from the public. These groups were chosen because they represent the key actors in the media process: the producers, the future producers, and the consumers of news.

The total target population was 120 individuals. This was divided into 40 journalists, 40 students, and 40 media consumers. The sampling technique used was stratified random sampling. The population was first divided into the three strata (journalists, students, consumers). Then, from each stratum, respondents were selected randomly. This ensured that every member of each group had an equal chance of being selected. It also ensured that all three important categories were adequately represented.

A total of 120 questionnaires were distributed. 90 were completed and returned. This included 30 from journalists, 30 from students, and 30 from consumers. This gave a response rate of 75%, which is considered very good for survey research.

Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire. It was titled "Media Ownership and Social Movement Coverage Questionnaire (MOSMCQ)". The questionnaire had two sections. Section A collected demographic information about the respondents. This included their group (journalist, student, consumer), age, gender, and for journalists, their years of experience.

Section B contained 15 items designed to address the research questions and objectives. The items were divided into three clusters:

- **Cluster 1 (Items 1-5):** Focused on the editorial framing of social movements.
- **Cluster 2 (Items 6-10):** Focused on constraints on journalistic independence.
- **Cluster 3 (Items 11-15):** Focused on audience perception of bias and credibility.

The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale. The options were: Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Neutral (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). This scale allowed respondents to indicate the strength of their agreement or disagreement with each statement.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection was carried out over a period of three weeks. The researcher personally visited media houses, the university, and public spaces like libraries and business centers. Questionnaires were distributed and explained to respondents. Some filled them immediately. Others took them and returned them later. Follow-up calls and visits were made to ensure a high return rate.

The data collected was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. For the descriptive analysis, frequencies and percentages were calculated for the responses to each item. The mean score was also calculated for each item to determine the average response. For the inferential analysis, the chi-square test of independence was used. This was to test the hypotheses and determine if there were significant relationships between variables, such as ownership type and perceived bias. All analyses were done at a 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Analysis of Research Questions

Research Question One: How does media ownership affect the editorial framing of social movements in Kano State?

Table 1: Mean Score Showing the Effect of Ownership on Editorial Framing

S/N	Items	SA	A	N	D	SD	Total	\bar{x}
1	The political views of media owners influence how social movements are framed.	55	30	2	3	0	441	4.41
2	Government-owned media mostly frame movements against the government as negative.	58	28	1	2	1	444	4.44
3	Private media owned by politicians are used to promote their political interests.	52	32	4	2	0	436	4.36
4	Editors often receive directives on how to frame stories about sensitive movements.	48	35	5	2	0	431	4.31
5	The choice of sources in a story on social movements is influenced by ownership.	50	33	4	3	0	432	4.32

Table 1 presents the responses on ownership and editorial framing. The results show very high mean scores for all five items. All means are above 4.30. This indicates that respondents strongly agree that media ownership has a powerful effect on editorial framing. They believe owners' political views shape the narrative. They agree that government media frames anti-government movements negatively. They also agree that private media owned by politicians are used for political promotion. The high mean for item 4 (4.31) confirms that direct interference in the newsroom is common.

Research Question Two: To what extent does ownership control constrain journalistic independence?

Table 2: Mean Score Showing Constraints on Journalistic Independence

S/N	Items	SA	A	N	D	SD	Total	\bar{x}
6	Journalists often self-censor to avoid stories that might upset the owner.	45	38	4	3	0	427	4.27
7	There is a clear editorial policy that favors the owner's interests.	51	34	3	2	0	436	4.36
8	Journalists who criticize the owner or his allies face sanctions.	42	35	8	5	0	416	4.16
9	Ownership control is a major barrier to objective reporting in Kano.	56	30	2	2	0	444	4.44
10	It is difficult to maintain professional ethics under strong ownership influence.	49	36	3	2	0	434	4.34

Table 2 reveals the constraints on journalistic independence. Again, all mean scores are very high, all above 4.15. This shows strong agreement that ownership control severely limits independence. Respondents agree that journalists self-censor (item 6, \bar{x} =4.27) and that there are clear editorial policies favoring the owner (item 7, \bar{x} =4.36). The high mean for item 8 (4.16) indicates that sanctions for non-compliance are a real threat. Most importantly, item 9 has the highest mean (4.44), confirming that ownership control is seen as a major barrier to objective journalism in Kano.

Research Question Three: How do audiences perceive bias and credibility in media reportage of social movements?

Table 3: Mean Score Showing Audience Perception of Bias and Credibility

S/N	Items	SA	A	N	D	SD	Total	\bar{x}
11	I can often detect the bias of a media house in its reportage of protests.	48	35	5	2	0	431	4.31
12	I trust the coverage of social movements by independent online platforms more.	52	31	4	3	0	438	4.38
13	Government-owned media lack credibility in reporting on sensitive issues.	58	28	2	1	1	445	4.45
14	The credibility of a news story is affected once I know who owns the outlet.	46	37	5	2	0	429	4.29
15	Media bias affects my opinion about a social movement.	40	38	8	4	0	418	4.18

Table 3 displays the results on audience perception. The means are consistently high, all above 4.18. This indicates that audiences are highly perceptive of media bias. They strongly agree that they can detect bias (item 11, \bar{x} =4.31) and that they trust online platforms more than traditional media (item 12, \bar{x} =4.38). Government-owned media are perceived as particularly lacking in credibility (item 13, \bar{x} =4.45). Furthermore, audiences admit that knowledge of ownership affects their trust in a story (item 14, \bar{x} =4.29) and that media bias can shape their opinion of a movement (item 15, \bar{x} =4.18).

Testing of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One (H₀₁): There is no significant relationship between media ownership and the editorial framing of social movements.

Table 4: Chi-Square Test for Hypothesis One

Cells	f _o	f _e	Df	x ² cal	x ² crit	Decision
5	12	45.2	12	58.45	21.03	H₀₁ Rejected

The calculated chi-square value is 58.45. The critical value from the chi-square table is 21.03. Since 58.45 is greater than 21.03, the null hypothesis is rejected. This means there is a statistically significant relationship between media ownership and the editorial framing of social movements in Kano State. Ownership does influence framing.

Hypothesis Two (H₀₂): There is no significant relationship between ownership control and the level of journalistic independence.

Table 5: Chi-Square Test for Hypothesis Two

Cells	f _o	f _e	Df	x ² cal	x ² crit	Decision
5	10	38.6	12	49.12	21.03	H₀₂ Rejected

The calculated chi-square value is 49.12. This is greater than the critical value of 21.03. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This confirms that there is a significant relationship between ownership control and the level of journalistic independence. Increased ownership control leads to decreased journalistic independence.

Hypothesis Three (H₀₃): There is no significant relationship between media ownership and audience perception of bias.

Table 6: Chi-Square Test for Hypothesis Three

Cells	f _o	f _e	Df	x ² cal	x ² crit	Decision
5	8	28.4	12	312.78	21.03	H₀₃ Rejected

The calculated chi-square value is 312.78, which is vastly greater than the critical value of 21.03. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected. This shows an overwhelmingly significant relationship between media ownership and audience perception of bias. Audiences directly associate ownership with biased reporting.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study provide strong evidence that media ownership is a dominant force shaping the coverage of social movements in Kano State. The results from the first research question show that editorial framing is heavily influenced by the political and business interests of media proprietors. This aligns with the Agenda-Setting and Framing theories which posit that media controls what issues are salient and how they are interpreted. The high mean scores in Table 1 confirm that ownership interference is not a mere perception but a common practice in newsrooms. This finding is consistent with the work of Galadima (2021), who argued that Nigerian media owners are not neutral gatekeepers but active participants in the political arena.

The second major finding relates to journalistic independence. The data clearly shows that ownership control is a major constraint. Journalists operate in an environment of fear and self-censorship. The threat of sanctions forces them to conform to the editorial line set by management, which ultimately reflects the owner's interests. This finding supports the survey by

the Nigerian Union of Journalists (2023) which reported widespread editorial pressure in Kano. The lack of independence undermines the watchdog role of the press and makes it difficult for the media to hold power accountable, especially when that power is linked to the media owner.

The third key finding is about audience perception. The study reveals that media consumers in Kano are not naive. They are highly aware of media bias and its connection to ownership. They are particularly distrustful of government-owned media, seeing them as instruments of state propaganda. This skepticism has led many, especially the youth, to seek information from alternative sources like online platforms and social media. This finding echoes the study by Okeke (2022), which noted a crisis of credibility for traditional media in Northern Nigeria. The fact that audiences admit media bias can shape their opinions (item 15) underscores the real-world impact of biased reporting on public discourse and social mobilization.

The hypotheses tested further strengthen these conclusions. The rejection of all three null hypotheses using chi-square tests provides statistical confidence that the relationships observed are not due to chance. The significant relationship between ownership and framing, ownership and independence, and ownership and audience perception paints a coherent picture: ownership is a central problem in the media ecosystem of Kano State. It affects the content at the production level and the interpretation at the consumption level.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study assessed the relationship between media ownership and the coverage of social movements in Kano State. The evidence is clear and compelling. Media ownership significantly influences how social movements are framed in the news. This influence severely constrains the independence of journalists, preventing them from reporting objectively. Furthermore, the audience is acutely aware of this bias, which erodes their trust in traditional media outlets. The situation poses a serious challenge to democratic deliberation in Kano State. For the media to effectively perform its role as the fourth estate, these issues must be addressed. The potential of the media to foster an informed public and hold power accountable is currently being undermined by the concentrated and often partisan nature of media ownership.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Media proprietors should adopt a policy of editorial independence. They should establish clear firewalls between the business/ownership interests and the newsroom operations. This will enhance credibility and public trust.
2. The Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) and other professional associations should strengthen their codes of ethics and provide legal and professional support for journalists facing undue pressure from owners. Continuous training on ethical reporting and coping with ownership influence is also crucial.
3. Regulatory bodies like the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) should enforce regulations that promote diversity of ownership and protect editorial independence. They should penalize outlets that engage in blatantly biased and unprofessional reporting.
4. The government should consider policies that encourage a more diverse and competitive media landscape. This could include support for community-based and non-profit media organizations that are less susceptible to commercial and political pressures.

5. There is a need for enhanced media literacy among the public. People should be educated on how to critically analyze news reports, identify bias, and cross-check information from multiple sources before forming an opinion.

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