

# Beyond Public and Private Ownership: Analysis of Media Ownership Patterns in Cameroon and Implications on Journalists' Professional Aptitude

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## Abstract

Media concentration in the hands of a few individuals/tycoons has been noted to have a negative effect on journalism. Thus, who owns and runs the media matters. This piece of research went beyond already established patterns like public and private to examine salient media ownership patterns within these two grand patterns and to establish the relationship with professionalism in Cameroon. The study made use of a mixed methods approach utilising both qualitative and quantitative analysis. Guided by Altschull's media ownership theory and the social responsibility theory of Siebert et al., the study found out that beyond private and public media ownership, other salient media ownership patterns exist, such as horizontal ownership (Newspaper 29.3%, Radio 27.9%, TV 11.1%), conglomerate ownership (8.9%) cross ownership (8.1%), sole proprietor ownership(4.3%), vertical ownership (3.3%), religious ownership (2.4%), community ownership (1.4%) regional line ownership (1.1%), political line ownership (0.5%) and co-ownership (0.3%). With this diversified ownership pattern, Cameroon portrays a unique ownership trend similar to those of many African countries but very different from ownership trends in the USA, Europe and other parts of the world where media concentration lies in the hands of one family or a few individuals. Though media concentration is not very visible in Cameroon, some key players in the likes of the Cameroon government (CRTV and SOPECAM), the Groupe l'Anecdote, La Nouvelle Expression, TV+, Spectrum Group, BT Media Group and DASH Media Group are dominating the media landscape in Cameroon. The research established a significant relationship ( $p$ -Value = 0.038) between journalists' professional aptitude and media ownership patterns. However,

when it comes to specific media ownership patterns the relationship among these variables varies. Media owners were found to have an influence on journalists and media content which affects professional aptitude by using various means, including media policy, direct instructions in the editing of news stories, sanctions and orientation of new recruits to the editorial policy of the media house. As a result, basic elements of professional ethics like truth, verification, relevance, balance, fairness and objectivity are compromised in favour of the owner's interests. The study therefore, recommends strict respect for professional norms and canons by both journalists and media owners. Additionally, the government's policy of administrative tolerance on setting up a media organ should be accompanied by strict follow-up measures such as the readiness of such organs to operate in terms of acquiring the necessary equipment, qualified personnel (who will perform their functions freely and objectively) and budget to sustain it.

### Keywords

Media, Media Ownership, Ownership Patterns, Professionalism, Journalist

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## 1. Introduction

Media power in modern-day society cannot be overemphasised. This phenomenon had long been recognised by British statesman Edmund Burke (1729-1797) who described the media as the Fourth Estate and more powerful than the other three arms of government. Though [Amodu, Usaini and Ige \(2014\)](#) note that the concept of the Fourth Estate by Burke was synonymous with the print media, it can never be less relevant today with the evolution of the media from print to audio visual and now the Internet with its new phenomenon of the social media. In understanding media power, it is crucial to note that the person who owns the media and how the media is run in a particular society is of prime importance.

Powerful media owners can attempt to manipulate information for their own goals ([Prat, 2015](#)). The early media tycoons like William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer who controlled a large share of the media were associated with the phenomenon of 'Yellow Journalism' in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Modern society has equally produced other tycoons in the likes of Rupert Murdoch, Silvio Berlusconi, the Warner brothers or Johannes Rupert in South Africa.

The liberalisation of the media sector around the world has always given the traditional power structures (government) a hard time controlling the media. Deregulation has placed the media more and more into the hands of big corporate bodies that have monopolised the sector. Africa in general and Cameroon in particular witnessed liberalisation of the media sector in the 1990s. In Cameroon, this was evident with the enactment of Law No. 90/052 of 19 December 1990 relating to Freedom of Mass Communication. With this law, individuals and corporations who met up with the necessary conditions as specified by the

law were given authorisation to own and run a media house. Since 1990, the number of print media organs in Cameroon has been on an increase while the audio visual sector saw a steady increase after 2000, following Prime Ministerial Text No. 2000/158 of 3 April, 2000, effectively liberalising the audio-visual sector.

Cameroon has a variety of ownership/concentration patterns. Since the deregulation of the sector in the 1990s, many private individuals, religious bodies, Non-Governmental organizations (NGOs) and business people have engaged in the sector. [Muluh \(2017\)](#) paints a picture of the ownership patterns in the radio sector. He notes that, apart from the public and private sector debate, individuals with private agendas notably politicians own radio stations. Other groups include development NGOs, councils and religious bodies. For the most part, the debate on ownership has always been polarised between public and private ownership. The debate on public and private media ownership has been captured in different lines of analysis. For example, sensationalism in public and private press ([Ngange, 2001](#); [Ngange & Elempia, 2019](#)); ethics in private and public media ([Ndangam, 2009](#)), among others. However, the private sector which is controlled basically by private individuals has not been sufficiently dissected as it has various types of ownership patterns within which it operates. These ownership trends are likely to affect the way journalists carry out their jobs on a daily basis.

While Cameroon is now witnessing media pluralism, the sector is gradually and hugely being concentrated in the hands of a few individuals and families who, in most cases, are not necessarily media professionals. This phenomenon raises questions about the future of the sector in terms of professionalism and journalists' independence. With the media in the hands of a few private individuals, the questions that come to mind are: what happens to professional journalism? And how do journalists cope with the changing professional environment?

Ironically, unprofessionalism is stamping its mark in the Cameroon media landscape at a time when professional schools to train journalists have increased in numbers. Professional standards in journalism can be affected by several factors including ownership. This piece of research seeks to establish a link between media ownership patterns and professional standards in Cameroon. In this respect, the paper attempts to answer the following questions:

- What are the different media ownership patterns that exist in Cameroon today?
- To what extent do media ownership patterns affect journalists' professional aptitude?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Media Ownership

Media ownership is a common concept in journalism studies. It refers to how the media are owned and who are the people who own and control the media.

Many authors, (Bagdikian, 1983; Doyle, 2002b; Ellis, 2014; Noam, 2016; Shoemaker & Reese, 2013) have suggested that the issue of who owns and controls the media and how much they are allowed to own, matters a lot. To politicians, it is even of greater concern because, as exemplified with increasing clarity over time, those who control popular media have the power to make or break political reputations and careers (Doyle, 2002a).

As the media evolves and widens its scope, the concerns are even more alarming. Noam (2016) holds that technological advancement is changing the game of ownership, especially the print media, which has faced a threat from the radio. The advent of radio predicted the end of the newspaper and then the coming of Television predicted the end of the radio and today the social media is threatening the survival of all of these three conventional media.

The expansion of the media industry has developed various ownership patterns. The dominant pattern that has existed in media ownership has been public and private ownership. However, with the expansion of the industry, other patterns have emerged, such as cross ownership, horizontal ownership, chain ownership, religious ownership, sole proprietorship ownership, and conglomerates (Danesi, 2009; Madhav, 2008; Mulu, 2017; Tanjong, 2012).

## 2.2. The Public/Private Ownership Debate

Ownership of the media has always revolved around the public and private ownership debate. Historically, the state has always monopolised the media landscape before gradually liberalising the sector permitting private ownership which is observed under some strict attribution measures.

In line with the private/public media ownership debate, Djankov, McLiesh, Nenova and Shleifer (2001) note that the two dominant forms of ownership of media firms around the world are that by the state and by concentrated private owners, that is, controlling families. They argue that in terms of geography, public ownership of the media is higher and has a firm grip in countries that are poorer, have more autocratic regimes, and have higher overall state ownership in the economy. In terms of impact, the authors note that there is a negative impact of government ownership of the media on media freedom. Journalists are more independent and face less arrest under private ownership. However, this situation may not be true for every society, as the authors observe that journalists still face harassment in some countries where the media is predominantly privately owned. Countries like Turkey, Nigeria and Kenya with a high private sector media concentration are prominent examples of where journalists ironically face more harassment.

Strömbäck and Hopmann (2012) observed that the journalistic goals among public and commercial/private media are different. In their analysis of the selection criterion for news among public and private journalists, they found that journalists of the public press preferred “dramatic and thrilling events while for journalists of the private/commercial press it was important that the event in-

creases people's insights and knowledge" (Strömbäck & Hopmann, 2012).

### 2.3. Media Ownership Patterns

The liberalisation of the media sector came as a revolution that witnessed media ownership gradually shifting from the grips of the state to private ownership. While this could be good for the journalism profession and the society at large, it leaves the media under the control of a few, which could also be detrimental (Bagdikian, 1983).

Madhav (2008), brings out four basic types of media ownership that is chain, cross media, vertical and conglomerate integration. Chain ownership is a situation where a newspaper company owns several publications in a country. Cross media ownership refers to common control over different media genres. Vertical integration suggests a setup where a company has stakes in various industries that go into producing the cultural product—say a newspaper company also owns large forests that provide paper pulp. Conglomerate ownership is a term used to describe a large company that consists of sections of often seemingly unrelated businesses.

Omenugha and Uzuegbunam (2015) identify three main patterns of media ownership in Nigeria and their characteristics;

**Ownership by Government:** This pattern of ownership applies to media houses owned and financed by the government. Such media are expected to be public service corporations.

**Ownership by Private Persons/Institutions:** This is when individuals (one person or group of persons) establish, finance and direct the administration of a media organization. They are more commercially oriented as compared to government-owned media.

**Co-ownership by Government and Private Persons:** It entails the government and private persons sharing proprietary rights over a media establishment. This sort of ownership pattern appears to be scarce in Nigeria, as Omenugha and Uzuegbunam (2015) noted further.

One ownership pattern that is growing today is conglomerate ownership. This form of ownership involves a media company owning several other unrelated businesses. Conglomerate ownership has been noted for often inviting a lot of external influence on the media. Madhav (2008) notes that in such a situation the media would merely be used to exercise social and political influence on the decision-makers. In this same light, Baker (2006) observes that this type of ownership pattern can make media companies more vulnerable to outside pressures. It puts the media in a situation where governmental or powerful private groups may be able and willing to use economic leverage over one portion of a conglomerate to induce its media "division" to mute critical reporting. In as much as the conglomerate ownership pattern can succumb to external pressure, it could as well use its media powers to further its non-media economic interest. With this, Baker notes that, the public loses in either way, that is, both from this

ownership type's vulnerability to external pressure and its non-related media interest which often hampers on professionalism and ethics.

Another aspect of the conglomerate ownership as purported by Baker is that there is always a deliberate move to upset independent or creative judgement. Editors and news reporters are not allowed to criticise other businesses owned by the media company. In fact, in some cases editors are compelled to sign or to undertake to not at any time denigrate, ridicule or intentionally criticise the company or any of its subsidiaries or affiliates, or any of their respective products (Baker, 2006).

## 2.4. Media Concentration

Ohlsson (2012) defines media power as direct control over the means of media production. This power can be a result of media concentration and has become a point of focus in the media debate (Couldry & Curran, 2003; Doyle, 2002a; Bagdikian, 1983). All around the world, the media is increasingly concentrated in the hands of powerful individuals and families.

von Dohnanyi and Möller (2003), paint a vivid picture of how media is concentrated in the hands of a few tycoons in Europe. They note that across Europe, few media corporations controlled by individuals and families make up the lion's share of the media market. In Germany three groups: Axel Springer Verlag, Verlagsgruppe WAZ and Südwestdeutsche Medien Holding control the media. These groups equally own and control media in foreign countries. In Finland, two groups, Sanoma WSOY and Alma Media dominate the media. The former is the second largest Nordic media group after the Swedish Bonnier group. Seven companies control the entire press in the UK and only four of this account for 90% of sales. Silvio Berlusconi, former Italian Prime Minister, dominates the press ownership in Italy under his company Mediaset.

In the US, media tycoons like Rupert Murdoch and Warner Media Company account for over 30% share of the media market. In fact, TitleMax (n.d) notes that, just 15 billionaires and five corporations dominate the media landscape in the USA. One of these media conglomerates—Warner Media, is one of, if not, the biggest in the world. According to von Dohnanyi and Möller (2003), these billionaires and a few corporations make up 90% of the media market in the USA.

In Latin America, Asia and Australia, media concentration is also left in the hands of a few individuals and families. Mastrini and Becerra (2011), note that the dominant group in Argentina is the Clarin Group. This is the main communication group in the country and is noted for monopolising the landscape through cross ownership with several newspapers, radio and TV stations, the main cable distribution system and several cable channels. It also participates in other areas tied to cultural industries such as press paper manufacturing (where it is a partner to the state), film production, news agencies and internet distribution.

In Australia, the top media agency, News Corp, owned by media mogul Rupert Murdoch controls over 29% of the overall media market in that part of

the world, while the four largest media houses—News Corp, Fairfax Media, Seven West Media and APN News & Media, accounted for 90% of the market in 2015 (Noam, 2016).

The concept of media concentration, though different in Europe and USA, is equally an issue of concern in Africa in general and Cameroon in particular. Since the early 1990s, the media system saw a shift from state monopoly to a more market-based media system. Though media concentration is not very visible across Africa as compared to statistics in USA and Europe, South Africa presents some interesting statistics on media concentration. Vilakati and Mavindidze (2014) note that, four main groups; notably, Avusa, Naspers (through Media24)15, Caxton and CTP Groups, predominantly owned by the white minority, account for 88% of the media market, particularly the print sector. Recent statistics in South Africa show the dominance of the Remgro Group. Remgro which is owned by business tycoon Johannes Rupert has huge investments in the media sector paving the way for it to dominate the media landscape in South Africa. The merging of Remgro and VenFin in 2009 added more media and technology investments (Remgro, 2018).

In other African countries, the concentration is not significant, but the end result is still the same—the media is left in the hands of a few individuals and families, whether powerful or not.

Capitant and Frère (2011), examined the ownership pattern of media in Anglophone and Francophone Africa. They note that in Anglophone Africa the media is dominated by some powerful media while in Francophone Africa the media landscape remains in the hands of single individuals with relatively weak structures. The few powerful media groups seen in some Francophone African countries like Senegal (the Sud Group) cannot be compared to powerful groups in Anglophone Africa like the giant Nation Media Group (NMG) in Kenya.

Africa, in general, has produced some media tycoons who control a greater share of the media in their respective countries. Jackson (2012) gives an idea of some of these tycoons and the nature of their media investments. For example, Koos Bekker from South Africa, owns Naspers, a \$12 billion media conglomerate. Naspers controls 23 magazines, pay-tv giant DSTV, a 30 percent stake in Russian internet giant Mail.ru, has stakes in *Mxit Lifestyle*, *24.com* and *QQ* as well as investments in telecommunications. Another example is Reginald Mengi from Tanzania, who dominates the media sector in East Africa with his IPP group. The IPP group owns ten national newspapers, two of East Africa's most popular television stations, and ten radio stations. As a conglomerate, the group has investments in other business sectors such as brewery and financial consulting. On its part, The Aga Khan from Kenya owns the Nation Media Group (NMG) which remains the biggest media house in East Africa having expanded operations into Uganda and Tanzania. It runs a series of newspapers as well as two TV and two radio stations in both Kenya and Uganda. In Nigeria, Ben Murray-Bruce dominates the media sector. His company Silverbird Productions

owns three radio stations, Silverbird television, the Most Beautiful Girl in Nigeria, Silverbird Cinema, Silverbird Entertainment and Silverbird Galleria.

In Cameroon, media concentration is seen within a mixture of public and private ownership patterns (Tanjong, 2012). Historically, media ownership in Cameroon has fluctuated between the private and public press. During the colonial period, Cameroon witnessed a mix ownership between Colonial masters (*l'Eveil du Cameroun*, *l'Enfant de la guerre*), Missionary (*Das Evangelische Monatsblatt*, *l'Effort Cameroouanise*) and indigenous people (*Mbale*), while the post-colonial period, especially from 1966, witnessed a dominance of public ownership with the introduction of a one-party system (Ewumbue-Monono, 1992). The post 1990 era witnessed a gradual liberalisation of the sector into the hands of private individuals and corporate bodies. While the situation in Cameroon may not exhibit the large concentration as witnessed in USA, Europe and other parts of the world, Muluh (2017) notes that there are media rich and media poor regions.

## 2.5. Media Ownership and Professionalism

Professionalism refers to certain standards the media should meet. Kovach and Rosentiels (2001) break it down into certain rules which have been widely acknowledged as acceptable standards of professionalism. They include balance reporting, fairness in reporting, independence of journalists, objectivity, reporting the truth, loyalty to society, verification, providing a forum for public debate, making significant issues interesting and relevant, and allowing journalists to exercise their personal conscience.

Shoemaker and Reese (2013) look at professionalism as shared norms and outlooks which individuals of particular groupings are called to observe. These shared norms can go to a level where it embodies a set of procedures and routines. von Dohnanyi and Möller (2003) opine that professional journalists should not be guided by personal ideological beliefs or political affiliation but rather they “ought to be critical observers, diligent reporters and an indispensable link between all levels of society”, (p. 18).

Ownership and professionalism in the media are two concepts that are inextricably linked. Professionalism largely depends on issues of ownership to prevail. These could include editorial policies and the owner’s personal/political view and affiliation. A simple market based analysis of ordinary business indicates that owners exert a lot of influence on how the business operates. In fact, the outcome of the business is generally a function of the objective and interest of the owners. This model cannot be different in the media world which has taken a more business tune. McQuail (2003), for example, wrote on the influence of ownership on mass media content. He notes specifically that there is no doubt that owners in market based media have ultimate power over content and can ask for what they want to be included or left out. In the same light, Hearnns-Branaman (2018) holds that, “professional ethical standards for journalists are intimately



tied to the political economy of the press acting as a smoke screen for the economic interests of the owners,” (p. 26).

Omenugha and Uzuegbunam (2015) define media ownership as “the proprietary rights that someone, a group of persons or an institution, exercises over a media establishment.” (P. 402). These rights according to the authors encompass the power to determine the corporate policy, editorial slant, content and workforce of such media establishment. This definition clearly portrays the owners as the lords who have the means to determine media outcomes and thereby influencing the professional aspect of the media.

Media owners exert a lot of pressure on their media outlets thereby compromising the supposed independence of the media. In fact, the fundamental interest of the owners always prevails, and media independence can only come after the owner’s interest has been satisfied, Jika (1984), cited in Omenugha and Uzuegbunam (2015). As far back as the 1980s, the author had seen the influence of the media in Nigerian society and described press freedom as nothing but a “hoax, a farce, a propaganda policy being branded by the ruling class to hoodwink the gullible masses” cited in Omenugha and Uzuegbunam (2015).

Ugwu (2011), looks at the media landscape in general and how it affects professionalism. He concludes that the final content of the media is a product of the interaction between different interests within mass media, different roles of mass media, different sources of information and different interest groups outside mass media organizations.

According to Baker (2006), ownership concentration which entails profit maximisation often undermines the journalism and content creation that produce social benefits, that is, “positive externalities”. In addition to this, structural considerations such as mergers provide other reasons for the opposition to media concentration. Baker (2006) notes that mergers often create new opportunities for profit maximisation which in turn affects professional output.

In Cameroon, the issue of ownership and influence on content has been treated by some authors (Ngange & Elempia, 2019; Tanjong, 2012 & Ndangam, 2009). These authors are in line with Djankov et al. (2001) who earlier noted that state subsidies to the media enable governments to influence media content and in Cameroon the state deliberately refuses to advertise in the privately owned press that is critical to the government and uses “defamation laws to influence content by repressing investigative journalism”, (p. 15).

Muluh (2014), looked at radio ownership and professionalism in Cameroon differently. He observed that radio stations employ many journalists but very few are professionally trained. This, according to the author, affects the quality of news and foreign affairs programme which are poorly handled by untrained journalists.

## 2.6. Theoretical Review

### 2.6.1. Social Responsibility Theory

The social responsibility theory is one of the four normative theories of the press

by Siebert, Patterson and Schramm (1956). Tanjong, Eselem and Che Tita (2016) note that, unlike the authoritarian theory, which the press ought to act as a propaganda tool for the regime in place or the libertarian theory which suggests that the press ought to be free to present the truth the way it is, the social responsibility theory throws more emphasis on the press' responsibility to society. The theory lays some guidelines for a responsible press. Some of the main tenets of the theory according to McQuail (1994) are:

- Media have an important function to fulfil in society (support democratic political principles);
- Media are under obligation to fulfil their social functions (transmission of information and creation of a forum for different viewpoints);
- Independence of media emphasised in relation to their responsibility towards society;
- Media should meet certain standards.

This theory postulates how the media ought to behave, and in terms of professionalism, it gives specification on how the media ought to be professional and responsible. The social responsibility theory implores journalists to be professional in carrying out their duties at all times.

### **2.6.2. Media Ownership Theory**

Altschull contends that “the content of the press is directly correlated with the interests of those who finance the press” (Altschull, 1984). The autonomy of media outlets is given within the boundaries of owners' profit. Where the media outlet is commercially owned, the content will reflect the point of view of the news organization's owners and advertisers. Where the media outlet fits into what Altschull (1984) calls an “interest pattern,” the content mirrors the concerns and objectives of whoever is providing the financing. The author therefore, compares it to the local adage which states that “he who pays the piper calls the tunes.” To him, “the press is the piper, and the tune the piper plays is composed by those who pay the piper” (p. 254) that is, the media sponsors.

Shoemaker and Reese (1991) have attempted to refine and extend Altschull's work. Their theory of media ownership and news content points out that the owners of a media organization have the ultimate power over the news content of the newspapers. They contend that the primary focus of a news organization owned by a publicly held corporation is to make profit, and objectivity is seen as a way of attracting the readers desired by advertisers.

Shoemaker and Reese (1991) have found that news organizations funded primarily by commercial sources are far more likely to use objectivity and newsworthiness as their principal standards in making news judgments. The reason, as suggested by Shoemaker and Reese (1991), is that a commercial media outlet is more responsive to its audience and advertisers, both of whom desire these qualities. They further found out that news organizations that are financed primarily by “interest” groups are far less likely to place great emphasis on objectivity and newsworthiness. Instead, their content is more likely to reflect the think-

ing of the special interest group or groups that control them.

### 3. Method

This study adopted a mixed methods approach to social inquiry, combining qualitative and quantitative methods. The quantitative dimension of this research targets a large sample which is trained journalists in active service while the qualitative aspect handles smaller samples that involve case studies and interviews with media owners.

The mixed methods approach is most suitable for this research because it allows the researchers to collect data from different sources in order to bring out comprehensive answers to the research questions and also not leave out any unanswered questions in the readers' minds.

The research focuses on the media landscape in Cameroon but limited to the conventional media. The lead method used in this study is the survey. Under the quantitative design, a survey was used with a questionnaire as the main tool for data collection. The method targeted practicing journalists from across the country. The second method used in this study is the case study research method and semi-structured interview was used to collect data from journalists with known experience of rift with media owners, and media owners. The qualitative approach comes in to complement data gotten through the survey.

The study involves the media sector in Cameroon. Two sets of stakeholders of the media sector are involved—practicing journalists and media owners. Practicing journalists in Cameroon constituted the main target. They were selected in six different media-rich cities: Bamenda, Buea, Douala, Garoua, Limbe and Yaoundé. These six cities were selected for the study because they present all the socio cultural and political characteristics of the country such as culture, ethnicity, language and religion. In terms of media concentration, they represent the six major media rich towns in Cameroon and therefore, are appropriate to be selected for the study.

Journalists who have undergone formal training were primarily selected for the study. This is so because it is expected that journalists who have received formal training understand the ethics of the profession and can speak with certainty under what circumstances they are pushed to go unprofessional. Equally, journalists who were not formally trained but had more than five years experience in the field were included in the study. This was so because it is expected that after such a long period in the field, the journalists would have gathered enough experience and may have attended training seminars meant to gain knowledge on professional ethics in the process.

Media owners, constituted another aspect of the population under study. From the six cities under study, media owners were identified and interviewed. The media owners provided data on what influence they have over media content.

The total population was established by identifying the different media organs in the various towns under study and the number of trained and experienced

journalists in each of the media organ. In large cities such as Yaoundé and Douala, the researchers made use of the different journalism associations that exist there and statistics on journalists from the divisional delegation for communication to come up with an acceptable population.

In order to get a fair representation, the study adopted a stratified sampling procedure. The study area Cameroon was divided into four strata, taking into consideration media rich and media poor regions as well as language and cultural factors. The strata are the Grand North strata representing Extreme North, North and Adamawa regions, the Centre South strata representing the Centre, South and East Regions, the Western strata representing the Littoral and West regions and the English Speaking strata representing the South West and North West regions. Out of these four strata, six chief cities were identified for the study; notably, Bamenda, Buea, Douala, Garoua, Limbe and Yaoundé. This procedure ensured that Cameroon was fairly represented, taking care of diversity like language, culture and religion. After the stratification, a random sampling technique was used in each of the four strata. Media organs and journalists who participated in this study were randomly selected.

The research borrows from [Krejcie and Morgan \(1970\)](#) who propose the appropriate sample size required for different populations under study. In the case of this study, the recommended sample according to Krejcie and Morgan is represented in the table below:

**Table 1** gives the sample size of journalists from the total population in each city as proposed by [Krejcie and Morgan \(1970\)](#). Thus, the total sample size of all six cities stands at 463 trained journalists.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Determining Media Ownership Patterns in Cameroon

**Table 2** suggests that beyond public and private ownership patterns, there exist other types of media ownership within the media landscape in Cameroon.

Horizontal ownership is a situation where a media house owns the same kind

**Table 1.** Sample size according to Krejcie and Morgan

Town	No. of journalists	Recommended sample (Krejcie and Morgan)
Bamenda	61	52
Buea	71	59
Douala	250	152
Garoua	25	24
Limbe	29	24
Yaoundé	250	152
<b>Total</b>		<b>463</b>

Source: Field data (October, 2020).

of media across the country (Madhav, 2008). Results in **Table 2** show that this type of ownership exists in Cameroon and cuts across all three conventional media, Newspapers, Radio and TV. Statistics from the respondents show that horizontal ownership is the highest with horizontal ownership of Newspapers taking the lead with 108 (29.3), followed by horizontal ownership of radio 103 (27.9%) and horizontal ownership of TV 41 (11.1) Horizontal ownership is very evident in the print media sector, as owners of Newspapers own different titles around the country, for example, *Réalités Plus* and *Les Preuves* owned by Paul Gwarey, *L'Orphelin*, *La Veuve*, *L'Epervier* owned by Clovis Nunjo *Municipal Update* and *Chronicles Times* owned by Cham Victor. Radio is also found to have several stations owned by the same person or corporation e.g., CRTV owning stations in all ten regions of Cameroon. Lastly, examples of horizontal ownership in the TV sector include Canal2 English and Canal2 International, My Media Prime and My Media movies, etc.

Another ownership pattern identified within the media landscape in Cameroon is conglomerate ownership. This is a situation where the media house falls as one of the businesses of a large company with other unrelated businesses. According to Madhav (2008), in such a setup there will be interlocking of directorship—where the media company would merely be used to exercise social and political influence on the decision-makers. This type of ownership was identified and ranked second 33 (8.9%) by the journalists after horizontal ownership. This indicates that business people in Cameroon have understood the power of the media and are making use of it by investing and owning their own media structures. Such media tend to project the interest of the owner especially to promote

**Table 2.** Media ownership patterns.

Ownership patterns	Frequency	Percent (%)
Horizontal ownership (Newspaper)	108	29.3
Horizontal ownership (Radio)	103	27.9
Horizontal ownership (TV)	41	11.1
Conglomerate ownership	33	8.9
Cross ownership	30	8.1
Sole Proprietorship	16	4.3
Vertical ownership	12	3.3
Religious Ownership	9	2.4
Community Ownership	5	1.4
Regional line ownership	4	1.1
Political line ownership	2	0.5
Co-ownership (Private Politician)	1	0.3
Co-ownership (Government /Private)	1	0.3

Source: Field data, 2021.

or protect their other businesses. An example of this is DASH media created by renowned business man Boniface Abayo Dashaco. Before investing in DASH media in 2020, he was already a successful business man/entrepreneur with his ACMAR Media Group, a reputable publicity agency that operates across 20 countries and employs over 1000 persons.

According to [Danesi \(2009\)](#), cross ownership is the ownership of all three conventional media, that is, print, radio and TV. The statistic in [Table 2](#), 30 (8.1%) indicate that cross ownership is very much in existence in Cameroon. Chapter VIII, section 43 of law no 90/052 of 19 December 1990 relating to freedom of mass communication specifically states inter-alia that no “natural person or corporate body shall be allowed to own more than one audio visual communication company and a press organ at the same time”. The article is still unchanged in law no 90/052 of 19 December 1990 relating to freedom of mass communication, amended and supplemented by law no.99/11 of 20 July 1999. Despite the fact that cross ownership of the media is illegal in Cameroon, many media organs are operating under such a pattern with impunity. On the other hand, the government policy of administrative tolerance, which allows media organs to go operational without necessarily fulfilling the pre-conditions lay down by the law, could explain the gross violation. Examples of this type of ownership include: the Groupe Anecdote which owns *Vision 4 TV*, *Radio Satellite FM* and *Anecdote Newspaper*. There is equally Groupe Nouvelle Expression which owns *La Nouvelle Expression Newspaper*, *Equinox radio* and *Equinox Television*.

According to [Entrepreneur \(2021\)](#), sole proprietorship is a kind of business that legally has no separate existence from its owner. This form of ownership is present in the media landscape in Cameroon as identified by 16 (4.3%) of the journalists. Since it is simple and easy to establish, it is very popular and was rightly identified by the journalists as one of the ownership patterns. This type of ownership is very common in radio stations and newspapers.

Vertical ownership according to [Madhav \(2008\)](#) is a situation where a media organ has other companies that aid in the realisation of its primary product. For example, a Newspaper owning a business that aids in producing paper or printing the paper. This type of ownership is growing in the print media sector in Cameroon. Statistic from [Table 2](#) shows that 12 (3.3%) of the respondents identified this type of ownership. Proprietors of print media organs are investing in the business of printing press, which aids in the printing of the newspaper/magazine. A famous of them is the Maison Catholique de la Communication Sociale (MACACOS) which is owned by the Douala Arch Diocese and which equally publishes *L’Effort Camerounais Newspaper*. Also, the Catholic Communication Service (CACOS) in the Diocese of Buea runs a printing press and publishes Cameroon Panorama. Other Newspaper houses run the printing press as part of the Newspaper itself, like *The Guardian Post*, which owns and runs a printing press as an integral part of the Newspaper.

Religious ownership is a situation where media is owned and run by a reli-

gious movement or congregation. This type of ownership is very visible in Cameroon today and was identified by (2.4%) of the respondents. About two decades ago, this type of ownership was limited to traditional religious denominations like the Catholic, Baptist and or Presbyterian Churches. Today, most religious movements own a news magazine, radio and/or TV. The Pentecostal religious movements are the fastest growing with tele-evangelism being the order of the day.

Statistics from **Table 2**, (1.4%) 5 shows that community radio was identified as one of the media ownership patterns that exist in Cameroon. This type of ownership is evident in radio stations. Community media first came to Cameroon in 1997 (Muluh, 2017) when the government of Cameroon accepted a Canadian government and UNESCO's offer to set up five rural radio stations in Oku, Kembong, Foutouni, Lolodorf and Mouturewa. With a relatively high license fee to set up audio visual media, (National Commercial radio 50 million F CFA, Local Commercial 10 million F CFA, National non-commercial 10 million F CFA, and Commercial television stations 100 million F CFA), many media organs especially radio are registered as community radio which has no specific legislation.

Media houses are most often created with specific objectives. Some promote particular ideologies, others specialise in particular sectors like sports, entertainment, culture while others are to promote people from a particular ethnic group or region. This type of ownership was identified by the journalists (1.1%) 4, as existing in Cameroon. Though not very popular, it still exists in several regions in Cameroon. Examples of such media with regional/ethnic lines ownership, include *Manyu Voice*, *l'Eco Ouest*, *Tribune de l'Est*, *l' Oeil du Sahel*, *Essingan*, *Hebdo Meyomessala*, etc.

Media organs have always lined up behind a particular political ideology or candidate. However, political line ownership goes beyond lining up behind an ideology or candidate. It entails political parties owning and running a media house. The journalists surveyed, 2 (0.5%), identified this as an ownership pattern in Cameroon, though seemingly rare. An example of such ownership, is *l'Action* newspaper, which is owned by the Cameroon Peoples Democratic Movement (CPDM) party.

Co-ownership is a situation where two independent bodies own a media organ. This pattern is identified in the Nigerian media landscape by Omenugha and Uzuegbunam (2018). Results indicate that co-ownership exists in Cameroon 1 (0.3%) but is very rare. Two types of co-ownership are identified, Government/Private and Private/Politician. The former depicts a situation where the government co-owns media with private individuals while the latter is a situation where media is owned by a private individual and a politician.

## **4.2. To What Extent Do Media Ownership Patterns Affect Journalists' Freedom and Professional Aptitude in Cameroon?**

### **Media Owners' Influence on Media Content**

Results from the field indicate that media owners in Cameroon have an influ-

ence on media content. This result goes in line with Altschull (1984) assertion that media owners who finance the press have a direct influence on media content. **Table 3** reveals that out of the 360 participants who attempted this question, only 2.4% of the participants were of the opinion that media owners never influence on media content. On the contrary, 61 (16.5%) asserted that media owners always (100% measurement scale) influence media content while another majority of 156 (42.3%) of the participants supported the fact that media owners often (75% measurement scale) influence media content. The results establish the fact that media owners have a direct influence on media outcomes and present the situation in Cameroon as a regular practice.

The research went further to establish some of the means that the owners use to influence media outcome. Some of them as derived from this research include media policy, direct instructions, editing of news stories and sanctions. In the journalists' evaluation of the frequency of this method, **Table 4** shows that media policy is the most frequently used method as 120 (32.5%) of journalists strongly agree with this. Media policy is seen at two levels, government policy on the media and in-house media policy. Each media house is created with an objective and thus, the media policy of a media house is a guideline to fulfil its vision, mission, and objective. With this, it is not surprising that media policy is

**Table 3.** Frequency of media owners' influence on media content.

Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Always (100%)	61	16.5
Often (75%)	156	42.3
Sometimes (50%)	77	20.9
Rarely (25%)	57	15.4
Never (0%)	9	2.4
No response	9	2.4
Total	<b>369</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field data, 2021.

**Table 4.** Means used by media owners to influence on media content

Means	Strongly Agree (100%)	Agree (75%)	Neutral (50%)	Disagree (25%)	Strongly Disagree (0%)
Media Policy	120 (32.5%)	126 (34.1%)	76 (20.6%)	27 (7.3%)	17 (4.6%)
Direct Instructions	88 (23.8%)	115 (31.2)	114 (30.9%)	38 (10.3%)	12 (3.3%)
Editing of News Stories	66 (17.9%)	106 (28.7%)	121 (32.8%)	43 (11.7%)	31 (8.4%)
Sanctions	58 (15.7%)	100 (27.1%)	131 (35.5%)	47 (12.7%)	31 (8.4)

Source: Field data, 2021.



rated as the most frequently used means to influence media content because it acts as a subtle control tool irrespective of whether the outcome respects the basic canons of the profession or not.

### 4.3. Assessment on Whether Media Owners Compel Journalists to Uphold Their Interests

Results indicate that journalists are compelled to uphold their proprietors' interests and goals. This is done even when it is at the detriment of professional ethics. **Table 5** shows that out of 349 journalists who attempted this question, 97 (26.3%) attested that this practice is on a regular basis while another 112 (30.4%) supported that the practice exists but on a rather moderate level. The research further looked into the means used by media owners to ensure that journalists succumb to this practice. **Table 6** brings out some of the means which are: signed

**Table 5.** Journalists assessment of how media owners compel them to uphold their interest and goals.

Level	Frequency	Percent (%)
Always (100%)	97	26.3
Often (75%)	112	30.4
Sometimes (50%)	65	17.6
Rarely (25%)	39	10.6
Never (0%)	36	9.8
No response	20	5.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>369</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field data, 2021.

**Table 6.** Journalists Assessment of means used to compel them to uphold owner's interests.

Means	Strongly Agree (100%)	Agree (75%)	Neutral (50%)	Disagree (25%)	Strongly Disagree (0%)
Signed undertaking	108 (29.3%)	54 (14.6%)	66 (17.9%)	62 (16.8%)	78 (21.1%)
Strict follow-up of editorial policy	147 (39.8%)	110 (29.8%)	67 (18.2%)	21 (5.7%)	23 (6.2%)
Threat of dismissal	96 (26.0%)	55 (14.9%)	76 (20.6%)	72 (19.5%)	69 (18.7%)
Sanctions	99 (26.8%)	79 (21.4%)	67 (18.2%)	76 (20.6%)	47 (12.7)
Threat of suspension	102 (27.6%)	65 (17.6%)	68 (18.4%)	67 (18.2%)	66 (17.9%)
Others					
Drop Story	0 (0.0%)	3 (0.81%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Dirty Talks	3 (0.81%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Source: Field data, 2021.

undertaken, strict follow-up of editorial policy, threat of dismissal, sanctions, threat of suspension, dropping of story and dirty talks. Among these means, signed undertaken, strict follow-up of editorial policy and threat of suspension was the most frequently used methods to compel journalists to uphold the interests of their proprietors, especially when it goes contrary to the ethics of the profession.

On a similar note the research sought to know what is done to journalists who decide to stay within the ambit of journalistic ethics and go contrary to the interest of media owners. It was discovered that, other harsh measures are used on them. Some of these as presented in **Table 7**, include forced resignation, punitive transfers, demotion, and dismissal, suspension of salary, sanctions, late pay and isolation. Suspension of salary, punitive transfers and forced resignation was rated as the most frequently used methods to sanction journalists who go against the interest of the owners.

#### 4.4. Assessment of How Owners Influence in Media Affects Professionalism

Statistics in **Table 8** show that the frequent intervention of media owners on media content affects professionalism in a negative manner. A total of 86 respondents (23.3%) strongly agree that it has a major effect on professionalism while 142 (38.5%) of respondents agree that it has a moderate effect.

Having established that media owners' influence has a negative effect on professionalism, the research went further to see which elements of professional ethics are mostly affected. **Table 9** shows that basic elements like truth, 101 (27.4%), verification 103 (27.9%) and relevance 105 (28.5%) are highly compromised. Other elements like balance 136 (36.9%), fairness 131 (35.5%) and objectivity 126

**Table 7.** Journalists Assessment of measures taken on journalists who decide to respect ethics instead of owners' interest.

Means	Strongly Agree (100%)	Agree (75%)	Neutral (50%)	Disagree (25%)	Strongly Disagree (0%)
Resignation (Forced to resign)	97 (26.3%)	52 (14.1%)	72 (19.5%)	76 (20.6%)	71 (19.2%)
Punitive transfers	94 (25.5%)	59 (16.0%)	68 (18.4%)	76 (20.6%)	71 (19.2%)
Demotion	95 (25.7%)	66 (17.9%)	72 (19.5%)	65 (19.5%)	70 (19.0%)
Dismissal	87 (23.6%)	63 (17.1%)	79 (21.4%)	83 (22.5%)	56 (15.2%)
Suspension of salary	107 (29.0%)	57 (15.4%)	75 (20.3%)	62 (16.8%)	67 (18.2%)
Others					
Sanction	3 (0.81%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Isolation	3 (0.81%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Late Pay	4 (1.08%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Source: Field data, 2021.

**Table 8.** Journalists rating of how owners influence affects their professional aptitude.

Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Major effect (100%)	86	23.3
Moderate effect (75%)	142	38.5
Neutral (50%)	75	20.3
Minor effect (25%)	28	7.6
No effect (0%)	37	10.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>369</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field data, 2021.

**Table 9.** Journalists rating of how specific elements of professionalism are affected by owners' influence.

Elements	Major Effect (100%)	Moderate Effect (75%)	Neutral (50%)	Minor Effect (25%)	No Effect (0%)
Balance	76 (20.6%)	136 (36.9%)	65 (17.6%)	50 (13.6%)	42 (11.4%)
Fairness	68 (31.4%)	131 (35.5%)	80 (21.7%)	42 (11.4%)	48 (13.0%)
Journalists' Independence	75 (20.3%)	103 (27.9%)	96 (26.0%)	56 (15.2%)	39 (10.6%)
Objectivity	83 (22.5%)	126 (34.1%)	77 (20.9%)	33 (8.9%)	50 (13.6%)
Truth	101 (27.4%)	87 (23.6%)	77 (20.9%)	47 (12.7%)	57 (15.4%)
Loyalty to the society	95 (25.7%)	101 (27.4%)	76 (20.6%)	41 (11.1%)	56 (15.2%)
Verification	103 (27.9%)	90 (24.4%)	81 (22.0%)	41 (11.1%)	54 (14.6%)
Relevance	105 (28.5%)	88 (23.8%)	89 (24.1%)	34 (9.2%)	53 (14.4%)
Personal conscience	102 (27.6%)	83 (22.5%)	84 (22.8%)	44 (11.9%)	56 (15.2%)
Creative judgment	96 (26.0%)	80 (21.7%)	95 (25.7%)	43 (11.7%)	55 (14.9%)
Independent judgment	93 (25.2%)	80 (21.7%)	90 (24.4%)	49 (13.3%)	57 (15.4%)

Source: Field data, 2021.

(34.1%) are fairly compromised. The results indicate that, media owners influence is touching the inner fabrics of professional ethics. By compelling journalists to uphold their interests, basic and very important elements of ethics like objectivity, truth, relevance and verification are kept in the locker in exchange for the proprietors' political and economic interests.

#### 4.5. Results of Qualitative Analysis of Interviews with Respect to Media Owners' Influence on Journalist Freedom and Professional Aptitude

The qualitative analysis of this research centres on the interviews granted by

journalists and media owners.

### **Media Owners and Their Influence on Journalists**

The quantitative data establishes that media owners indeed have an effect on journalists' professional aptitude. Most media are created to achieve certain aims and the route to these objectives may in one way or the other push journalists to go out of the rails of professional ethics in order for them to be achieved. As such, media owners use different means to compel journalists to achieve these objectives. Some of these are direct instructions and media policy. *"My media owner asks me to take government side while anchoring news programmes or writing news reports"* Interviewee 2. Journalists are given direct instructions to take a particular angle regardless of whether it falls in line with the ethics of the profession or not. The editorial policy equally compels journalists to work in line with the media owners' objectives. Sometimes the policy is not even written while others are written.

*"We have it written in the document creating the radio, it was stated there very clearly that this is the editorial policy of the radio. So each time we have a new staff, we might not give him but we bring that document as a reminder that look, this is what governs this radio, we expect you to go by it"* Interviewee 4.

Equally, when the media house considers a journalist to be radical, he/she is not given any major assignment. *"When I was recruited I wasn't allowed anywhere near the mic... sometimes when reading my paper, somebody will come and withdraw it that it is ordered from the manager..."* Interviewee 1. Even when the journalists are competent, their names can be dropped from any assignment deemed lucrative. *"My name was dropped from the list of those to cover the Agric show in the North... But I was urgently rushed to do reports when things were not going well."* Interviewee 1. This implies that, even when a journalist is competent, the media owner overlooks that in so far as the journalist is considered a radical.

More so, the management can delay or refuse to broadcast or publish a journalist's report when they realise that it is going contrary to their views. *"I went for a long period and my stories were not published ... I realised that the management was afraid of the angle I took because it was touching some bigwigs in the regime."* Interviewee 3.

In most cases, when a journalist goes contrary to the owner's views, he will simply be reminded that he is going against the editorial policy. This so-called policy sometimes exists only virtually *"May be they have may be not.... but I have never seen it."* Interviewee 1.

In most cases, journalists succumb to these practices and carry out their duties faithfully. Some of these practices are seen as normal while others, in order to safeguard their jobs and keep a good face with their proprietors, put up with such practices. However, there are cases of journalists who go against these practices and stay within professional lines. In such cases, the media owners take several measures on journalists including but not limited to sanctions, punitive

transfer, reduction or suspension of salary and demotion.

*“Oh my boss will call me, give me money, threaten me, and at one point I was suspended for four months ... they sent me on punitive transfer to Bertoua”* Interviewee 1. The measures taken by media owners are sometimes very difficult to handle. Some journalists do repent and respect the orders of their media owners, while the resilient ones tangle for a while and actually resign from their jobs. Some resign and get into other business while others create their own media houses or are employed by other media organs. *“Of course I voted with my feet out.”* Interviewee 1.

*“I had to resign because of the kind of things I was asked to be doing... that I should have mostly pro-government and be moderate as far as the Anglophone crisis is concerned... that if a news source pays higher, I should take his side, or preference is given to the highest bidder...these were against professional ethics, I had to resign. Today I am an artist and I don't have any business with journalism.”* Interviewee 2.

In most cases, especially in the newspaper sector, journalists who have resigned have created a rival newspaper. This finding comes added to the work of Ndangam (2009) who noted that the seed of divide among newspaper publishers perpetrated by politicians is the main reason for a rival publication. In addition to this, journalists who disagree on professional grounds have created their own papers. There is the case of *Kalara* and *Le jour* newspapers whose publishers are former employees of *Mutation* newspaper. There is also the case of Charly Ndi Chia of *The Post newspaper* who left and created his own newspaper—*The Rambler*.

Media owners on their part attest to the fact that they directly influence content—*“there are times that you find the staff going away from the editorial policy. So in that kind of situation you have to try to bring them in order.”* Interviewee 4. They do this by re-orientating new recruits to follow their in-house policies. *“We orientate according to editorial policy ... if we allow them the way they come from school, you know the school teaching tells them objectivity, all of that, but the reality in the field is different... So we try to put them on a rail so that they follow and toe the line of the radio and they do their work.”* Interviewee 4.

**Table 10** shows the relationship between media ownership patterns and

**Table 10.** Regression results testing significance of the relationship between media ownership patterns and journalists' freedom/professional aptitude.

	Journalists' Professional Aptitude
	Ordinary Least Square Regression
Media ownership Patterns	0.0357899** (0.038)

Key: \*\*\* = 1%, \*\* = 5%, \*10% level of significance and values in brackets are the t-statistics. Source: Computed by the author using Stata 14.

journalists' professional aptitude. It uses the binary regression to test the relationship between the ownership patterns (independent variable) and journalists' professional aptitude (dependent variable).

The results indicate that there is a significant relationship between media ownership patterns and journalists' professional aptitude. The relationship is significant at 5% ( $p$ -Value = 0.38) indicating that each one can easily affect the other.

**Table 11** brings out regression results of specific media ownership patterns and journalists' professional aptitude.

Horizontal ownership has a negative relationship with journalists' professional aptitude. This implies that as horizontal ownership increases, the more likely journalists' professional aptitude is compromised. However, the relationship is not significant to cause any major cause for concern.

Cross ownership shows a negative relationship with journalists' professional aptitude. This implies that when cross ownership increases, there is the likelihood that journalists' professional aptitude is compromised. Again the relationship is not significant.

Religious ownership and conglomerate ownership patterns equally have a negative relationship with journalists' professional aptitude but however have no significance.

On the other hand, sole proprietorship shows a positive relationship with journalists' professional aptitude with little or no significance while community ownership shows a negative relationship with little or no significance.

As seen from **Table 10** to **Table 11**, media ownership patterns affect journalists'

**Table 11.** Regression results testing significance of the relationship between Specific media ownership patterns and journalists' Freedom/professional aptitude.

Media Ownership Patterns	Journalists' Professional Aptitude
	Ordinary Least Square Regression
Horizontal ownership	-0.0180202 (0.676)
Cross ownership	-0.5646848 (0.220)
Religious Ownership	-0.0824876 (0.900)
Conglomerate ownership	-0.0524539 (0.938)
Sole Proprietorship	0.6142128 (0.364)
Community Ownership	-0.8137063 (0.347)

Key: \*\*\* = 1%, \*\* = 5%, \*10% level of significance and values in brackets are the t-statistics. Source: Computed by the author using Stata 14.

professional aptitude in different ways. The result on how ownership affects journalists' professional aptitude shows that, the more there is diversity of ownership in the media sector, the journalists are more likely to enjoy their freedom and be more professional, that is, carry out their duty without any major influence on their professional aptitude. Looking at specific ownership patterns, results indicate that, they have both positive and negative effects without any major significance.

The hypothesis test indicates that there is a positive relationship between media ownership patterns and journalists' professional aptitude. Because the calculated  $p$ -value is less than the standard  $p$ -value at 5% it shows that the relationship is significant and as such the null hypothesis is rejected.

When it comes to specific media ownership patterns the results seem to be different. Horizontal ownership has a negative relationship with journalists' professional aptitude. Because the calculated  $p$ -value is not less than the standard  $p$ -value, it shows that the relationship is not significant and as such the null hypothesis is not rejected.

On the other hand, cross ownership as well as conglomerate ownership show a negative relationship with journalists' professional aptitude. Because the calculated  $p$ -value is not less than the standard  $p$ -value, it shows that the relationship is not significant and as such the null hypothesis is not rejected.

Again religious ownership shows a negative relationship with journalists' professional aptitude. Because the calculated  $p$ -value is not less than the standard  $p$ -value, it shows that the relationship is not significant and as such the null hypothesis is not rejected.

On a general note, the results indicate that control exerted by media owners affects journalists' professional aptitude, but this is however not significant to a level of prime concern.

#### 4.6. Discussion

This study sought to identify media ownership patterns in Cameroon and their implication for journalists' professional aptitude.

Ten media ownership patterns were identified within the context of this study which includes horizontal ownership, cross ownership, vertical ownership, religious ownership, sole proprietor ownership, regional line ownership, co-ownership, community ownership, political line ownership and conglomerate ownership. Cameroon demonstrates a diversity of media ownership patterns which can be good for its democracy as supported by Bagdikian (1983) who noted that, when the media rest on few hands it could be detrimental to democracy. Baker (2006) equally supports this as he equally posits that, media concentration in a few hands is a major threat to freedom of the press. On the other hand, the results show that Cameroon has a unique ownership pattern similar to African countries and much more different from Europe and North America with a huge concentration in the hands of a few individuals. Notwithstanding, major players

such as the Cameroon government, the Groupe l'Anecdote, La Nouvelle Expression, TV+, Spectrum Group, BT Media Group, and more recently DASH Media Group are dominating the media landscape in Cameroon.

The results also establish that media owners exert influence on journalists and media content which affects their professional aptitude. Various means including media policy, direct instructions, editing of news stories, sanctions and orientation of new recruit to respect the editorial policy of the media house are used by media owners. This is not surprising given that previous research had established that media owners have a direct influence on media content. The specific means used to influence content are similar to the work of [Schultz \(1998\)](#), who noted that journalists' professional aptitude is often compromised by pressure from owners. In this same light, the results are in line with the findings of [Benson, Neff and Hessérus \(2018\)](#), who noted that media proprietors use the media to achieve their short and long-term profit goals, primarily by adjusting content. The results also confirm the work of [Altschull \(1984\)](#) who asserted that those who finance the press call the tune.

Another interesting finding is the means by which journalists are compelled to uphold media owners' interests against their wishes. Journalists are most often compelled to uphold media owners' interests through the signed undertaking, strict follow-up of editorial policy, threat of dismissal, sanctions, threat of suspension dropping of a story and dirty talks. In most cases, the journalists are compelled to follow the orders of their proprietors. In cases where the journalists decide to go contrary to their proprietors' orders and uphold professional standards, they are either forced to resign, sent on punitive transfer, demoted, dismissed, salary suspended or delayed, isolated and not assigned to any sensitive or lucrative beat irrespective of their competence in such domain. These measures are difficult to resist especially in Cameroon where journalists are poorly paid ([Ndangam 2009](#); [Nyamnjuh, 2012](#)). With such precarious situation, most journalists are unable to resist these measures for long and thus, succumb to the whims and caprices of their owners. Those who find alternative opening have resigned from their jobs. The likes of former journalists, Constantine Anjangei, Charly Ndi Chia, Tricia Oben, etc. are glaring examples.

Having established that media owners have a negative effect on journalists' professional aptitude, the research equally found out which elements of professional ethics are mostly affected. The findings show that some basic elements of professionalism are at high risk. Elements like truth, verification, relevance, balance, fairness and objectivity are compromised. Journalists are forced to compromise these elements in favour of media owners' interests.

On a general note, findings show that there is a significant relationship between media ownership patterns and journalists' professional aptitude. The tight relationship between these two variables indicates that each can affect the other. This confirms the works of ([Altschull, 1984](#); [Schultz, 1998](#); [Shoemaker & Reese, 2013](#); [Benson, Neff; & Hessérus, 2018](#)) who noted that professional outcome has



a direct relationship to media ownership.

The research went further to look at the extent to which specific media ownership patterns influence journalists' professional aptitude. Findings show that horizontal ownership has a negative relationship with journalists' professional aptitude. The regression test shows that the relationship is not significant enough to call for concern. This finding however calls on the Cameroon media landscape to be vigilant because the more horizontal ownership increases, the more the likelihood for journalists' professional aptitude to be compromised. In this same light, Baker (2006) observes that this type of ownership pattern can make media companies more vulnerable to outside pressures. It puts the media in a situation where governmental or powerful private groups may be able and willing to use economic leverage over one portion of a conglomerate to induce its media "division" to mute critical reporting. Baum and Zhukov (2018), noted that when media outlets are owned by one person, they tend to share contents across the board. In cases where horizontal ownership dominates, there is likely to be less diversity of media products. The research equally found that reasons for the increase of horizontal ownership are linked to patronage, favouritism and even corruption. Media owners are encouraged by their networks in the political system to create different titles in order to benefit from state subsidies and use the titles for other selfish gains.

Findings also show that cross ownership and conglomerate ownership both have a negative effect on professional aptitude. With conglomerate ownership, Baker (2006) observed that the more a company owns a different business, the less critical the editors become. Equally, Baum and Zhukov (2018) hold that in cross ownership the different media share the same content across the board and prevent audience from diversified news sources. Equinox radio and TV for example, have journalists who report across the board (for radio and TV). In such a situation, there is the likelihood that the same reports are passed both on radio and TV. e.g. the Pidgin English news for radio and TV. Conglomerate ownership on its part portrays the owner's economic interest. According to Madhav (2008) conglomerate ownership is often used to promote the other businesses of the owners. Once the owner's interest becomes a priority, professionalism may likely be compromised.

Religious ownership has a negative effect on journalists' professional aptitude. However, the relationship is not significant which shows that the threat calls for no alarm.

Community ownership shows a negative effect on professional aptitude. Again being operational at the community level, their main target is the local population that they serve. Being focused on local news they are less likely to handle sensitive political and economic issues which might jeopardise their owners' interest or government interest. This is why journalists feel freer under such ownership structure. Here, the negative effect on journalists' professional aptitude calls for no major alarm as the relationship is very insignificant.

The findings above answer our research question which shows that media

ownership patterns have a significant effect on journalists' professional aptitude. These findings are in line with works of (Altschull, 1984; Schultz, 1998; Shoemaker & Reese, 2013; Benson, Neff, & Hessérus, 2018). The research hypothesis is equally not rejected as the findings indicate that control exerted by media owners affects journalists' freedom and professional aptitude, though not on a significant level.

## 5. Conclusion

Media concentration in the hands of a few individuals/tycoons has been noted to have a negative effect on journalism and to a large extent democracy. Thus, who owns and runs the media matters in a particular society. This piece of research sort to examine media ownership patterns and their relationship with professionalism in Cameroon. Media ownership patterns in Cameroon have already been examined by authors like Tanjong (2012) and Muluh (2017). This went beyond already established patterns like public and private media ownership to bring out other salient patterns that exist mostly within the private sector and determine how they affect journalists' professional aptitude. In order to achieve this task, a mixed method approach was used making use of qualitative and quantitative analyses. Guided by Altschull's media ownership theory and the Social responsibility theory of Siebert et al. (1956) the following results we obtained.

Beyond private and public media ownership other patterns exist such as horizontal ownership, cross ownership, vertical ownership, religious ownership, sole proprietor ownership, regional line ownership, co-ownership, community ownership, political line ownership and conglomerate ownership. With these diversified ownership patterns Cameroon does not have media concentration in one family or individuals as seen in Europe and North America. Though media concentration is not very visible in Cameroon, some key players in the likes of the Cameroon government (CRTV and SOPECAM), the Groupe l'Anecdote, La Nouvelle Expression, TV+, Spectrum Group, BT Media Group, and more recently DASH Media Group are dominating the media landscape in Cameroon.

Media owners were found to have an influence on journalists and media content which affects their freedom and professional aptitude by using various means including media policy, direct instructions, editing of news stories, sanctions and orientation of new recruits to respect the editorial policy of the media house. Journalists are equally compelled to uphold the media owner's interest through, a signed undertaking, strict follow-up of editorial policy, threat of dismissal, sanctions, threat of suspension, dropping of a story and dirty talks. Where journalists refuse to uphold the owner's interest, they are either forced to resign, sent on punitive transfer, demoted, dismissed, or have their salary suspended or delayed. Others are isolated and not assigned to any sensitive beat irrespective of their competence in such domain. As a result, basic elements of professional ethics like truth, verification, relevance, balance fairness and objectivity are compromised in favour of the owner's political/economic interests.

The research established a significant relationship between journalists' professional aptitude and media ownership patterns. However, when it comes to specific media ownership patterns the relationship among these variables varies. These results show that the research objective was achieved, as they provide empirical evidence of the relationship between media ownership patterns and journalists' professional aptitude in Cameroon.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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