

**MEDIA OWNERSHIP AND ITS ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS ON
PROFESSIONALISM: A CRITICAL LOOK AT JOURNALISTS' EXPERIENCES AT
BIG FM AND STEP TV IN MBALE, UGANDA**

PRISCA ADAEZE NENGER

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Abstract

In Journalism, ethical codes serve as crucial guidelines for practitioners. However, challenges arise in fully adhering to these codes, with media ownership leading to a control syndrome over employees, thus impeding full compliance. In this study, in-depth interview was conducted using the open-ended structured interview guide to investigate the conflict between journalists' professionalism and the interests of private media owners. It examined the dilemmas faced by journalists, their coping mechanisms, and the impact of ownership controls on journalistic practices. The research focused on BIG FM and STEP TV in Mbale, Uganda as the study population. The findings indicate significant conflicts of interest and high levels of control among media owners in Mbale, Uganda. This situation pressures journalists, particularly when adhering to ethical journalism practices outlined in codes of conduct. Thus, the journalists are faced with a two-tier level of control: one from the media owners, and the other from the government. Consequently, society is left with a distorted representation of facts, political manipulation of the media, weakening of the press, and subversion of justice. The study recommends the need for continual updates and reinforcement of national journalism standards, along with ongoing legislation to tackle issues about media ownership and control. Additionally, there is a necessity to establish strong journalism unions to protect members who may be affected by conflicts of interest involving media owners. Mass sensitisation efforts are also required to support journalists and editors in upholding factual reporting across all media platforms, irrespective of owners' interests.

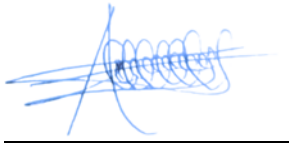
Declaration

I, **PRISCA ADAEZE, NENGER** hereby declare that this Dissertation is my original work, it is not plagiarised, and that all sources are fully referenced.

I also declare that I have not submitted this work to any other institution for any award, neither for any other purpose, nor for publication elsewhere.

Prisca Adaeze, Nenger

RS15M42/021

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Signature

Approval

I certify that this work was carried out by **PRISCA ADAEZE, NENGER** in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies, Uganda Christian University, under my supervision.

Dr. Annette Kezaabu

Supervisor

Signature: 

Head of Department, Post Graduate Studies,

School of Journalism, Media and Communication,

Uganda Christian University,

Mukono, Uganda.

Dedication

First, this work is dedicated to the Lord Almighty, on whose foundation I stood throughout this journey, for bringing me thus far, for His grace, mercies, provisions, and unending love towards me. I remain grateful Lord!

I also dedicate this work to my husband (my friend), Barrister Jerome Aondongu Nenger, and my kids, Hadassah and Hephzibah. Thank you for your unwavering support and love. Even when it felt like all hope was lost regarding the completion of this degree, you stood by me through thick and thin, and here we are today! Thank you for never giving up on me!

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Table of Contents

	Page No.
Abstract.....	i
Declaration.....	ii
Approval	iii
Dedication	iv
Acknowledgments	v
Table of Contents.....	vii
List of Acronyms and Abbreviations	xiii
List of Tables	xiv
List of Figures.....	xv
List of Appendices.....	xvi
CHAPTER 1	1
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY.....	1
1.1 Overview	1
1.2 Background of the Study.....	2
1.2.1 Media Ownership.....	2
1.2.2 Media Ownership and Professional Journalism.....	3
1.2.3 Media Ownership and the Ugandan Media Environment.....	5
1.2.4 Private Media Ownership in Uganda.....	6
1.2.5 Media Ownership and Press Freedom Contradictions.....	9
1.3 Problem Statement.....	12

1.4 Statement of Purpose	14
1.5 General Objectives	14
1.5.1 Specific Objectives	15
1.6 Research Questions	15
1.7 Scope of the Study	15
1.8 Justification	16
1.9 Significance of the Study	16
1.10 Definition of Key Terms	17
1.11 Conceptual Model	18
1.12 Theoretical Framework	19
1.13 Conclusion	19
CHAPTER 2	20
LITERATURE REVIEW	20
2.1 Introduction	20
2.2 Theoretical Underpinnings	20
2.2.1 Critical Political Economy Theory	21
2.2.2 Concept of Competing Loyalties	25
2.2.3 Manipulative Approach	26
2.3 What is Ethics all about?	27
2.4 Journalistic Codes of Ethics	28
2.4.1 Codes of Ethics for Journalists in Uganda	29
2.5 The Ethical Implications of Media Ownership on Professionalism	29

2.6 The Quest for Professionalism versus Ownership Control: A Question of Ethics	33
2.7 Empirical Review	36
2.7.1 The Dilemma Faced by Journalists and Editors Due to Media Owners’ Conflicts of Interest.....	36
2.7.2 Journalists’ Coping Mechanisms and Media Owners’ Conflicts of interest.....	41
2.7.3 Effects of Media Owners’ Conflicts of Interest on Good Journalism Practice.....	44
2.8 Conclusion	46
CHAPTER 3	48
METHODOLOGY	48
3.1 Introduction.....	48
3.2 Research Design	48
3.3 Methodological Approach	48
3.4 Area of Study.....	49
3.5 Information Sources	50
3.6 Study Population.....	50
3.6.1 Sampling Technique	51
3.6.2 Sample Size.....	51
3.7 Data Collection Method.....	52
3.8 Instruments for Data Collection	52
3.9 Procedure for Data Collection	53
3.10 Quality/Error Control	53
3.11 Data Processing and Analysis	54

3.12 Ethical Considerations.....	59
3.13 Methodological Constraints	59
3.14 Conclusion	60
CHAPTER 4.....	61
DATA PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION.....	61
4.1 Introduction.....	61
4.2 Data Presentation and Analysis.....	61
4.2.1 General Data	61
4.3 Interview Guide.....	63
4.4 Emerging Themes	63
4.4.1 Research Question One:.....	64
4.4.2 Research Question Two:	72
4.4.3 Research Question Three:	79
4.5 Conclusion	89
CHAPTER 5.....	90
ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS	90
5.1 Introduction.....	90
5.2 The Dilemma faced by Journalists and Editors due to Media Owners’ Conflicts of interest.....	90
5.2.1 Understanding of Ethics and Professional Codes	91
5.2.2 Conflicts of Interest and Ethical Dilemma.....	93
5.2.3 Media Ownership Structures, Editorial Independence, and Journalists’ Autonomy ...	95

5.2.4 The Two-Tier Level of Control: Media Owners and Government.....	97
5.3 The Coping Mechanism Deployed by Journalists and Editors Regarding Media Owners' Conflicts of Interest.....	102
5.3.1 Perception of Private Media Ownership.....	102
5.3.2 Self-Regulation, Sticking to Professional Codes, Avoidance, Tolerance, and Collaboration.....	105
5.3.3 Using Theoretical Frameworks.....	108
5.3.4 Proactive Measures to Address Media Ownership Control.....	109
5.4 The Effect of Media Owners' Conflicts of Interest on Good Journalism Practice in the Media and Society.....	114
5.4.1 Consequences of Conflicts of Interest on Journalists' Professional Output and the Society.....	115
5.4.2 Future Outlook on Journalism Practice.....	125
5.5 The Ethical Theories and Their Implications	131
5.6 Conclusion	133
CHAPTER 6.....	135
IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSION.....	135
6.1 Introduction.....	135
6.2 Implications of the Study.....	135
6.3 Limitations of the Study	136
6.4 Recommendations.....	137
6.5 Suggestions for Future Study.....	139

6.6 Conclusion	140
References	142
APPENDICES	154
APPENDIX A: Consent Form	154
APPENDIX B: Interview Guide	155
APPENDIX C: Code of ethics observed by the National Institute of Journalists of Uganda, NIJU	157
APPENDIX D: Journalism Codes of Ethics as Developed by the Independent Media Council of Uganda.....	158

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACME:	African Centre for Media Excellence
AIJ:	African Institute for Investigative Journalism
BBC:	British Broadcasting Corporation
ENA:	Ethiopian News Agency
HRNJ-UGANDA:	Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda
IMCU:	Independent Media Council of Uganda
MCU:	Media Council of Uganda
NBS:	Nile Broadcasting Service
NIJU:	National Institute of Journalists of Uganda
NMG:	Nation Media Group
NORHED:	Norwegian Programme for Capacity Development in Higher Education and Research for Development
NRM:	National Resistance Movement
SBC:	Step Broadcasting Corporation
SRPGS:	School of Research and Post Graduate Studies
UBOS:	Uganda Bureau of Statistics
UCC:	Uganda Communications Commission
UCU:	Uganda Christian University
UJA:	Uganda Journalists Association
UN-HABITAT	United Nations-Habitat

List of Tables

	Page
Table 1: Respondents at Big FM.....	56
Table 2: Respondents at Step TV.....	57
Table 3: Emerging Themes from Research Question One.....	58
Table 4: Emerging Themes from Research Question Two.....	66
Table 5: Emerging Themes from Research Question Three.....	73

List of Figures

	Page
Figure 1: Conceptual model for the components of press freedom	18
Figure 2: Steps of Data Analysis.....	57

List of Appendices

	Page
Appendix A: Consent Form.....	112
Appendix B: Interview Guide.....	113
Appendix C: Code of Ethics Observed by the National Institute of Journalists of Uganda, NIJU.....	115
Appendix D: Journalism Codes of Ethics as Developed by the Independent Media Council of Uganda.....	116

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Overview

In Journalism, like every other profession, moral principles serve as a standard-bearer for practice. These are enshrined in the profession's ethical codes, which every journalist and media practitioner should abide by. However, there are certain impediments to the full compliance of these codes, one of which has been identified as complications from media ownership due to its resultant 'control syndrome' over the employees (herein referred to as the journalists employed by the media owner). The case of media ownership globally and, particularly in Uganda, seems to be a 'recurring decimal' that has not been fully addressed, most likely because of the economic implications. This current study on 'Media Ownership and its Ethical Implications on Professionalism in Uganda' dissects how journalists' professionalism conflicts with private media owners' interests and the daily dilemmas they face on the job. The study also considers the coping mechanisms these journalists are adopting and the effect of these ownership controls on good journalism practice in the media and society, using BIG FM and STEP TV in Mbale, as the study population. The study was methodically conducted from one chapter to another, as portrayed here:

Chapter One starts with the general introduction of the study and continues through the background of the study, then to the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions and objectives, the scope and the limitations of the study, the significance and the justification of the study, as well as the definition of terms amongst others. **Chapter Two** reviews the empirical literature on media ownership, ethics, and professionalism in the media and presents the critical political economy of the media theory, all in a bid to drive home the

points of inquiry in this research. The methodology is presented in **Chapter Three**, while in **Chapter Four**, the data gathered from the respondents is presented and interpreted alongside while generating (emerging) themes for the analysis. **Chapter Five** is the thematic analysis and discussion of findings. Lastly, **Chapter Six**, the concluding chapter, wraps up the entire work and recommends further studies.

1.2 Background of the Study

Press freedom has been a topical issue since time immemorial because of its pivotal role in human evolution in the social organisation of the public (public service) in what is today known as governance. The level of press freedom in any society has been shown to be strongly associated with the level of media ethics practiced, with studies linking ethical journalism to greater autonomy from ownership and external pressures (Oji, 2007; Chaudhary & Chaudhary, 2020; Cruft, 2022; Maniou et al., 2023); thus, it could determine the level of professionalism that could be attained by journalists in that society (Ghosh, 2018). Several factors have limited many nations from achieving complete press freedom. These include interference by media owners (Baum & Zhukov, 2019), human factors in media ethics (Fortner & Fackler, 2017), the state or government interference (Namusoke, 2018; Curran & Seaton, 2018), and the level of external influences (Huang, 2019) on a nation, among other factors.

1.2.1 Media Ownership

Media ownership structure plays a pivotal role in shaping the content, editorial policies, and overall direction of media organisations. Thus, making the journalists and editors employed in these media houses abide by their masters' (herein referred to as the media owners') dictates. Media ownership refers to the control and management of media organisations, which can be

state-owned, privately owned, corporate-controlled, or community-owned. It significantly influences media content, editorial policies, and news production, often shaping narratives to align with the owners' interests. Media ownership, as defined by McChesney (2008), involves the control and influence exercised by individuals or corporations over media organisations, which can significantly affect the content and perspectives presented to the public. McChesney emphasises that the political economy of media reveals how ownership structures can shape the narratives disseminated through various media outlets, often prioritising owners' interests over the public good. This concentration of ownership can lead to a homogenisation of viewpoints and a reduction in the diversity of information available, raising critical concerns about the role of media in democratic societies. Research indicates that media ownership plays a crucial role in shaping news coverage, often aligning reporting with owners' interests rather than serving the public good (Ilomuanya et al., 2023). The situation presents a significant ethical dilemma for journalists, as they are often torn between serving the interests of their employer and serving the public good. This conflict raises critical questions about professional ethics, particularly for journalists who prioritise ethical standards in their practice.

1.2.2 Media Ownership and Professional Journalism

The issue of media ownership control extends beyond Uganda and/or East Africa, as similar trends have been observed in other regions, such as Pakistan, where media ownership concentration has negatively impacted ethical journalism standards (Adnan et al., 2019). The ethical dilemmas faced by journalists in Uganda are reflective of broader global trends. Raza et al. discuss how media concentration can adversely affect journalistic independence, especially in contexts where media organisations rely heavily on advertising revenue (Raza et al., 2022). This reliance can create conflicts of interest, compelling journalists to prioritise the financial

interests of their owners over their ethical obligations to report objectively. The pressures exerted by owners can lead to a deterioration of journalistic autonomy, particularly in democratic regimes where such autonomy is often assumed (Reich & Hanitzsch, 2013).

Professional journalism is anchored in core principles such as objectivity, accuracy, fairness, accountability, and independence. In Uganda, these principles are especially vital given the country's complex media landscape, which is shaped by various internal and external influences. While regulatory bodies like the Uganda Journalists Association (UJA) and the Media Council of Uganda oversee media ethics, journalists often face significant challenges in maintaining these standards. One major obstacle is media ownership interference, where proprietors impose political or financial agendas on reporting, thereby compromising objectivity. This challenge is exacerbated by the financial instability of many media outlets, which may prioritise sensationalism over factual reporting (Muwanga et al., 2020). Journalists frequently find themselves caught between ethical reporting and the expectations of their employers or the government (Muwanga et al., 2020). As a result, certain voices are amplified while others are marginalised, weakening the democratic process and restricting the public's access to balanced information.

Moreover, a significant number of media outlets are owned by individuals or entities with close ties to the government, leading to biased reporting and limited critical coverage of state actions (Kazibwe, 2018; Muwanga et al., 2020). Financial pressures further contribute to this issue, as media houses often prioritise profitability over journalistic independence, ultimately compromising the quality and integrity of news reporting (Vallesi, 2021).

1.2.3 Media Ownership and the Ugandan Media Environment

For over three decades, particularly since the early 1990s, there has been a marked increase in the establishment of broadcast media outlets across many developing countries, with Uganda serving as a significant case study (Maractho, 2015). In Uganda, media ownership has transitioned from a state-controlled monopoly to a more diverse landscape with private entities gaining prominence in radio, television, and digital platforms (Chibita, 2010; Kazibwe, 2018). The emergence of private media houses, such as BIG FM and STEP TV, has intensified competition while also raising ethical concerns. Although the expansion of private media has fostered a competitive environment, it has also introduced challenges related to journalistic integrity. Financial and political interests can exert pressure on journalists, potentially compromising editorial independence (Adnan et al., 2019; Maweu, 2014).

Since 1993, broadcast media ownership in 'Museveni's Uganda' (Maractho, 2015) has been liberalised, leading to the proliferation of media houses, especially privately-owned media (Maractho, 2015; Kazibwe, 2018). Fourie (2007) sees liberalisation as a process by which the State seeks to expand the number of participants in the market, usually by creating competing providers of communication services. This opens up media ownership to whoever has the financial means to own a media house, unlike in the pre-liberalisation era where the media was solely owned by the government (Chibita, 2010; Maweu, 2014; Maractho, 2015) and served the government's interests; telling the people only what the government wanted them to hear. Liberalisation of the media comes with benefits such as multiplicity of outlets (Maractho, 2015), and private media ownership. However, it also comes with challenges, like dealing with multiple players and/or private media owners who see the media like every other business, thus focusing on just the economic interest (profit maximisation) at the expense of professionalism. Despite

the remarkable improvements in press freedom in Uganda, it may not be said that the press is entirely free from encumbrances from the government because, in reality, press freedom and democracy ebb and flow; some media restrictions have lessened, and others have worsened as the government's interference remains pervasive (Cohen & McIntyre, 2023). From this perspective, Akpabio, Katunzi, and Mfaume (2013) contend that private media may still be endangered.

1.2.4 Private Media Ownership in Uganda

Just like in most African countries, the changes and developments in the Ugandan media have been fundamentally swayed by several factors, mainly social, political, and economic (Kazibwe, 2018; Teer-Tomaselli, 2018). That is why Maractho (2015) posited that broadcasting diversity and independence remained elusive, and little development of the sector beyond growth in numbers (multiplicity of outlets) was experienced. Against this backdrop, the media in Uganda turned a new leaf from the sole monopoly of a government-controlled media in the pre-liberalised era to a liberalised media where private players are allowed and/or licensed to operate a media house (Chibita, 2010), provided they meet the requirements and also have the means to do so. This democratic wind of change that swept through the continent brought about an increased cry for multiparty politics and the liberalisation and privatisation of the media (Maweu, 2014), thereby leading to a competitive media space.

Considering these dynamics, Repucci (2019) contended that the viability of alternative online news media organisations in developing and transforming countries could assuage the already challenging situation faced by traditional and sometimes monopolised media, which often struggle with issues such as limited access, censorship, and bias owing to the control mechanisms involved. According to Repucci, this shift could help improve the overall media landscape in

these regions. As such, the emergence of social media, enabled by digital devices such as smartphones, tablets, and computers, has further transformed the media landscape by driving commercialisation. This shift has contributed to a notable rise in private ownership of media enterprises, reshaping the dynamics of information dissemination and media consumption. Most media owners now see the media business as any other business, at the expense of the social responsibility role of the press, especially when it comes to its public service duty and/or obligations to the society in which it operates. That is why Wilding et al. (2018) noted that the rise of digital platforms has forced news producers to make compromises that weaken the quality of journalistic content, which is crucial for journalists to maintain their authority as watchdogs, representatives of the public, and experts on current events (Wilding et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the forces of demand and supply in any competitive business environment go a long way in determining the efforts that will be put in place to reach the goal. So, also in media operations, journalists and editors as news producers bear in mind the audience's satisfaction (consumers) before embarking on any (news) production process, as they put public service/interest over any other interests. However, the tide is changing due to the commercial interests of media owners and managers at the expense of public service or the common good of members of society. Journalists and editors who work in private media, particularly in Uganda, therefore try to prioritise the business interest of their employers before considering any other to avoid crossing the 'invisible line' as referred to by Oloka-Onyango in Chibita (2010). From a critical political-economic perspective, private ownership largely integrates private media into market power structures and logic (Maweu, 2014).

BIG FM and STEP TV, two prominent privately-owned media outlets in eastern Uganda, are well-regarded for their diverse programming that encompasses news, entertainment, and

engaging talk shows. The ownership structures of these media houses play a significant role in shaping their editorial policies and decisions. This dynamic situation raises important questions about the ethical implications of media ownership on journalists' professionalism. By exploring the influence of ownership, we can gain valuable insights into how it affects the integrity, objectivity, and overall credibility of the news and content produced by these stations, making them noteworthy case studies in the broader context of media ethics and accountability.

Big FM 97.6 Mbale

Big FM Mbale, also known as Bright FM and fondly called “Munene Munene” (which means very big or great in Luganda), started operations in 2014 and runs on 97.6 FM. It is usually broadcast in English and two other local languages, Lumasaba and Luganda. Its coverage cuts across most eastern parts of Uganda and extends to some parts of northern Uganda, such as Kaberamaido, Kabong, Katakwi, and Moroto. Its programming combines entertainment and information, though it tilts more towards entertainment. This is because the target population is youths between 15 and 35 years of age.

STEP TV Mbale

STEP Television Mbale, which commenced operations in 2009, is a part of a media conglomerate known as STEP Broadcasting Corporation (SBC), which also houses STEP FM and Open Gate FM, all in Mbale City. STEP TV is known as the major TV station in eastern Uganda because of its wide coverage in all parts of the eastern region, and even extends to Kayunga (central Uganda), Kyoga (northern Uganda), and Nakuru (Kenya). The goal of the TV station is to provide local content to community members. As such, they broadcast in three languages: Lumasaba, Luganda, and English.

1.2.5 Media Ownership and Press Freedom Contradictions

Globally, there is a marked disparity between the theoretical tenets of press freedom and their practical realisation, especially in developing nations. This issue is particularly pronounced in Africa and other regions, where the notion of press freedom is often presented as a façade, without substantive enforcement (Sobel & McIntyre, 2020). In Uganda, journalists frequently encounter significant contradictions that highlight the complexities of press freedom within the socio-political landscape. Kazibwe (2018), in his analysis of the media landscape under Yoweri Museveni's leadership compared to his predecessors, argued that the media enjoys relatively more freedom to express themselves in recent times than in the past; nevertheless, this perception must be contextualised within the broader historical narrative of media repression and state control:

It was discovered that despite the existing limitations on media freedom, Museveni has provided more freedom to the media than all the previous regimes. However, it is important to note that the relative media freedom during Museveni's rule is largely due to the global economic and political forces (Kazibwe, 2018, p. 40).

Given these contrasting realities, the Freedom House report (2017) and the report of February 8, 2021, identified that lack of press independence and emasculation of press freedom reached a new peak during the contested January 2021 elections in which the Ugandan government clamped down on independent media by restricting access to connectivity and blocking access to social media platforms (Schenkkan & Linzer, 2021). With the events of the past January 2021 elections, internet restrictions in Uganda are the emerging trend in press emasculation (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2021). By these actions, the Ugandan Government has greatly limited free expression through systematic mechanisms within the law and in other possible forms.

Owing to this influence, Freedom House (2021, 2017) concluded that the Ugandan government had forced the Press into having a predictable relationship with an underlying obvious advantage to the government and press emasculation, and possible human rights abuses. Due to this predictable relationship, most media houses and their owners tend to play safe rather than play right, thereby laying out specific internal standards and rules in the form of house style for practitioners (employees) to follow through if they must work for them.

Meanwhile there is a general perception that journalists who work for private-owned media are more likely to realise their professional potential than journalists who work for government-owned media. Studies indicate that journalists working independently in private media often enjoy greater autonomy, which enhances their ability to engage in investigative reporting and serve as watchdogs of public interest. This autonomy contrasts sharply with those working in government-owned media, where they may experience limitations on their journalistic scope and freedom of expression, influencing their overall professional development (Lowrey & Erzikova, 2014; Skovsgaard, 2013). That is why Skjerdal (2012), in his study on the concept of *Competing Loyalties*, clearly summarised the ordeal faced by journalists who work for government-owned media. Skjerdal narrated his puzzling encounter in Addis Ababa with a journalist in the Ethiopian News Agency (ENA), who noted that they are “a government mouthpiece,” and as such, they must do what the government wants. As perplexed as Skjerdal was, he questioned why such a great journalist who knows his professional onions would cower silently in the face of the truth, only to sing his master's praises at the expense of his professional duty to the public when he can stand his ground in a privately owned media instead. However, that does not seem to be the case for journalists who work in privately owned media, as most of them face a double dilemma over doing what the government and their media owners want simultaneously, as against what is

professionally and ethically right. Similarly, research by Rodney-Gumede suggests that journalists in environments where the government exerts significant influence may face challenges in maintaining a standard of professionalism, particularly when their roles may be at odds with governmental agendas. This creates an environment where the professional potential of journalists could be stifled as they navigate conflicting expectations between their ethical obligations to society and their roles as enforcers of government narratives (Rodney-Gumede, 2022).

From the discussions above, it is clear that the underlying issue plaguing journalism is not the medium itself, but rather the dynamics of ownership. The adage, "he who pays the piper dictates the tune," encapsulates this issue. The prevailing philosophy in modern journalism creates a significant dilemma for practitioners across media outlets. Many journalists often find themselves in a tough position, having to either jeopardise the fundamental ethics of their profession or perform their jobs without restraint, all the while being cognisant of the repercussions dictated by media owners. This tension underscores the conflict between editorial independence and the economic pressures from stakeholders in the media industry. For instance, in cases where the editors' or journalists' decision-making process conflicts with the dictates of the media owners, they are left in a dilemma of dancing to the tune of media owners to be able to keep their jobs or, as a consequence, resign from their current jobs and go elsewhere. The latter option is most unlikely in a developing country like Uganda, where unemployment steadily rises (Alfonsi et al., 2017).

The background to this study highlights the critical intersection of media ownership, press freedom, and journalistic professionalism in Uganda, revealing the significant ethical challenges that journalists face in balancing professional integrity with ownership interests. Media

ownership, whether state-controlled or privately held, profoundly influences editorial policies, news content, and the broader media landscape. While private media outlets such as BIG FM and STEP TV offer a platform for diverse narratives, they are also subject to financial and political pressures that can compromise journalistic independence. The study underscores the urgent need for regulatory frameworks and ethical safeguards to mitigate ownership interference and promote a more transparent, independent, and accountable media sector. By examining the Ugandan media environment through the lens of ownership dynamics using the experiences of journalists in Big FM and Step TV in Mbale, Uganda as a model, this research contributes to the broader discourse on media ethics and press freedom, emphasising the necessity of reforms to uphold democratic values and the public's right to unbiased information. Therefore, the findings of this study could potentially shape the future of media professionalism in Uganda, making it a crucial piece of research for all stakeholders in the field.

1.3 Problem Statement

Globally, all nations desire freedom of speech and press freedom; however, it is rarely actualised, especially among underdeveloped and developing nations like Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, and Nigeria (Cohen & McIntyre, 2018; Downs & Cowan, 2012; Duho et al., 2020; Cohen & Hopkinson, 2023). Press freedom is a vital index for human development, and its absence complicates sustainable national growth (Ejigu & Gebru, 2020; Höglund, 2019). Many studies have sought to identify the causes, key players, and consequences of restricted press freedom. However, issues such as the clash of interests between media owners and journalists remain underexplored in the Ugandan context, a void the current study intends to fill.

In Uganda, existing research highlights instances of controlled press freedom and interference. For example, Sobel and McIntyre (2020) note that legal and extralegal measures limit Uganda's

press freedom, but they do not investigate how media owners' nuances influence journalism ethics and professionalism. Similarly, Höglund and Schaffer (2021) emphasised the importance of legal mobilisation to defend media practitioners under a semi-authoritarian regime. While Höglund and Schaffer (2021) acknowledged the use of legal action by Ugandan journalists to protect media freedom, they did not assess the impact of ownership control on journalistic professionalism, especially with regards to exploring the dilemma of journalists working in owner-controlled media, where content is shaped by the owners' dispositions, including his or her dispositions towards the ruling class.

Other studies also highlight gaps. In another study, Sobel and McIntyre (2019) evaluated whether local-language radio stations in Kenya are helpful or harmful. They found that journalists recognise their value primarily for cultural preservation, which led to increased rural development and political participation, but did not address how owners' agendas might limit journalists. Blanc, Islam, Patten, and Branco (2017) explored corporate anti-corruption disclosure but did not consider how such disclosures might empower journalists to uphold professional standards when owners constrain them. Likewise, Namusoke (2018) examines state-led attacks on press freedom in Uganda but overlooks how private owners might undermine journalists' professional ethics. Baum and Zhukov (2019) show that ownership chains standardise foreign policy coverage but do not focus on the implications for journalists' professionalism. Ghosh (2018) and Semambo (2017) both reveal ethical crises stemming from publisher, advertiser, and government influence, yet they leave gaps regarding private owners' impact on ethics and professionalism.

Given these considerations, the present study investigates the conflicts of interest journalists face in privately-owned Ugandan media, an area often overshadowed by government-driven

narratives. As Skjerdal (2012) notes, private media outlets are perceived as politically aligned with opposition groups, which can skew the understanding of how ownership shapes journalistic decisions. Maweu (2014) argues that evaluating media performance requires examining the political and economic forces at play. Accordingly, this study explores how journalists navigate these pressures to maintain best practices, offering insights that could shape the future of journalism in Uganda and other developing nations.

1.4 Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate the kind of dilemma journalists encounter on the job, owing to conflicts of interest (herein referred to as competing loyalties according to Skjerdal, 2012), between their professional ethics and the commercial interest of their employers, due to the ownership control syndrome. The study also seeks to derive practical knowledge from journalists' real-life experiences on the job with regards to managing and resolving the conflicts that arise when it comes to yielding to their master's call or sticking to their professional standards, as well as how these competing loyalties affect good journalism practice. Again, the study will, in the end, find out from the journalists why media owners who venture into the media business see it as every other business. Yet, the core public service obligation of the media underlies the argument that the media business cannot be regarded as any other business (Obijiofor & Hanusch, 2011). This study will, therefore, focus on the following general and specific objectives:

1.5 General Objectives

The study seeks to analyse the ethical implications of private media ownership on professionalism regarding journalists' experiences in two privately-owned media (BIG FM and

STEP TV) in Mbale, Uganda. It will thus examine how media ownership controls and affects journalists' decisions in these media houses, respectively in Mbale and in Uganda at large.

1.5.1 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of this study are:

1. To investigate the ethical dilemma journalists and editors face in privately-owned media, owing to the owners' conflicts of interest, which they encounter daily.
2. To examine how journalists and editors deal with the media owners' conflicts of interest in privately-owned media.
3. To explore journalists' perspectives regarding how media owners' conflicts of interest affect good journalism practice (professionalism) in the media.

1.6 Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to seek in-depth knowledge on the research topic:

1. What ethical dilemmas do journalists and editors encounter as media practitioners in privately-owned media due to the owner's conflicts of interest?
2. What coping mechanisms do journalists and editors employ to navigate the owner's conflicts of interest in privately-owned media?
3. How do owners' conflicts of interest affect good journalism practice in the media?

1.7 Scope of the Study

The general scope of the study will be limited to private media ownership and its ethical implications for the journalistic profession, using the experiences of journalists from two broadcast media organisations (one radio, Big FM, and one television, STEP TV) in Mbale as

case studies. However, in the literature, the researcher may reference other media organisations outside Mbale and compare them with government-owned media where needed.

1.8 Justification

This study justifies itself by filling obvious gaps in the literature regarding the dilemmas, challenges, and problems facing ethical journalism in different parts of Uganda. Critical of the concerns is how ethical dilemmas affect media practitioners working in State-controlled media or privately-owned media organisations, whose allegiance is controlled by the State rather than professionalism.

This study will also explore various competing loyalties that journalists and editors may face daily in privately-owned media, the possible sources of these conflicts, and their ethical implications for the journalistic profession. Furthermore, an inquiry will be made into the coping strategies being adopted by these media practitioners in managing the competing loyalties they regularly face, with a view to suggesting effective ways of managing their negative impacts on both the media practitioners, the media owners, and Ugandan society at large in order to enhance professionalism.

1.9 Significance of the Study

This study will be of essential benefit to practicing journalists, media owners, and society at large. It identified and put in clear terms the dilemma journalists face daily on the job, so that media owners will feel their pulse and allow them to do their job as they ought to. It will also benefit the larger society, as a reasonable compromise will lead to a better output of information and programmes in the society, as the media is socially responsible to the society in which they operate.

Overall, this research will contribute to the existing literature on media ownership and control as well as the ethical dilemmas journalists face in the newsroom, with particular emphasis on privately-owned media and the way forward. In addition, it will broaden the horizons for further studies on the subject being researched and the like.

1.10 Definition of Key Terms

The following terms have been conceptualised as their meaning applies to the current study:

Commercialism - It is the state of profit maximisation as a matter of priority, at the expense of every other thing.

Commercialisation – It is the process of making a product or service available for public consumption with the goal of financial gain.

Commodification of News - The process of exchanging or selling news and media messages as products for economic value.

Competing loyalties - Refers to dual or shifting loyalties. That is loyalty to two or more interests that potentially conflict, leading to ethical dilemmas.

Conflict of interests - This is a clash between a person's private interests and his/her official responsibilities. It is simply referred to as a clash of values.

Ethical dilemma - Occurs when conflicting moral principles challenge a person's decision-making, as each choice and/or action may violate ethical values, leading to a compromise.

Ethical implication - The moral consequences of someone's action as it relates to others.

Ethical theories - These are concepts that guide one's moral thinking and behaviour.

Journalism - The act of gathering and disseminating information as news through a mass medium for public consumption.

Journalist - A person skilled in the art of news gathering and dissemination for public consumption through a mass medium (radio, television, newspaper, magazine, social media, etc.).

Media Ownership - This is an individual's or corporate control of the media, usually for political or economic purposes.

Press Freedom - This is an ideal regulatory environment in which the media and journalists operate without restrictions and/or sanctions from the government of the day.

Professionalism - The level of excellence or competence expected from an expert or a skilled person.

1.11 Conceptual Model

Below is a Conceptual Model for the Components of Press Freedom as concerning this study:

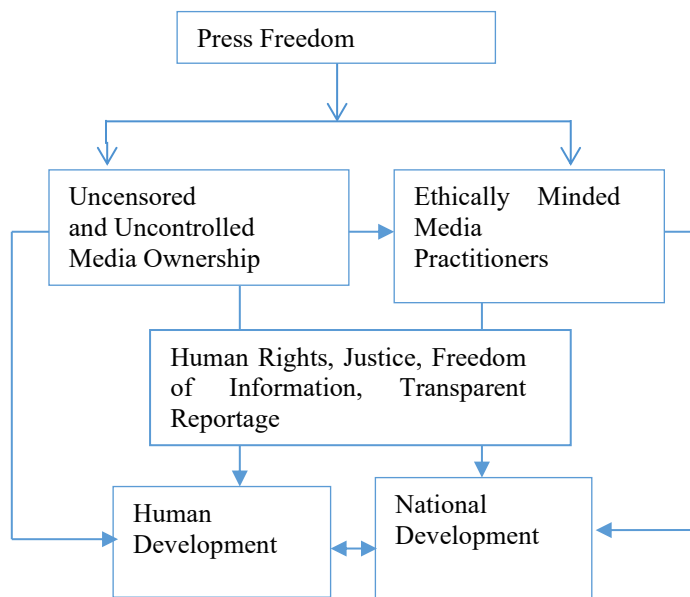


Figure 1: Source – Generated by the author.

The schematic diagram in Figure 1 above shows the relationships among the variables to be studied. The conceptual model depicts that press freedom can only be guaranteed by an uncensored and uncontrolled media ownership structure. This will spur ethically-minded media

practice among journalists, leading to human rights actualisation, justice, freedom of information, and transparent reportage for human and national development (Höglund, 2019). While not currently reflective of the majority of African media due to the prevailing operations and practices of the press in African society, the described scenario demonstrates an ideal model for media operations in a free or liberal society, assuming all other conditions are optimal.

1.12 Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in the Neo-Marxist Critical Political Economy Theory (McQuail, 2010) and will incorporate Skjerdal's (2012) Concept of Competing Loyalties. Additionally, the study utilised Melaku's (2008) Manipulative Approach model of media ownership to reinforce the researcher's argument.

1.13 Conclusion

In the opening of this chapter, the research begins with a detailed overview of the study's background, including the problem statement, purpose, objectives, and derived research questions. The subsequent chapter will critically review relevant literature about the study's focus.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This study utilised McQuail's (2010), Skjerdal's (2012), and Melaku's (2008) theories, as well as literature from Nwabueze (2005), Obijiofor and Hanusch (2011) work, among others, to explain the concept of media ownership and its ethical implications on the journalistic profession. Notably, the neo-Marxist Critical Political Economy theory by McQuail (2010), the Concept of Competing Loyalties by Skjerdal (2012), and Melaku's (2008) Manipulative Approach will be the compass that will drive this research. That notwithstanding, findings from other researchers relevant to the study were also reviewed, bearing in mind the research questions for the study.

2.2 Theoretical Underpinnings

Skjerdal's (2012) *Concept of Competing Loyalties* will be used to anchor the paradigm behind the first objective of the study, which is to investigate the kind of ethical dilemma journalists and editors face in privately-owned media, owing to the owner's conflicts of interest, which they encounter on the job daily. It will help to understand how journalists deal with the conflict of their jobs and ethical journalism. The neo-Marxist *Critical Political Economy Theory* by McQuail (2010) will help explore the second objective of this study, which is to examine how journalists and editors deal with media owners' conflicts of interest in privately-owned media. Finally, the *Manipulative Approach* by Melaku (2008) will also be employed to explore the study's last objective, which seeks to explore journalists' perspectives regarding how media owners' conflicts of interest affect good journalism practice (professionalism) in the media. Employing these theoretical paradigms in the study guides the understanding of media ownership

and its ethical implications on journalists, specifically in privately-owned media and the Ugandan media environment.

2.2.1 Critical Political Economy Theory

The idea of political economy revolves around power and control due to one's social status, with particular reference to the producer (media owner), the distributor (journalists and editors), and the consumer (the audience). Mosco (2009), attests to this by stating that:

Political economy is the study of the social relations, particularly the power relations that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources, including communication resources... A more general and ambitious definition of political economy is the study of control and survival in social life. Mosco (2009, pp. 2-3).

Critical Political Economy is a concept used by critical theorists working on the neo-Marxist tradition to refer to a general view of the media and society in which material (economic) factors play a determining role in which politics is primarily about economic power (McQuail, 2010). This approach centres on media activity as an economic process, leading to the commodification of media products or content. According to McQuail:

The political-economic theory is a socially critical approach that focuses primarily on the relation between the economic structure and dynamics of media industries and the ideological content of the media (McQuail, 2010, p. 96).

Here, the modern media are seen as part of the economic system with a close connection to the political system in the society in which they operate. The propositions highlighted by McQuail (2010) are:

- Economic control and logic are determinants - This implies that the instrumentality of economic resources is a well-known determinant tool in the hands of media owners who

exploit it to serve their purpose. The State (Government) expects to utilise this political-economic advantage to the detriment of ethical journalism, especially when it opposes the tenets of good journalism.

- Media structure always tends towards monopoly – Good journalism comes at a high cost and patriotism. Most of the time, the resources required for proper media structure come at a high cost, so only very few individuals and corporate bodies can pull it through. This limited participation increases the tendency of media houses to monopolise, as real competition is non-existent compared to other sectors. The presence of a media monopoly, especially in the hands of the State and a few individuals, has reduced the quality of journalism and increased the emasculation of upcoming media houses treated as rising opposition. This has aggravated the loss of public voice and press freedom.
- Global integration of media ownership develops - Although the global integration of media ownership structure has continued to evolve, content influence revolves around resource-control ownership and political allegiance and affinity to the ruling class, which ultimately detracts freedom of speech, professionalism, and ethical journalism.
- Contents and audiences are commodified – The greatest enemy of ethical journalism is transactional journalism (brown envelope journalism), in which information and news are distorted by the highest bidders who have the means to do so at the expense of professionalism and the public. Here, the leading cause of commodified content is identified as the poor standard of journalism practice by media houses, which see media practitioners inadequately remunerated without risks and hazards allowance, among others.
- Real diversity decreases - One could also argue that at the national level, the true essence of journalism, which is human and societal development based on equity, equality, justice,

and freedom, has been compromised, thereby reducing diversity. This narrowing of focus can make it difficult for media houses to fulfill their core mission. Instead, economic exploitation and political affiliations may overshadow their intended purpose, distorting the role of journalism.

- Opposition and alternative voices are marginalised - This is purely the political element of the theory in which the media is launched and used to extend the battleground for crushing political oppositions, especially those opposed to the ruling power, which is believed to use the paraphernalia of the State to suppress press freedom and ethical journalism, which promotes rising voices against the State as if they are members of political opposition.
- Public interest in communication is subordinated to private interests - For the masses who rely on press freedom to air their views and express their opinions, critical political economy theory equally propounds that the public's interest in journalism is also lost to the private interests of the media houses, whose interests are tailored to transactional journalism by commodification of the press and subservient service to the ruling power.
- Access to the benefits of communication is unequally distributed - Critical political economy theory also disenfranchises the public and prevents them from accessing facts and accurate information except distorted and commodified information. This is a critical aspect where media house owners are not to be compromised by the State or other elements who may use their resources to emasculate press freedom.

In a contrary view, Maweu (2014) noted that the critical political economy approach focuses on the equilibrium between capitalist enterprise and public intervention, delving into moral questions such as justice, equity, and the public good rather than just technical efficiency issues.

McQuail (2010) portrays the critical political economy of the media as more of a one-sided control by media owners who elevate business interests over public interests, whereas Maweu (2014) sees the term as a balance of power between both capitalists' enterprise and public intervention. So, in the latter, we see the media's code of ethics readily at play because the core ethics of the media profession revolves around balance, fairness, and justice. However, these may be compromised considering the proponents of critical political economy theory, which preserves economic interests and allegiance to the State to the detriment of the true tenets of press freedom and ethical journalism. For instance, the preposition of the first objective of this study explores the ethical dilemma journalists and editors face in private-owned media, owing to the owners' conflicts of interest that they encounter on the job daily. This dilemma, as caused by the need to practice ethical journalism and the need to serve the purpose of media house owners, was aptly captured by critical political economy paradigms in which the need to remain economically viable and politically advantageous is the real thing that governs media house owners' vision. These ideals are ironically against the spirit of press freedom and ethical journalism, and they are the causes and sources of dilemma for journalists working in media houses, especially in private-owned media. This is because of the ownership control that the private media owners exhibit, which is against ethical journalism and press freedom. If that is the case, then why has the critical political economy approach to media primarily focused on how ownership and control are used to manipulate content in order to benefit the wealthy and powerful, often to the detriment of the public? (Maweu, 2014). Is it because those who control the political economy seem to care less about the public sentiments by emasculating the press freedom from which the public's voice is heard to attend to their personal whims and caprices?

Teer-Tomaselli (2018) noted that: “Political economy is a holistic, embracing paradigm, flexible to the needs of the time while maintaining a core integrity of rigor and normative principle.” The political economy is a critical perspective, but other valuable ways of seeing the world exist (Mosco, 2009). Therefore, the researcher has incorporated other concepts and/or approaches to gain a deeper understanding of media ownership and its ethical implications on professionalism.

2.2.2 Concept of Competing Loyalties

As proposed by Skjerdal (2012), this Concept of Competing Loyalties is a conceptual framework that seeks to illuminate a situation in which journalists endure conflict between different commitments, all in a bid to keep body and soul together (to survive). Skjerdal noted that:

The competing loyalties model acknowledges that journalists are bound by several commitments simultaneously... The argument here is that even though professional and national loyalty may appear uneven in different situations, they are not mutually exclusive (Skjerdal, 2012, p. 242).

Competing loyalties revolve around dual or multiple commitments media practitioners face daily as practicing journalists. The concept of competing loyalties reveals how both or different loyalties are present at the same time persistently and forcefully. As a result, a conflict of interest and ethical dilemma arises when journalists find their professional commitment being challenged by a non-professional commitment (Skjerdal, 2012).

Based on the critical political economy theory, the concept of competing loyalties is a major factor that determines and explains why some transformations in the economies of the media are tilting towards the balance between journalists' obligation to professional values and the pursuit of the business mission of their news organisation (Obijiofor and Hanusch, 2011). This does not imply that the concept of competing loyalties stems from the critical political economy theory;

instead, it shows that while the journalist considers the media owner's business interest while trying to maintain the media's professional standards, an ethical dilemma is likely to arise. This theoretical view ideally explains what the second objective of this research aims to achieve. The second objective was focused on exploring how journalists and editors deal with the media owner's conflicts of interest in privately owned media. Media owners' conflicts of interest arise because of their transactional inclination towards journalism, which exposes their primary interest to monetary and resource control. The lack of independence also makes them vulnerable and causes them to be aligned with the State to avoid pitfalls that attract State sanctions and emasculation, mainly when reportage is directed to serve the purpose of the people against the State. In this stance, media owners may be unwittingly Instruments of the State and may be motivated by the socio-economic and political benefits of compromising ethical standards for the State rather than abiding by the ethics and principles of professional journalism, which seeks to promote press freedom above every other interest. Consequently, the journalist finds himself shifting loyalties from one end to the other, depending on the circumstances he is faced with.

2.2.3 Manipulative Approach

According to Melaku (2008), in the Manipulative Model, the media is categorised as an income-generating venture, as the capitalists (herein referred to as media owners) regard it as a means of production. As such, capitalists buy media businesses to control the means of production. Here, mass media manipulation occurs in that the content of the media is manipulated by those who own and control the institutions of broadcasting and the press. The manipulative approach is based on the conspiracy theory, which states that a small group of individuals knowingly and secretly conspire to promote their own interests against those of the general population. Individuals and groups of people who own media institutions use them for their purposes

(Melaku, 2008), not necessarily for the common good of man (public interest), which is the basis of ethics and the operations of the media in any given society. An ethical dilemma arises in this situation for a journalist who is faced with the challenge of projecting the business interest of the media owner while maintaining the profession's ethics.

Unlike the Critical Political Economy theory by McQuail (2010) and the Concept of Competing Loyalties as proposed by Skjerdal (2012), the Manipulative Approach by Melaku focused on subtle conspiracy against the interest of the public at the instance of promoting self and personal agenda of the media owners for economic, social and political advantage. In this model, the media owners are not necessarily under the pressure of the State as the case may be; instead, they devise a means to harvest their media ownership advantage and utilise same for the promotion of their selfish agenda, which under normal circumstances is against the ethics of journalism and professional conduct of media owners. This approach is called manipulative, considering the methods it deploys in actualising its aims and objectives, which are usually unknown to the journalists, content creators, and editors working with such media houses. Thus, the approach presented an underpinning for understanding and applying the study's third objective, which is to explore journalists' perspectives regarding how media owner's conflicts of interest affect good journalism practice (professionalism) in the media. This is particularly so because the subtle manipulation of media owners to their advantage readily conflicts with the tenets of good journalism and predominantly affects press freedom.

2.3 What is Ethics all about?

Ethics, as a moral principle that stipulates rights and wrongs, has been defined by various scholars. However, only a few related definitions will be considered for this research. Okunna (2003) defines *ethics* as a moral concept or philosophy concerned with the standards of good or

bad conduct in a society, using societal norms to evaluate human conduct or behavior. Similarly, Ward (2012) states that ethics intrinsically connects with questions of correct conduct within society. *Ethics* have also been defined as a moral modus operandi adopted or willingly accepted by a person or group of persons in their day-to-day dealings in a particular trade or in their relationship with others (Nwabueze, 2005).

All the above definitions of ethics align with the current study. However, Nwabueze (2005) stands out in the sense that his definition concerns the day-to-day dealings of a particular trade and/or profession, in this case, journalism. The ultimate goal of ethics is a duty to man in line with the utmost good of the people, which is the basis on which journalism thrives as a profession that focuses on public interest in its pursuit of news for society.

2.4 Journalistic Codes of Ethics

Like every profession, journalism is backed up by ethics or codes of conduct. This has to do with the set of moral principles guiding the practice of journalism (Nwabueze, 2005). The codes of ethics for the media are specific standards, rules, regulations, or norms that form the basis on which journalists make rational decisions or take actions, whether right or wrong, good or bad, responsible or irresponsible. The journalistic code of ethics spells out the ideals of professional journalists and their responsibilities to society. Examples of these standards include truth, objectivity, accuracy, privacy, fairness, balance, social responsibility, and integrity, to mention a few. Codes of ethics are an essential accountability mechanism that has gained widespread acceptance within the field of journalism (Whitehouse, 2010).

The earliest sign of the ethical code of conduct for journalism can be traced to the 20th century (Okunna, 2003). This was a reaction against the excesses of the Libertarian press by journalists after being freed from government bondage of the Authoritarian press, which was the order of

the day then. The Libertarian theory of the press gave ample freedom to journalists to practice their profession effectively, as opposed to the Authoritarian press. However, it eventually became a source of abuse, as most journalists used the pen-power for their personal interests and bias at the expense of public interest. As a result, the social responsibility theory of the press was introduced to curb the excesses of journalists, a term Okunna (2003) refer to as a response to the crisis of confidence in journalism. From this, the ethical code of conduct for the journalism profession was established to make journalists socially responsible to the society in which they operate (Nwabueze, 2005).

2.4.1 Codes of Ethics for Journalists in Uganda

There are two sets of professional codes of ethics for journalists in Uganda. The National Institute of Journalists of Uganda (NIJU) developed the first code of ethics in 1999, while the Independent Media Council of Uganda developed the second one. However, most journalists in Uganda reckon with the professional code from NIJU, perhaps because it was provided for in the Press and Journalists Act of Uganda of 1995. Therefore, it is Uganda's official code of ethics for professional practice. *Refer to Appendices C and D for the two codes of ethics.*

2.5 The Ethical Implications of Media Ownership on Professionalism

Professionalism, which revolves around sticking to the stipulated code of conduct for any discipline or field of study, enhances proficiency and expertise in the required discipline. Since most media houses recently are tilting towards commercialisation at the expense of public service, media owners are now driven by profit-generating motives, as acknowledged by Skjerdal (2012). The profit-generating motives of media owners have led to commercialisation of news, which is taking precedence over ideal (public) interest in journalistic production. Fourie

(2007), sees commercialisation as the process in which the State replaces public interest and public service-based regulations with market standards. In the same vein, Obijiofor and Hanusch (2011) notes that the commercialisation of news refers to any action taken to increase profit that hinders a journalist's or news organisation's primary goal of enhancing public understanding of the issues and events that influence the community they claim to serve. As such, most media organisations emphasise business rather than public interest, causing quality journalism to suffer (Obijiofor & Hanusch, 2011). Commercialisation of journalism is therefore seen as the media's preference for profit over public service or good (Obijiofor & Hanusch, 2011). According to Obijiofor and Hanusch:

Basically, profit motives and public service goals of media are at odds. Yet the tensions between public service objectives of the media and the goal of making profit set out by media owners and managers have existed for more than a century (Obiojiofor & Hanusch, 2011 p. 157).

This explains that the conflicts of interest between the ideal (the media's public service objectives) and the reality (the goal of maximising profit) is not a new phenomenon but a struggle that has existed for a long time.

For this cause, in most Ugandan media, adverts and entertainment thrive at the expense of news. It is common for advertisements to play in the middle of news or educational programmes, thus distracting the audience, as some may lose interest in the programme. Even news is now being sold as a commodity rather than an exchange of knowledge or information to society. Fourie (2007) attests to this and posits that the communications industry now emphasises market positions while seeking to maximise profit at the expense of public service broadcasting, which is meant to be a universal service. To this end, more emphasis is now placed on how popular the

media content is and how much it can sell. Furthermore, Fourie opines that the focus has shifted towards the marketability and popularity of media content, resulting in commercially successful broadcasting that is saturated with popular programme genres such as talk shows, popular music, games, sports, and advertisements (Fourie, 2007).

Still, as a result, the pressures from advertisers and in turn, the media owners, particularly in private media, have led to the commodification of media products, thereby putting the professional and ethical decision-making processes of the journalist and editor (if need be), in a conflicting situation. This is because the editorial decisions of what is newsworthy depend on what is likely to bring the most significant advertising revenue (Maweu, 2014). For example, some newspapers, television, and radios sometimes coin their opinion/editorial content and news commentary in a way that will suit the intent of a major advertiser or sponsor of a programme (indirect advert). Also, other media adverts contend for time and space with main news content, which gives the marketing and advertising units of a media organisation the power to carry out the advisory role to the editor on the stories that will likely attract more sales and income, via audience subscription and readership, therefore maximising profit to please the master/boss. Thus, the profit maximisation achieved through advertising revenue is seen as the ultimate aim of business-oriented media (Obijiofor & Hanusch, 2011). Media owners and managers, therefore, take a keen interest in making profits at the expense of enhancing quality journalism, especially the proprietors of privately-owned entities who unashamedly use the media to advance their outfits' political and business interests! (Akpabio, Katunzi and Mfaume, 2013 p. 24).

With commercialisation in view, the question of ethics also comes into play in the daily lives of journalists and editors in privately-owned media, resulting in competing loyalties for them, where the urge to carry on with the master's bid or professional values conflict.

According to Obijiofor and Hanusch (2011), there is a moral dilemma concerning whether an editor of a commercial newspaper can openly criticise the business interests of their publisher or employer. Furthermore, the media's conflicting priorities, which involve serving the public while also pursuing profit, pose a significant threat to the practice of professional and ethical journalism. Professional journalists and editors are grappling with the question of whether they should prioritise the editorial aspects of their role or the commercial interests of their organisation.

It is difficult for journalists to serve two masters well at the same time, as they may be pursuing conflicting objectives, especially directly on the job, when their professional ethics collide with the business interests of the media owners. Journalists have tried to resolve this dilemma by referring to their professional ethics values, such as truthfulness, fairness, objectivity, accuracy, and balance in reporting, as a basis for professional practice.

In support of the above, Obijiofor and Hanusch posit that the degree to which these values are manifested in news coverage by journalists is a subject of intense debate and that, regrettably, the professional values that journalists often refer to as defensive mechanisms are rooted in commercial interests (Obijiofor & Hanusch, 2011).

This is because every organisation exists in one way or another with the sole aim of maximising profit, and the media cannot be isolated as a not-for-profit organisation. If these professional values have their origins in commercialism, what should the journalist do? This and many more questions are left as rhetorical questions in the minds of journalists and researchers.

The case of Mbale is not different. With her promising commercial status attracting both governments and corporate organisations, there is a usual heavy presence of media practitioners trying to show how these activities affect the economic, social, political, and ordinary lives of

the citizenry. From this perspective, this environment can be seen as a mini-Uganda as it connects the people of Uganda and other nations from all walks of life altogether in a city. With the media organisations operating in the area, most journalists, editors, and, to a larger extent, their proprietors are unwilling to stick their necks out for fear of being clamped down and/or sanctioned by the government. The primary obstacle to media freedom and development in Uganda is attributed to media ownership rather than direct government restrictions. (Maractho, 2015).

2.6 The Quest for Professionalism versus Ownership Control: A Question of Ethics

The quest for professionalism by media practitioners may deadlock with ownership control and, therefore, conflict with the profession's ideals. The control, to a great extent, affects what editorial content should eventually be (Kanyiwedo, 2013). This is because individuals who venture into the media business see it as every other business at the expense of the public service good to society. Media programmes are therefore sold as commodities, a term Fourie (2007) refers to as commodification of news. The increasing commercialisation of the media is a contentious issue in the industry. According to Obijiofor and Hanusch (2011), journalists are aware of the trend but have limited ability to address it, while editors oppose it but feel compelled to conform. On the other hand, media owners and managers view commercialisation as a natural aspect of the media as a business. The proliferation of commercialisation in the media has caused concern among professional journalists, editors, and audiences, not because it is a new phenomenon, but due to its escalating prevalence (Obijiofor & Hanusch, 2011).

Furthermore, Obijiofor and Hanusch (2011) raised concerns about the increasing commercialisation of journalism and its impact on the quality of journalism. They emphasised that this has sparked a debate about the media's role in today's society. They framed this issue by

asking whether the media is structured to prioritise public service or employer interests. This leaves an ethical question for the journalist to think about. Does he maintain his professional standard and possibly lose his job, or do the bidding of his employer that conflicts with the ideals of the profession and the social responsibility role of the media in society?

The big question now is: Is accommodating the trend of media ownership control over professionalism a way forward or a means to keep body and soul together while leaving behind the profession's ideals?

Accommodating the trend of media ownership control over professionalism may be the way forward. That is why (Akpabio et al. 2013) discovered that some journalists are tilting towards accommodating the trend because the media owner made his agenda known to his employees (journalists) before signing the employment contract with them. In their analysis, Akpabio et al. 2013, added "*If you are comfortable, then you have to learn to compromise with what your publisher wants*" (Akpabio et al., 2013, p. 23). This is because there has been an existing employment contract with the media owner. Another question that readily comes to mind is: What does it mean to be comfortable to compromise with what the publisher (owner) wants? This and many more questions puzzle the researcher's mind. In light of the above reference made, Akpabio et al. (2013) put forward that: "*A way around the clash between proprietors' interests and professionalism can be resolved if the latter were upfront about their agenda [sic].*" This is because the professionals (journalists) already knew what they were getting into when signing the employment contract with the employer.

In a 2003 study by Special Correspondents, in the '*Face and Mind of the American Journalist*';

Journalists also continued to regard journalistic training as the greatest influence on their news values, and a majority thought that the quality of journalism has been rising steadily

at their news organizations. Nearly three-fourths thought producing high-quality journalism was critical to their owners or senior managers, and a majority disagreed that profits are a higher priority than good journalism at their news organizations (Special Correspondents, 2003).

The essence of journalistic ethics lies in the fact that journalists who take cognisance of ethics obviously care about excellent or right actions, and such a concern leads them to seek the highest good for the people while practicing their profession (Okunna, 2003). Good journalistic practice should encourage strict adherence to the journalistic code of ethics, no matter whose ox is gored, which will enhance the credibility of the profession and journalists' reputation in the eyes of the public (Nwabueze, 2005). An excellent example in the Ugandan media space, is that of a journalist like Solomon Serwanjja. Serwanjja is a Ugandan investigative journalist and the executive director of the African Institute for Investigative Journalism (AIJ). Despite the odds and challenges he faced in his journalism practice while working as an investigative reporter and news anchor with NBS TV, he stuck to his guns professionally. Through his fact-finding mission as a journalist and a purveyor of truth, he exposed and relayed facts about the vices and corruption in Ugandan society. For instance, in stories like *The Dark World of Drugs*, *Kifeesi*, and *Stealing from the Sick*, Serwanjja exposed men of the underworld and their cabals and modus operandi (Shantel, 2021). Such tenacity and professionalism (seeking the truth) eventually paid off, as he won the prestigious BBC Komla Dumor Award alongside other awards over the years, as he brought public interest stories to the masses, not deterred by the risks involved in his career, his life, and his family too. (Shantel, 2021). The journalist's commitment to truth and transparency in his reportage set him apart professionally. Quality journalism is considered a

valuable public good that contributes to an informed citizenry and a robust democracy (Wilding et al, 2018).

2.7 Empirical Review

Previous studies have found that media owners' conflicts of interest injure press freedom and have devastating consequences for society. The findings from these studies are presented below and align with this study's research objectives.

2.7.1 The Dilemma Faced by Journalists and Editors Due to Media Owners' Conflicts of Interest

Onyenankeya and Salawu (2020) did a study *On Bended Knees, Investigated Journalism and the Changing Media Culture in Nigeria*. In their research, they analysed the obstacles that investigative journalism faces, drawing on both theoretical frameworks and empirically supported studies on factors that limit journalistic independence. They conducted twenty-five structured interviews with journalists, journalism educators, and members of civil society in Lagos and Abuja. These cities serve as hubs for media production and consumption, and also witness power struggles related to information, communication, political ideologies, and social discussions. Additionally, these cities are hotspots for underreported political corruption, widespread unethical behavior, and significant exploitation of Nigeria's resources. The qualitative data analysis revealed that investigative journalism faces challenges stemming from a complex interplay of socio-cultural, economic, and professional factors. The ownership of newspapers by politically influential individuals, combined with inadequate protection for journalists, has significantly hindered the practice of investigative journalism. These obstacles pose a threat to the press's watchdog role, particularly in democratic societies such as Uganda.

Like in this study, the design of both studies was similar (they are both qualitative research), as well as the purpose, which dwelt on the socio-cultural factors that affect journalists as watchdogs and, in the long run, journalism as a profession. Although the setting and sampling for these studies were different, as the current study is based in Uganda and with the Ugandan population, while Onyenankeya and Salawu's (2020) study was based in Nigeria, both studies complement each other since in content, they are investigating factors which affect true journalism practice. The authors identified social factors such as corruption whereas the current research is focused on media owners' conflict of interest, which also is a form of corruption. Therefore, Onyenankeya and Salawu's (2020) study is adjudged relevant to the current study and may help to further understand the problems of ethical dilemma.

Mare (2018) conducted a comparative study of how business journalists negotiate ethical policies in Kenya and South Africa. The author emphasised the presence of a pro-corporate bias in financial news, indicating that the content and presentation of such news are intentionally shaped to convey a positive image of corporations and their actions. The research is significant in light of findings indicating ethical dilemmas faced by business journalists with access to information. They have the potential to impact markets or benefit personally. The study utilised document analysis and in-depth interviews and contends that business journalism ethics is still alien to Kenyan and South African newsrooms. Unlike previous studies, this research has found that hidden and obvious influences from advertisers, shareholders, news sources, and editorial management are posing significant challenges to the establishment of ethical business journalism in African newsrooms. Although Mare's (2018) study utilised document analysis contrary to the thematic analysis and qualitative design used in the current study, the study provided valuable insights by centering on pro-corporate bias in the content and framing of financial news. This bias reflects challenges

identified in the current study, which are influenced by the conflict of interest of media owners, representing a significant form of pro-corporate bias. The setting of the study and sample have many characteristics in common. One of the significant findings concerns the ethical challenges faced by business journalists with access to information. These journalists have the ability to influence markets or to personally benefit from the information. Both studies aim to identify the factors that contribute to ethical dilemmas among journalists in this context.

Similarly, Maweu's (2014) study on the clash between journalistic and capitalist values in Kenya employed in-depth qualitative interviews with 20 journalists from Nation Media Group (NMG) to ascertain how advertisers meddle in journalists' decision-making processes. The study, based on the critical political economy of the media tradition, found that in a highly commercialised media environment such as Kenya, market forces present the most significant challenge to media freedom and accountability.

The conclusion from this study indicates that it is very challenging for commercial media like the NMG to rise above the immense power advertisers wield over the media because advertising revenue is one of the significant sources of capital for the media. In light of this, journalists bear the brunt, as they are faced with the dilemma of trying to fulfill their professional responsibilities by doing what is in the public interest and adjusting to the realities of the newsroom, which are primarily influenced by these commercial and market forces, especially advertisers who bring in the bread and butter. This clash of journalistic and capitalist values leaves the journalists with only one option other than to strive to meet the shareholders' expectations while maximizing profit for the media owners. Maweu's (2014) study ideally supports the framework of this study from many perspectives, except that the setting and sample are from Kenya.

The study is similar in design and statistics as both utilised qualitative design and in-depth interviews to collect data. However, while the current study utilised thematic analysis of qualitative data culled from two media houses, Maweu's study utilised content analysis. More so, the focus of both studies was the same as both dwelt on the political economy of the media tradition in which journalists are faced with the dilemma of simultaneously meeting both owners' expectations and journalistic ethics. This dilemma is considered in the light that media owners are capitalists and profit-focused. Therefore, Maweu's finding is critical for the current study, considering the differences and similarities between both studies.

In a separate investigation, Ekayanti and Xiaoming (2018) delved into the relationship between journalism and political alignment in the media, specifically examining the impact of ownership on Indonesian newspapers. The researchers employed the hierarchy of influences model on media content as the conceptual framework to assess the effects of political ownership of newspapers on journalists' adherence to professional values in their daily news-reporting activities in Indonesia. By surveying newspaper journalists in Jakarta, the study sought to determine whether journalists view political ownership as a potential challenge to their practice of professional values. After the analysis of data, the findings show that political ownership of newspapers may not directly affect the practice of professional values, but it can affect such a practice indirectly through interventional practices in the newsroom. Although Ekayanti and Xiaoming's (2018) was based on newspaper journalism, the critical parameters of their study matched the current study and hence could lend it support; as such, both studies focused on media owners' conflict of interest in journalism. Both studies also attribute the extent of compliance to the journalism code of conduct to media owners' interference, especially regarding their political alliances, which could influence the journalism practices of their workers and the quality of their

reportage. Different settings and samples used by Ekayanti and Xiaoming's (2018) study afford the current study the opportunity to compare journalism practices in different locations and to know whether to validate or support the current research findings. Therefore, their study is found useful to the current research.

Also, Milojević and Krstić (2018) studied the hierarchy of influences on transitional journalism and assessed the corrupting relationships between political, economic and media elites. The authors applied the hierarchy-of-influences model to analyse how media owners, managers, and journalists in Serbia perceived the impact on their work during the 12-year democratic transition. The study aimed to elucidate the gradual transfer of influential factors from the highest system level to the lower levels and their interrelationships. The authors examined the concepts of corruption and the culture of corruption to analyse the power dynamics in transitional journalism. They asserted that involving external actors at a systemic level can be viewed as a form of corruption, characterised by the misuse of power for personal or group benefit, and this dynamic extends across all levels of influence. Milojević and Krstić's (2018) study in Serbia is also similar in focus to the current study, although the study was a longitudinal study and therefore differed in design. However, the study focused on determining the factors behind the hierarchy of influences on traditional journalism (referring to journalism conforming to ethical standards). Both studies were focused on third-party influence on journalism outcome; while Milojević and Krstić (2018) traced non-compliance to journalism ethics to corruption (which also involves media owners' conflict of interests), the current study attempted to link this to media owners' interference. Though different in design and setting, both studies complement each other in focus.

Meanwhile, Pepple and Acholonu (2018) assessed media ethics as key to sound professionalism in Nigerian journalism practice. The study assessed how ethics affect the standard of journalism practice in the country, using media practitioners in Rivers State, Nigeria as a case study. The study population comprised 300 registered journalists in Rivers State, including editors and managers. The survey research method was used, and the questionnaire was used as the primary instrument for data gathering. It was revealed that despite the importance of ethics to journalism practice, journalists' adherence to the ethical codes was low. The study also revealed that journalists often go against the profession's ethics due to sycophancy, security reasons, desperation, greed, ethical dilemmas, and ignorance of the code of ethics. Pepple and Acholonu's (2018) study and the current study are both similar and different. In terms of design, while a quantitative survey study was carried out in Nigeria, the current study is qualitative in Uganda. Pepple and Acholonu's (2018) study assessed how ethics affect the standard of journalism practice, but the current study focused on the ethical dilemma of media owners' conflict of interest. Pepple and Acholonu's (2018) study found ethical dilemmas resulting from lack of professionalism. Their study is therefore considered consequential to the current study, hence, the review.

2.7.2 Journalists' Coping Mechanisms and Media Owners' Conflicts of interest

Höglund and Schaffer's (2021) study on *Defending Journalism Against State Repression: Legal Mobilization for Media Freedom in Uganda* evaluated how journalist groups and media organisations use legal strategies to defend media freedom in semi-authoritarian contexts. In a case study of recent struggles for media freedom in Uganda, the authors analysed how journalist groups and media organisations have used legal strategies to defend their freedom to report against a semi-authoritarian regime that increasingly clamps down on independent media.

Drawing on numerous interviews with key actors, their analysis suggested that Uganda's so-called media fraternity has sometimes been able to push back state repression or advance the institutional framework for media freedom. Specifically, legal mobilisation has been successful when the media fraternity has been able to mobilise broad and rapid support and organise sustained public advocacy, especially when the journalist or media outlet in question has public credibility. By providing a better account of when and why the media freedom movement has successfully challenged government repression, this paper also contributes to a deeper understanding of legal mobilisation by journalists and media organisations that should be relevant beyond the case of Uganda. Unlike the current study, Höglund and Schaffer (2021) focused on the consequences of the state control of media freedom in Uganda.

On the other hand, just like the current study, Höglund and Schaffer's study adds its voice to the cry against the emasculation of the press by the Ugandan government. Both constructs are related because most media owners interfere with news reportage out of fear of government repression or because they are not in political alliance with the ruling party and government. These situations create ethical dilemmas for journalists who draw between their jobs and journalism ethics.

Furthermore, Jamil (2018) evaluated *Freedom of Expression and Threats to Journalists' Safety: An Analysis of Conflict Reporting in Journalism Education in Pakistan*. Statistics gathered by international organisations monitoring press freedom and violence against journalists in Pakistan reveal that threats to their lives and abuses by the military, intelligence agencies, and militant organisations have remained high in recent years (Freedom House 2015, 2016; *Committee to Protect Journalists 2016*). Drawing on the new institutionalism theory, the study investigated the diverse threats that affect journalists' work (agency/action) and their right to freedom of

expression, and the role (agency/action) of Pakistan's universities in promoting conflict reporting and peace journalism education in the country. The new institutionalism theory, as elucidated by Powell and Colyvas, (2008), has found application in various fields including sociology, political science, organisational studies, journalism, and economics, each with specific nuances. The study used sociological institutionalism because the theory recognised the influence of the institutional environment on actors' agency - either individuals or organisations (Scott, 2005). Thus, this study considered journalists and Pakistan universities as actors that are embedded in a specific cultural setting and can be influenced by the institutional environment within which they operate. Jamil's (2018) study extended the frontiers of government interference with journalism as one of the major causes of emasculation of press freedom. Though the study was based in Pakistan, the findings were similar to the objectives of the current study, which evaluated the conflicts of media owners' interests as the major source of ethical dilemmas for journalists. From the current study's findings, it was ascertained that government interference with the press is the primary cause of media owners' conflict of interest, as most owners are business capitalists interested in profits and would not like to attract government sanctions.

Again, Matthews and Onyemaobi (2020) explored Precarious Professionalism: Journalism and the Fragility of Professional Practice in the Global South. The research examined the concept of precarious professionalism and its impact on 15 journalists in Nigeria. The findings revealed that journalists experienced precarious professionalism through fragile professionalism, inherent job instability, and challenges to their professional and personal selves. The study concluded that these factors offer a deeper understanding of the prevailing conditions in non-western contexts and highlight the areas that need attention to enhance professionalism in Nigeria. The study by Matthews and Onyemaobi (2020) shares a similar design and statistics with the current study.

However, it was conducted in a different location (Nigeria) and with a different sample. Similar to this current study, this study evaluated the responses of 15 journalists from different media houses, and their interviews were analysed to understand the challenges that make journalism work precarious. Findings from Matthews and Onyemaobi's (2020) study pointed at fragile professionalism, as it exposes and endangers media practitioners to various threats, including threats to life, jobs, and property. Therefore, the study is relevant in understanding the ethical dilemma of journalists stuck with media stations whose owners interfere with journalism ethics.

2.7.3 Effects of Media Owners' Conflicts of Interest on Good Journalism Practice

In their study, Akpabio, Katunzi, and Mfaume (2013) set out to determine the impact of ownership on the operations of the Tanzanian media through a survey of journalists and in-depth interviews with media managers and retired journalists. Employing the stratified random sampling technique, 81 journalists from four media organisations, four media managers from identified organisations, and three retired journalists participated in the study.

Findings from the study indicate that ownership plays a huge role in how news is reported, with both government and privately-owned media guilty of influencing the editorial processes for various reasons, most of them self-serving purposes. It was also discovered that corporate bodies exerted influence on the news, even though there were divergent views on this, with journalists denying this effect while media managers and retired journalists affirming this to be the case. The study provides empirical evidence of the proprietors' interference in editorial decision-making, shaping the news.

The purpose and findings of Akpabio et al., 2013, are similar to those of the current study. First, both studies explored journalists from different media houses. They utilised the qualitative method to determine the impact of ownership on the operations of the Tanzanian and Ugandan

media, respectively, which affects journalism ethics. The current study also captured and focused on the objective standpoint, which supports this empirical review's findings.

Sokowati and Junaedi's (2020) study seeks to understand the problem of control and ownership of Mojok.co, which explored how the involvement of investors in the media life encouraged the rethinking of the three characteristics of alternative media, which are seen as de-professionalised, de-capitalised, and de-institutionalised in nature. Thus, the involvement of investors presents new problems, such as the problem of ownership and control. These problems provided many changes in the production of alternative media content. The investment made by Tirto.co in Mojok.co resulted in significant changes to Mojok.co. This change led to Mojok.co losing its independence, as it had to meet specific requirements, such as achieving certain page view targets, which compromised its autonomy. By focusing on page views as a benchmark for success, Mojok.co conformed to the norms of other digital media, where Alexa rank is used as a yardstick for measuring success.

Despite Mojok.co's ideological commitment to not favouring any particular ideology, its decision to accommodate all ideologies suggests a broader attempt to appeal to a wide audience. To better understand this issue, a study of the political economy was carried out. Through the study of political economy, the research discovered the control mechanism, the shifting of editorial policies and also the production practices of the Mojok.co, changed after Tirto. co's investment. Thus, the commodification of content became an editorial policy in order to gain more readership. Sokowati and Junaedi's (2020) study, which evaluated the problem of control and ownership of Mojok.co, as was highlighted, matched the purpose of the current study. In their findings, Sokowati and Junaedi blamed political economy on the extent of press freedom,

which is believed to be among the problems of control mechanisms, including those of the media owners.

Sobel and McIntyre's (2020) study on the State of press freedom in Uganda assessed the landscape of press freedom in Uganda as one with unique contradictions. In Uganda, despite having a relatively open and active media landscape with favorable legal decisions for journalists, various legal and non-legal methods still curtail freedom of expression. Investigative interviews with Ugandan journalists indicate that those who provide critical coverage of the president or his close associates face risks, limiting the freedom of the press. The study suggests that existing media development theories inadequately consider the role of journalists and proposes that while the concept of a safety valve from political science may apply, Uganda is experiencing a process of journalistic control. Comparing the current study with the study carried out by Sobel and McIntyre (2020), there are both points of convergence and departure, which complement and supplement the current study. The findings expose the interference orchestrated by media owners in Uganda, which leads to limited press freedom.

2.8 Conclusion

The literature reviewed in this chapter is in tandem with the study's research objectives. The research questions explored the ethical implications of media ownership and its resultant effects on professionalism, with a critical look at the dilemma journalists face on the job daily.

The reviewed literature reveals gaps in understanding the ethical implications of media ownership on journalism. While frameworks like McQuail's Critical Political Economy Theory and Skjerdal's Competing Loyalties Theory provide insights, there is a lack of exploration into how these theories interact, particularly in Uganda's private media. Although conflicts of interest from media ownership are studied, little attention is given to the ethical dilemmas faced by

journalists, especially regarding government interference and commercial pressures. Moreover, while the commodification of news is noted, its negative impact on journalistic autonomy and the public service role of the media requires more focus. There is also limited research on the coping mechanisms of journalists facing conflicts of interest and how editorial decisions shaped by media ownership affect public trust and press freedom. Additionally, the long-term effects of media ownership on journalists' commitment to professional values and public perception of media credibility remain underexplored. These gaps highlight the need for further research into the impact of media ownership on journalistic ethics in Uganda and beyond.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I explored the research methodologies utilised to establish a solid foundation for the study. The research design, study population, sampling technique, sample size, description of data collection instruments, and methods of data presentation and analysis, among others, will be highlighted.

3.2 Research Design

A research design is a framework or plan for a study used to collect and analyse data (Offor, 2005). This study's research design was exploratory via the qualitative research method. An in-depth interview was conducted using the open-ended structured interview guide to elicit data from the editorial staff of two privately owned media organisations in Mbale (Big FM and STEP TV) in a bid to ascertain the ethical implications of ownership influences on their output as media professionals.

3.3 Methodological Approach

The study utilised qualitative research methods, focusing on words rather than quantification for data collection and analysis, as Bryman (2016) outlined. It refers to research about persons' lives, stories, and behaviour, but also about organisational functioning, social movements, or interactional relationships (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). In this regard, interview sessions were conducted to elicit participants' opinions regarding their experience with media ownership in the workplace and how these experiences affect their professional conduct and the quality of their

work in many aspects as media gatekeepers. This means that the social world must be interpreted from the perspective of the people being studied rather than as though they were incapable of their own reflections on the social world (Bryman, 2016).

3.4 Area of Study

The researcher studied two privately-owned media (BIG FM and STEP TV) in the city of Mbale, Uganda where they are situated. Mbale is a municipality in the district of Mbale, located in the Eastern part of Uganda, which, until recently, was elevated from a town to a city status by the Ugandan government (The East African, 2020; Daily Monitor, 2020). The city of Mbale, which covers a geographical area of 2,435 hectares of land, is situated on the foot of the Wanale Ridge of Mount Elgon, about 8,000 feet above sea level. Some of the districts bordering Mbale are Tororo in the south, Manafwa in the south-east, Sironko in the north-east, Kumi in the north, Budaka in the north-west, and Butaleja in the south-west (Mbale District Local Government, n.d.). The population of Mbale stands at 92,863, with the Industrial division having about 45 percent of the population, followed by the Northern division, which has about 40 percent, and then the Wanale division with about 15 percent of the population, respectively (UBOS, 2016). Mbale was started and developed by the Arab slave traders as the commercial nerve centre of the region. Then it eventually attracted the Indian traders and other business-oriented individuals (UN-Habitat, 2012). Over the years, Mbale has advanced to become the administrative headquarters in the eastern region of Uganda, owing to its economic status in the region. The city benefits from its close proximity to Kenya, which boasts of the largest and most advanced economy in East and Central Africa. Kenya's memberships in regional economic blocs, coupled with its strategic geographic position, makes the country the gateway to the huge East African Community (EAC) market (KenInvest, n.d). This strategic location opens up numerous

opportunities for economic activities, cross-border trade, and the exchange of services at the city, regional, and national levels.

Mbale is strategically located in eastern Uganda, making it attractive and competitive for businesses to thrive. This has endeared government parastatals, corporate bodies, and entrepreneurs, including the media, to pitch their tents in this city. Hence, Mbale has extensive media coverage and reportage, making it an essential city in Uganda. Prominent among the media houses in Mbale are STEP TV and BIG FM, which are the focus of this study.

The dynamics of high government presence and interest in the area, heavy media presence (primarily privately-owned), the economic activities, and the diversity of the people of Mbale, gifts this study a mini-Uganda with the capacity to generalise findings. Thus, the area is suitable for investigating the ethical dilemmas that journalists and editors encounter on a day-to-day basis regarding media ownership and control.

3.5 Information Sources

The sources of information for the study depended on the available materials, textbooks, articles, as well as from in-depth interviews conducted amongst journalists and editors from BIG F.M and STEP TV in Mbale. The researcher recorded and transcribed the interviews for documentation and analysis.

3.6 Study Population

The study population was drawn from the editorial staff (journalists and editors) of two privately-owned media (BIG FM, which had nine editorial staff, and STEP TV, which had 14 editorial staff) in Mbale, Uganda. Mbale, a region in the eastern part of the country, has a lingua franca known as Lugisu, and its inhabitants are fondly called the *Gisus*.

3.6.1 Sampling Technique

In this study, the researcher used purposive sampling, a technique that involves selecting participants based on predetermined criteria relevant to the research inquiry. This approach allows for the deliberate selection of individuals who can provide valuable and in-depth information, making it particularly useful in qualitative research. A *purposive sample* is a non-random sample in which respondents are selected based on a particular characteristic (Frey et al., 2000). A researcher selects a person or site to be included in the study because the person or site is thought to be typical of the communication being investigated (Keyton, 2011). Here, only a specified category of persons (editors and journalists) in these media houses were selected as respondents.

3.6.2 Sample Size

As the administrative headquarters and the economic hub of eastern Uganda, Mbale has 16 licensed broadcast media houses (mostly radio stations) operating within the city. These are mostly privately-owned. The data for the study was generated through in-depth interviews with 20 journalists from BIG FM and STEP TV in Mbale. Fourteen respondents were obtained from STEP TV, while six respondents were obtained from BIG FM. This is because STEP TV has more editorial staff than BIG FM. The sampled population included editors and managers of these media houses who appear to have practical experience regarding media ownership and its ethical implications on professionalism.

I determined the number of participants in my study based on the total editorial staff in both media houses and their availability. At BIG FM, I was able to interview six out of nine editorial staff members, while at STEP TV, I interviewed all 14 editorial staff members, resulting in a

total of 20 participants. Although my initial plan was to interview all editorial staff from both media houses to capture their practical experiences, only six staff members at BIG FM were available to participate, as the others were unable to grant me an audience.

3.7 Data Collection Method

An interview was adopted as the method of data collection for this study. Interviewing has been identified as a key qualitative data collection method involving the presentation of oral-verbal stimuli and replies in terms of oral-verbal response, which enables researchers to explore participants' perspectives, experiences, beliefs, and motivations through open-ended questions (Kothari, 2004; Creswell & Poth, 2018). It is regarded as one of the most commonly used methods of data collection in media research (Jensen, 2012). In-depth interviews are often favoured for capturing the viewpoints of users and other communicators in media due to their resemblance to casual conversations (Jensen, 2012). This technique is considered a valuable instrument for gaining insight into user perspectives. The interactive, flexible, and meaning-making nature of interviews makes them especially well-suited for examining complex issues such as ethics, professionalism, and media ownership.

3.8 Instruments for Data Collection

Over twenty printed open-ended structured interview guides, a pen (for writing), and a mobile phone voice recorder were used to gather information from the respondents. The interview guide enabled me to interrogate the respondents and elicit their responses on the subject matter of inquiry more coherently and in-depth. Again, in in-depth interviews, efforts are made to ensure that the interview guide concerns only those aspects related to the study without inducing the interviewees with questions, which may stimulate their bias, generalisations, and undue

inferences outside the context of the purpose. The collected data was transcribed, organised, and analysed based on the emerging interview themes, thus leading the way in discussing the responses.

3.9 Procedure for Data Collection

The researcher used structured interviews to elicit detailed information from journalists and editors in the sample populations (Big FM and STEP TV). In gathering the data, I scheduled appointments with the respondents from the two media houses. I met with them at different times because they only come around the station when they return from the field or are scheduled to go on air.

3.10 Quality/Error Control

Throughout the data-gathering process, I used the interview guide for each respondent to enable me to get consistent and coherent data from them. By so doing, I ensured that I recorded and noted all the responses from the respondents in line with the subject matter of inquiry. I used the same interview guide, but on different sheets of paper for each interview. To a reasonable extent, as the researcher, I am assured that the data gathered from the respondents and their experiences are genuine and may likely pass for journalists across the country, too. This is because they appear to have firsthand experience with the dilemmas journalists face in both private and government-owned media organisations.

Administering the interviews allowed me to decipher the non-verbal reactions to the questions and discover if they were manipulating the truth. However, I did not record any incident of manipulating the truth. I only discovered that they were more comfortable talking without their supervisors or bosses. According to Keyton (2011), qualitative research involves documenting

events in a manner that may not be immediately apparent to individuals. Through systematic qualitative approaches, researchers are able to uncover and interpret such phenomena. Hence, qualitative methodologies can be employed to elucidate and comprehend the underlying aspects of any relatively obscure phenomenon (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

Above all, the study was conducted in two prominent privately-owned media organisations (BIG FM and STEP TV) in Mbale, as most people in the city and its neighbouring environs subscribe to these stations.

3.11 Data Processing and Analysis

For proper documentation, data was collected from the respondents via interviews, which comprised of some background data and characteristics of respondents, as well as the general research questions. In this form of qualitative analysis, the opinion of an individual is elicited on issues in which he or she is deemed knowledgeable or has had an experience prior to the interview (Kothari, 2004). Supporting this, Bryman (2016) posits that many qualitative researchers commit to viewing events and the social world through the eyes of the people they study. Thus, the recorded interviews were transcribed and analysed thematically by the researcher in line with the research questions, after which findings from the study were presented and recommendations made for further research in this field.

Thematic analysis is a widely used qualitative research method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. This approach is particularly valued for its flexibility and its ability to provide a detailed and nuanced understanding of qualitative data, which makes it suitable for a wide range of research topics, including healthcare, social sciences, and education (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As noted by Jones (2022), thematic analysis effectively synthesises large volumes of information, thus enabling the emergence of coherent responses to research

inquiries. Thematic analysis allows researchers to interpret the underlying meaning of data by organising it in a way that highlights significant patterns and themes relevant to the research question. It involves systematically coding the data and identifying these themes, which helps researchers gain a deeper understanding of participants' experiences and the phenomena under study (Caulfield, 2019; Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2023).

The process of thematic analysis follows a structured six-phase model. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), these phases include familiarising oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing the report. This process is crucial for understanding its depth before coding begins. Afterward, researchers code the data by identifying meaningful features and labeling them with codes that represent important concepts or patterns (Boyatzis, 1998). These codes are then grouped into broader themes, which are reviewed and refined to ensure they reflect the research questions. Once the final themes are defined and named, the researcher writes the report, providing a detailed analysis of the themes and their relevance to the research (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Saldana, 2016). Thematic analysis is not confined to any one domain, making it highly applicable across various contexts, from healthcare to social studies (Clarke & Braun, 2018).

Jones (2022) explains that themes extend beyond individual codes by bringing together multiple related codes and interpreting them within the wider context of the dataset. The theme highlights aspects of the data that are significant to the research objectives and reflects patterns or relationships that cut across participants' responses. In this sense, a theme does more than just label data segments; it captures elements that are directly relevant to the research purpose and reveals underlying commonalities. Developing themes is therefore an iterative process that requires moving back and forth between codes, constantly revisiting and refining them to ensure

they accurately represent the deeper patterns within the dataset (Jones, 2022). In my study, this meant moving beyond labels to capture patterns that directly reflected the ethical dilemmas journalists faced under media ownership structures. For example, the primary categories that emerged from the qualitative interviews encompass codes and patterns such as “media ownership structures”, “editorial independence”, “self-censorship”, “conflicts of interest”, “journalist autonomy”, “ethical dilemmas”, “political interference”, “economic pressure”, “commercialisation of news”, and “bribery and corruption”. While these codes stood on their own, I combined them into broader themes that accurately represent the deeper patterns within my dataset. This illustrates how themes, as Jones (2022) suggests, are not simply descriptive categories but interpretive constructs that reveal connections across the dataset and align directly with my research purpose, which is examining the ethical implications of media ownership on professionalism.

The themes in my study were rigorously derived through a synthesis of the theoretical and methodological frameworks employed in the study, the research questions, and the nuanced responses of participants from BIG FM and STEP TV. The thematic development utilised both deductive and inductive reasoning, drawing on established theories while also embracing the unique insights gleaned from participant narratives. This comprehensive approach was guided by a careful analysis of the structured interview guide and the content of participant feedback.

While thematic analysis offers numerous benefits, such as flexibility, transparency, and the ability to provide rich, detailed results, it also presents challenges. One challenge is the subjectivity of the process, as researchers must interpret the data and decide what constitutes a theme. Researchers must ensure that their interpretations are grounded in the data and be transparent in their analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Another challenge is ensuring that the

themes identified are neither too broad nor too vague, as this can compromise the clarity of the analysis (Nowell et al., 2017). Despite these challenges, thematic analysis remains a valuable and adaptable tool in qualitative research. Its structured phases, ability to generate in-depth insights, and adaptability across various domains make it a fundamental method in qualitative inquiry (Nowell et al., 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

To uphold methodological rigor and consistency in the analysis, the study adhered to the six-step thematic analysis process articulated by Braun and Clarke (2006). The intricacies of the data analysis process are visually represented in the accompanying figure on the subsequent page.

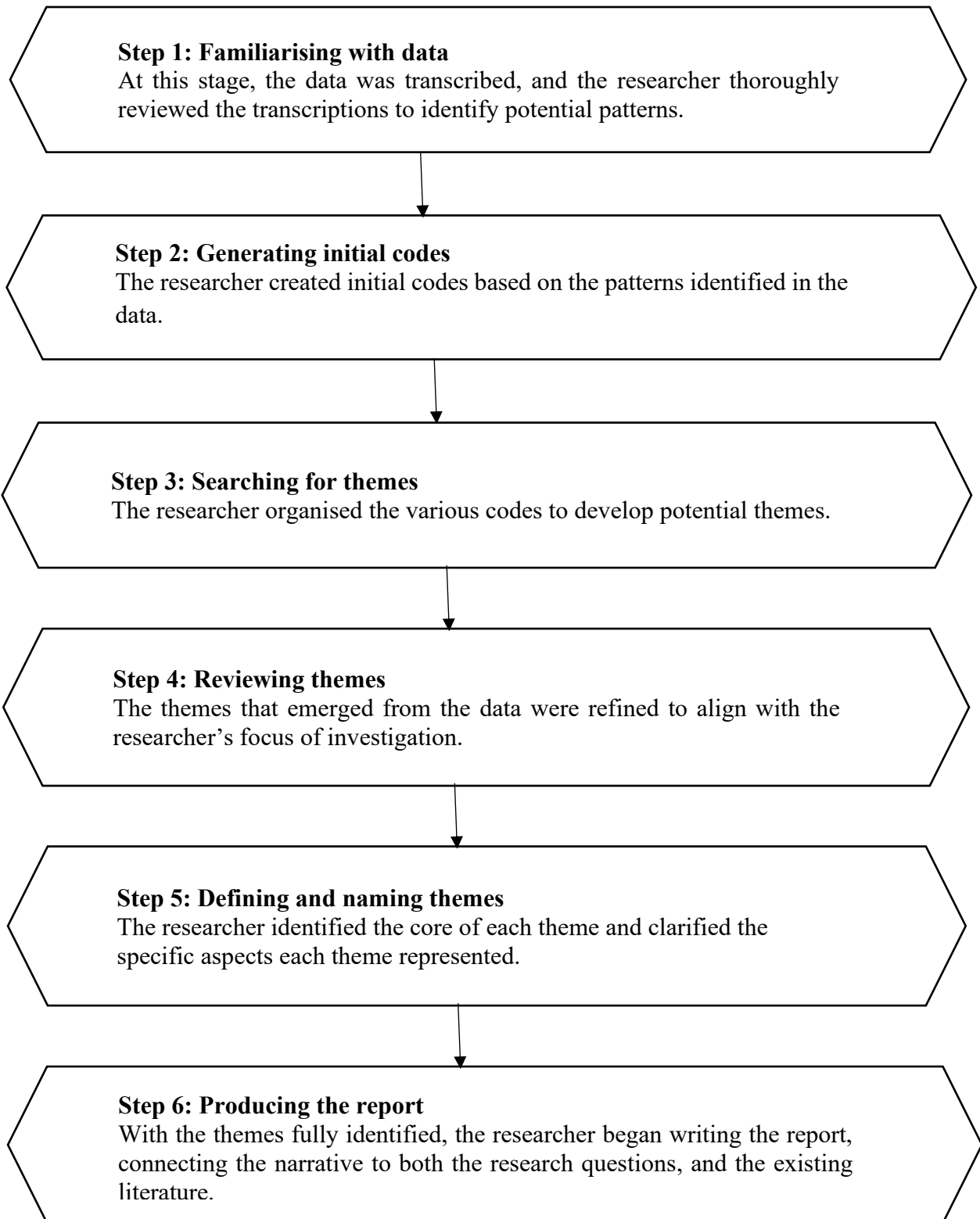


Figure 2: The figure depicts the six steps followed in the research process for data analysis. Source: Braun and Clarke (2006).

3.12 Ethical Considerations

As required, I obtained a letter of introduction from the School of Post-Graduate and Research Studies (SPGRS), Uganda Christian University, Mukono, through the programme coordinator in the Department, to show approval and consent from the respective authorities to proceed to the field for data gathering.

During the interview process, I introduced myself as the researcher and provided each participant with a consent form to sign, serving as proof of their acceptance to participate in the study. I informed the interviewees (the participants) that their names and identities would remain confidential and, as such, would not be included in the background data, data designation, and analysis (e.g., editors or journalists granting interviews to the researcher). Additionally, their length of service/year and other relevant information would be excluded, especially if such information would directly or indirectly connect or associate the participants with the study, etc., except where the respondent specifically wants to be associated with it. As such, all data gathered in this research is strictly used for academic purposes. For the sake of confidentiality and clarity, each respondent from the two media houses was given a coded identifier using the initials of the station they represent. For instance, respondents from BIG FM were identified as B1-B6, while respondents from STEP TV were identified as S1-S14.

3.13 Methodological Constraints

This study was limited to finding out how media ownership affects the ethical and professional roles of media practitioners regarding the concept of competing loyalties, as discussed in the literature review. The study was also carried out in two privately-owned media organisations in Mbale. So, there might be a bias challenge per the participants if they or their media organisation

have significant personalised experiences on the subject of interest. However, efforts were made for the participants to participate without any form of duress.

An extreme limitation of this research was that the researcher had to rely solely on the respondents' interpretation of this phenomenon, and there needed to be a measure to determine the accuracy of their responses due to fear of being discovered by their employer. Despite this constraint, the editors and journalists were in the best position to respond to the questions provided, because they face these challenges daily while performing their official duty. As such, they are the best respondents to the researcher's inquiries.

More so, the processes of carrying out this investigation particularly in terms of data gathering (meeting the respondents in the office and their willingness to respond to the interview questions amidst their tight schedules) was really challenging, coupled with other academic and day-to-day work the researcher was cumbered with.

3.14 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the study's methodology, which included details about the study design, study area, study population, sampling techniques, data collection procedures and instruments, data analysis methods, and the validity and ethical considerations for the study. The next chapter concentrates on delivering, examining, and interpreting the data gathered from the respondents.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

Chapter Four presents and interprets the data gathered for the study. The data obtained from respondents using an interview guide, was transcribed and organised by extracting emerging themes through codes and recurring patterns in a bid to answer the three research questions (RQ 1-3) posed in the study. Twenty (20) interviews were conducted amongst the Editorial staff of BIG FM (six staff members) and STEP TV (14 staff members) in Mbale.

4.2 Data Presentation and Analysis

This analysis was subdivided into two sections for clarification. The first section comprises the general data, which involves the respondent's designation, job description, and media experiences with regards to the length of time (number of years/months) spent in the media, either print/broadcast, and specifically in the station they work with at the time of data collection. While the other section comprises the interview guide, which involves the general research questions for respondents.

4.2.1 General Data

Here, the respondents' professional demographic information was categorised and presented in a tabular format for easy comprehension during data analysis. Table 1 contains the demographic data from BIG FM, while Table 2 comprises the demographic data from STEP TV.

‘Table 1’ - Respondents at BIG FM

Respondent	Number	Length of career in the Media	Length of career at BIG F.M
News editor/Station Manager	2	10 – 13 years	3 years
News reporters	2	5 – 9 years	3 – 4 years
Presenters	2	4 – 11 years	0.5 – 3 years
Total	6		

At BIG FM Mbale, the total number of respondents were six. The respondents were made up of the station manager, a news editor, two reporters (one of which doubles as a sub-editor while the other doubles as a news anchor alongside), and two presenters and anchors (one of which also doubles as a production manager and another as a field reporter). The editors and the station manager have generally had experiences ranging from 10 to 13 years in the media; however, at BIG FM, both of them have worked there only for three years respectively. On their part, the reporters have had media experiences that fall between the ranges of five to nine years, but at BIG FM, their years of experience range from three to four years in the field, while the presenters have had media experiences that fall between the ranges of four to 11 years, but at BIG FM, their years of experience range from five months to three years on desk. This is because the station was relatively new, having been established less than five years prior.

‘Table 2’ - Respondents at STEP TV

Respondent	Number	Length of career in the Media	Length of career at STEP TV.
News editor/Station Manager	1	10 years	6 years
News reporters	6	3 – 12 years	3 – 12 years
Presenters	7	2 – 14 years	2 – 5 years
Total	14		

At STEP TV Mbale, the total number of respondents were 14. Among the respondents were the news editor (who also doubles as the Station Manager), six news reporters and seven presenters and anchors (although all the reporters also double as presenters and anchors). The news editor has invested about 10 years of his career in the media generally and about six years at STEP TV, while the news reporters have had experiences that range between three to 12 years generally in the media, specifically at STEP TV. The presenters have had general media experience that falls between two to 14 years and two to five years at STEP TV.

4.3 Interview Guide

During the interview, respondents were asked the following questions as a guide to elicit data for the research questions. See *Appendix B* for details.

4.4 Emerging Themes

In order to answer the three research questions posed in an orderly manner, feedback from the respondents is thus put forward, with various themes emerging from the responses.

4.4.1 Research Question One:

What ethical dilemma do journalists and editors encounter as media practitioners in privately-owned media due to the owner’s conflicts of interest?

To ascertain the kind of ethical dilemma journalists and editors encounter daily as media practitioners in private-owned media due to owner conflicts of interest, questions one, two, three, four, five, and six were asked during the interview session with the participants. From the transcript of their responses to the questions, the following themes emerged and were briefly discussed in light of the participants’ experiences.

‘Table 3’ – Emerging Themes from Research Question One

Interview Guide	Emerging themes	Remarks
Question 1: Do you understand the concept of ethics?	Professionalism, guidelines, principles, do’s and don’ts, conduct patterns, code of conduct.	Most of them see ethics as a standard bearer.
Question 2: What do you know about the professional code of ethics for journalists in Uganda?	Media guidelines, confidentiality, accuracy, truth, balance and fairness, objectivity, protection, moral principles, media regulations.	This is a guiding principle for regulating an industry.
Question 3: Does your medium’s house style tally with the Professional code of ethics for journalists? a. If yes, in what ways? b. If no, in what ways?	Mostly Yes - balanced stories/news, no discrimination, no bribes, compliance, no defamation, verified reportage, impartial, truth, no biased reports, no partisan, no falsehood, reliability, no brown envelope journalism. A few No - programme tempering, going with trends, prioritise money, programme compromise.	There is ethical compliance, but there is also evidence of non-compliance.

Interview Guide	Emerging themes	Remarks
Question 4: What kinds of conflicts of interest do you face on the job daily as a practicing journalist/editor?	Bribery, government sanctions, owners/boss' interests, deceit, personal manipulation, party affiliation, sponsors' interests, social trends, religious faith.	It confirms the evidence of non-compliance with ethics in some cases.
Question 5: Are there occasions where the professional code of ethics conflicts with the media owner's interest? a. If yes, give examples. b. If no, (move to the next question).	A few No. Mostly Yes – politicians' interest, stations owned by politicians, media owners avoid anti-government reportage, media boom, money making and/or profit maximisation, employing unqualified practitioners, under payment, etc.	There is strong evidence of the causes of non-compliance with ethics.
Question 6: Has there been any time you are asked to do what the media owner wants at the expense of your duty to the public? a. If yes, how often? b. If no, (move to the next question).	In this case, there are more NOs than YES – with some of the following reasons - often, at times, irregular, once a year, twice, political seasons, rare circumstances.	There are scattered occurrences and indications of non-compliance.

Data from *Table 3* above reveal that themes that emerged from answering questions one, two, three, four, five, and six, which cover research question one, are indicative that the major ethical dilemma faced by journalists and editors in everyday life as media practitioners in private-owned media is whether to compromise standards in favour of media owners' interest leading to poor ethical compliance or to stick to professionalism against all odds with visible threats of job loss and threats to life.

Having agreed that ethics is a form of the standard bearer (culled from themes in question one), which serves as a guiding principle in regulating an industry (themes from question two), themes emanating from question four which constitute dilemmas to the journalist (bribery, government sanctions, owners/boss' interests, deceit, personal manipulation, party affiliation, sponsors' interests, social trends and religious faith) are therefore contrary to ethical standards although their occurrence is "often", "at times", "irregular", "once a year", twice, "during political seasons", "on rare circumstances" (themes from question six).

All the respondents in BIG FM attest to the fact that they face huge conflicts of interest on the job daily as journalists and/or editors. Four respondents gave feedback regarding bribing and external influences by notable members of society, such as politicians and big companies, as the medium is a business and/or commercial radio station. In contrast, the other two respondents talked about the stringent laws put in place by 'the powers that be' to restrict what is being aired or fear of government sanctions. For instance, some respondents cited in their responses to Question four above narrated the kind of ethical dilemma they face on the job daily regarding the theme deduced.

B1 a. "Bribe – there is much bribing of late; so many politicians or leaders want to pay their way through the media because they are not well-respected by the people they lead, due to their bad leadership."

b. "Tight laws or fear of government sanctions - Like some stories are right or true, yet fear of government sanctions or threats sets in, so we cannot air them, e.g. the age limit removal – you either don't talk about it if you are against it, or you just support it."

B4 "Being a business or commercial radio station, big companies always want to influence what news we air, especially when issues affecting them come up."

B6. “At times, I experience deceit; editors deliberately sit on stories for reasons best known to them, and one is not given an explanation as to what transpired so that we can learn from it, too.” Just like BIG FM, all the respondents but one (**S3**) in STEP TV poured their hearts out passionately, as conflicts of interest are undeniably a cankerworm that is eating deep into the fabrics of daily journalism practice, thereby affecting their long-term professional output. The conflicts of interest deduced from their responses are, but are not limited to, the responses as cited here:

S11. “News angle being determined by news sources: when it comes to sources of news, the news sources at times, force you to write stories in their own angle, yet, you have your angle of news.” Especially when they are top sponsors or government functionaries, an ethical dilemma is thus created.

S12. “The tendency to elevate my faith (being a Pastor) and views above all else (I am a presenter of faith and gospel truth).”

S14. “Like the need to tell the truth when, at times, it will hurt a sponsor. For example, we may have a negative story about an organization or a production company like **Movit**, but, just as we plan to put it on air, we imagine what consequences it may have on the business, especially if the organisation is programme sponsor at the station. However, I normally insist on telling the truth. I do this by going to the sponsor to engage them to tell their own side of the story, and once that is done, we air whatever is being said. By this, we have given them a chance to express themselves, which makes our reporting balanced.”

Though, some of the responses mostly from BIG FM as cited in question three below, are direct contradictions to the affirmative answers and the responses given in question four as was cited by some respondents above. For example, in their response to question three, all the respondents

at BIG FM, affirmed to the fact that their medium's house style tallies with the professional code of ethics for the Ugandan journalist, and they all justified their points with some reasons like:

B1. "Yes, because all our stories are professional. We always bring out balanced stories from both sides. For instance, in politics, we feature both the opposition and the ruling party; we don't discriminate! Also, we don't accept bribes, which is spelled out in the code of ethics both for the Uganda Journalists Association (UJA) and the National Institute of Journalists of Uganda (NIJU). Government regulatory bodies closely monitor us, and all this while, we have not received any summoning letter from the regulatory bodies."

B2. "Yes, to a large extent, because as far as the programming is concerned, we comply. However, on rare occasions, talk shows tamper with our programmes based on what is trending."

B3. "Yes, but sometimes not. And no, too, because sometimes our bosses look at making money, and so you find yourself allowing certain programmes on air that do not match the code of ethics." This response is quite peculiar because the respondent is neither here nor there (he spoke from two angles) based on his personal experience.

Just like **B2**, another respondent (**B3**) gave a two-sided answer of 'Yes' and 'No', with most of his reasons contradicting his affirmative answer. So, I will say that **B3** is more on the 'No' side than the 'Yes' side.

While at STEP TV, all the respondents gave an affirmative answer that the medium's house style tallies with the professional code of ethics for Ugandan journalists, stating that they ensure that they do what the guidelines of regulatory authorities like the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) stipulate; this they do by avoiding: 'brown envelope journalism,' use of scandalous words on air, putting the truth first, staying impartial in their line of duty by recruiting professional journalists who understood the tenets of the profession, avoiding false information

and ensuring the reliability of the sources of information before making it public, among others. See some of their responses below:

S1. “Yes. We make sure we stay impartial in our line of duty. We put the truth first before anything.”

S4. “Yes. Because no biased reporting is allowed, or stories which are not balanced, are also not allowed.”

S6. “Yes. We are prohibited from being partisan. False information is also not allowed; every piece of information must have a reliable source.”

S13. “Yes, by not going against the standards set by the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC).”

S14. “Yes. We discourage ‘brown envelope journalism’, use of bad language on air, among others.

All the respondents in both media houses, in their own way agreed that their medium’s house style tallied with the professional codes of ethics for the Ugandan Journalist, save for **B2** and **B3**, who gave a two-sided answer respectively. And since all the respondents affirmed to the compliance of their medium with the professional code of ethics, then, it will be that there are no deviations from these media houses to the codes of ethics as stipulated. However, one can still see from the data gathered in questions three and four that there are conflicting responses from both media houses to the questions posed.

Despite these contradictions, there are also little evidence of compliance (as seen in the themes emanating from question three), which indicated that there are balanced stories/news, no discrimination, no bribes, compliance, no defamation, verified reportage, impartial, truth, no biased reports, no partisan, no falsehood, reliability, no brown envelope journalism. Non-

compliance was blamed on politicians' interest, stations owned by politicians, media owners avoid anti-government reportage, media boom, money making and/or profit maximisation, employing unqualified practitioners, underpayment (as emergent themes of question five), and journalists believe that these problems are sources of dilemma in keeping faith with the journalism code. For instance, see what some respondents from both media houses (BIG FM and STEP TV) stated in their response to question five, which deals with occasions where professional codes of ethics for journalists conflict with the media owner's interests.

B1. "Yes, definitely; for example, if someone who is a politician is for or against the government, but the information he has conflicts with the ethical code of conduct, such information is allowed, provided he pays for it. However, during the 2016 elections, we were selective of news being reported especially that of the opposition like Besigye, was a 'no-go-area'."

B2. "Not at BIG FM; but yes, in other private media houses where the station is owned by politicians, owners tend to have conflicts with professional ethics."

B3. "Yes, generally. Like if the owner is a politician, definitely, you may end up not being objective." In this case, the media owner tends to dictate the angle of the news presentation in a way that it suits his party affiliations.

B6. "Definitely true; currently in Uganda, we experience media explosion, as a result, not everyone who establishes a media house, knows how to run it professionally. Such media owners tend to forego professional ethics and concentrate on making money."

S2. "Yes; in some occasions, some bosses employ non-professional (an amateur), journalists whom they pay less money. They consider their own economic value of maximising profit as against doing the right thing (professionally) of hiring professionals they need to pay well."

S8. “Yes, e.g. is that, we may do a good news story on the opposition, but because of the owner’s business and/or political interests with the ruling party like the National Resistance Movement (NRM), such stories will be dropped definitely.” In this scenario, stories do not see the light of the day due to business and/or political interests of the media owner.

S9. “Yes. For example, during electioneering where the media owner who is affiliated to a political party, wants his fellow political party member to be given an upper-hand in a news coverage other than his opponent, yet, there is need for impartiality as stipulated by the code of ethics.”

S10. “Yes, like when you want to talk about politics, the media owner restricts us for fear of government sanctions; not necessarily for his personal interest, but for government interest (which in the end, still conflicts with professionalism).”

S11. “Yes, but not in STEP TV. In Uganda, there are scenarios where presenters are forced to stop some of their shows, because the guests they have scheduled to go on air are not the media owner’s political party allies, though such scenarios do not happen in STEP TV, but it happens elsewhere. In STEP TV, media personalities are given the opportunities to express themselves professionally; those that are not journalists by education, are always advised to follow the regulatory authority’s (Uganda Communications Commission - UCC and/or Media Council of Uganda - MCU) guidelines.”

Just like ‘**B2**’ in BIG FM, ‘**S11**’ in STEP TV, also is of the same school of thought that of course conflicts of interest do exist between the media owner’s interests and the professional codes, but they personally have not experienced such in the respective medium to currently work for.

4.4.2 Research Question Two:

What are the coping mechanisms deployed by journalists and editors in dealing with the owner’s conflicts of interest in private-owned media?

Research question two was answered by interviewees’ responses to questions seven, eight and nine.

‘Table 4’ – Emerging Themes from Research Question Two

Interview Guide	Emerging themes	Remarks
Question 7: What does media ownership mean to you?	Full control, political affiliations, personal interests, and business venture.	The meaning implies a tendency to non-compliance.
Question 8: How do you deal with these conflicts of interest that arise on the job daily, owing to media ownership?	Play along, self-censorship, sticking to professional codes, keeping a distance, prioritise my job.	Reactions here are divided as some will stick with journalism code while others want to protect their jobs.
Question 9: What proactive measures should be put in place to curb the excesses of media ownership ‘control syndrome’ on the journalistic profession?	Employment of professionals, media ownership by professionals, sanctions against media owners, dialogue, training and retraining of journalists, need to sensitise the media owners, issuance of license, law amendment, legislation, self-regulation, more sensitisation.	Effective measures focus on improving the quality of journalist through trainings and also the need to sensitise media owners and improving on the media laws and regulations.

Data from the *Table 4* above reveal that the themes that emerged from answering questions seven, eight and nine, which covers research question two are indicative that journalists view media ownership as having “full control”, “political affiliations”, “personal interests”, “business venture” (as revealed in the themes from question seven). See excerpts from some respondents:

B1. “Media ownership means full or partial control of the media by directors (individuals), group or government. It also depends on the political affiliations of the media owner.”

B3. “It means anyone who has money and has seen potential in the media business, and with interest.”

B4. “Media ownership means having full power, control and management of a media house.”

B6. “Media ownership to me, means for one to establish and control a media house for the purpose of business, serving the community and promotes information dissemination with the intention to create jobs for the people in a given locality.”

At BIG FM, while the majority of others see media ownership as a form of control and management of the media venture (as deduced from the responses above), two other respondents,

B2 and **B5**, had very fascinating ideas on what media ownership means to them. **B2**, posits that “*it is a situation where media owners create jobs for the people in the field*”, and **B5**, sees the term as “*the person who is responsible for the procurement of the equipment used for broadcasting and pay taxes*”, in other words, the owner of the media facilities.

Then at STEP TV, most respondents see media ownership as a way the mass media is governed or controlled by an individual, a group, or the government, which can be in the form of print, broadcast, or online. However, some refer to it as a business enterprise set up to inform and entertain the public while making a profit. Some respondents have been cited here:

S3. “A business ownership of the media, not necessarily a professional ownership, because the owner may be a businessman who knows nothing about media professionalism.”

S7. “Media ownership is a manner in which mass media is governed. This can be print, broadcast or online media.”

S8. “It is business management and control of a media house.”

S11. “In Uganda, it is a little tricky. It is like waking up and starting up a media house for business. Most people who own media houses in Uganda, aside the government, are either politicians or businessmen.”

S12. “It is entrepreneurship, setting up an enterprise or organisation that specialises in communicating news, views, and entertainment to the public.”

S1 and **S4**, understood media ownership to mean an individual or government ownership of a news media, while **S13** and **S14**, defines it as the proprietors of a specific media organisation; either as sole proprietor or as a group.

In all, as can be deduced from the responses above, media ownership has to do with owning the factors and/or means of production in the media, which also revolves around controlling the media. In other words, the owner of the media facilities is regarded as the media owner and therefore has a higher level of control and/or influence over the media outlet.

Against this backdrop, journalists and media professionals are psychologically affected by their perception of media ownership and what it entails. Many of these journalists and media professionals, such as editors, deal with media ownership and conflict of interests by playing along, keeping a distance, and prioritising their jobs; although a few of them will stick to the professional codes or do self-censorship (as evident in the themes emerging from question 8). At BIG FM, conflicts of interest are being dealt with by suggesting ways to resolve a problem,

avoiding critical stories, applying suitable media and other theories on the situation at hand, and occasionally sharing stories with media houses that have the fortitude to face any pressure from the government of the day. But, **B6** has a fascinating response. Find some responses as cited:

B3. “I always stand on my professional codes, though sometimes, I am unable to”

B4. “In order not to compromise the ethics and professionalism, I forego certain stories or go for obvious ones.”

B5. “This is handled by sharing stories with media houses that have the capacity to handle government pressure. For example; stories with legal backing, lawyers will handle.”

B6. “I handle conflicts of interest basing on the media theories; i.e. ‘Antinomian’, ‘Absolutist’ and ‘Situationist’ theories. I apply one at a time depending on the existing situation of the location from where I execute my duties.”

As a reporter and newscaster, **B6** posits that applying any suitable media and/or other ethical theory from among the ‘Antinomian’, ‘Situationist’, and ‘Absolutist’ theories, respectively, helps as a solution to the challenges he faces on the job daily.

At STEP TV, the respondents gave their individual perspectives on how they handle the conflict of interest they face daily, due to media owners’ interests, except for **S11**, who said nothing in this regard, and **S2**, who claimed that he had never experienced any form of conflict of interest on the job. Some of the respondents have similar responses which have been summarised as the following points: putting oneself in the shoes of the media owner owing to the business interest, tolerance, playing along, self-censorship, prior research on the story to be armed with angles on how to handle whatever challenge that comes with it, sticking to professional code of ethics and shunning stories that brings dilemma so as to keep their job and the profession on the long run.

See some comments below:

S1. “I obviously play along.”

S4. “Self-censorship is done in order not to conflict with the owner.”

S6. “Sticking to my professional code of conduct and shunning stories that cause conflict.”

S8. “It is so challenging because we have to bear with the situation since he is the one who pays our salaries.”

S9. “For me, I choose to distant myself from such stories or situations to avoid being caught in the bracket in order to stay safe on the job. If I keep my job, I keep my profession!”

S10. “I become convinced that I need to take the business interest of the media owner first, else, I will lose my job.”

It is evident that these journalists deal with these conflicts of interest that arise on their job daily, as influenced by their perception of what media ownership entails. Participants recognised the dangers of media ownership control and opined on proactive measures to mitigate these controls as revealed by the themes (which emerged from responses to question nine).

Some suggestions were brought forward from the two media houses on the proactive measures to put in place in a bid to curtail the control syndrome of media owners, vis-a-vis professionalism.

From BIG FM, respondents say:

B1. **a.** By employing media professionals to lead the organisation, because at times, a media house may be led by someone who is not a media professional as a manager.

b. Professional journalists should own the media houses themselves and not just business-oriented people.

c. There is need to sensitise the media owners to understand how the media works in order to avoid interruptions and ethical abuse of the profession, and not just to see the monetary aspects alone.

d. Media organisations like the Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda (HRNJ-Uganda), should continue to fight for the protection and rights of journalists; a bill on the safety of journalists should be introduced.”

B4. “Journalism Associations should engage media owners and tell them how their conflicts affect professionalism.”

B5. “**a.** To start with, journalists should form partnerships with civil society organizations to empower them.

b. Again, journalists should join professional bodies like the Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda (HRNJ-Uganda) to help fight for their rights when violated.

c. Journalists should be trained and exposed to know their rights, then, they can do their profession.”

B6. “Prioritise on promoting professional code of ethics, as everyone who would wish to establish a media house, should first be assessed and verified, before doing so.”

Then, at STEP TV, journalists are of the opinion that:

S1. “Professional journalists should be established and empowered to manage the media independent of the owner.”

S2. “Bosses should know when to stop controlling and leave the journalists to do their job.”

S4. “The Uganda Communications Commission (UCC), should consist of both the private and government sectors, so that there are checks and balances for proper running of the media.”

S8. “There should be directives and use or code of conduct from the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) for media owners.”

S10. “**a.** First, the government needs to change the laws that govern the media houses. They should allow them to inform the people, whether it is positive or negative of the government.

b. The UCC should give media owners their own ethics, so as not to see it as just to become afraid of government sanctions, which they assume will in turn affect their media business. Media owners are always afraid of government sanctions, so, they put in a lot of control measures on their medium's content to keep their business going on.”

S11. “**a.** In my opinion, there is a big gap between media owners and the regulatory authorities. So, the gap between the media owners and the regulatory authorities should be bridged. This can be done by extending their regulations to the media owners, not the journalists alone.

b. Other measures should be put in place to curb the excesses of media owners. For instance; regulatory authorities and media personalities are okay, but the media owners, need to be enlightened on how the media run.

c. A bill for media ownership (that is how the media should be owned and managed) should be proposed, because regulatory authorities in their capacity control the media content for national consumption.

d. Again, media self-regulation within the media house should be encouraged. As a media personality, if my boss tells me to do something the right way, it is not bad, it is only bad if it is unprofessional.”

S13. “Journalists should advocate for more media freedom, especially during the time of politicking.”

S14. “Some media owners are ignorant and so need sensitisation, so that they acquire knowledge on the nature of the industry they are indulging in. I think the media owners have to go on the drawing board or look inwards intentionally to encourage professionalism within the staff they employ, other than concentrating on making money, or else, we will continue to experience a lot of cases that result from unprofessional code of conduct; like libel, defamation, among others.”

The themes were indicative that employment of professionals, media ownership by professionals, sanctions against media owners, dialogue, training and retraining of journalists, the need to sensitise the media owners, issuance of license, law amendment, legislation, self-regulation, more sensitisation of the journalists and the public, will be effective counter measures and good coping mechanisms to manage the conflict of media owners' interests in the obstruction of professional journalism.

4.4.3 Research Question Three:

How does owner's conflicts of interest affect good journalism practice in the media?

Research question three will be answered by interviewees' responses to questions 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14.

'Table 5' – Emerging Themes from Research Question Three

Interview Guide	Emerging themes	Remarks
Question 10: In what ways has media ownership influenced your professional decision-making as a journalist/editor?	Taking decisions that favour the boss in order to secure my job, it propels self-regulation, it affects the recruitment process, provides opportunities to learn new things (through trainings and networking), I have the right to exercise duties professionally, there is no way.	Decisions tend to favour the owners' and the third parties' interests.
Question 11: How has the interference of the media owner influenced your objectivity as a journalist?	By being biased, changing the angles of stories, running unbalanced stories, job protection, holding back, obstructing reportage, stimulates me positively, more vigilant, not yet observed, no influence, no way.	Interference makes reportage biased, unreliable, and lacking in credibility.
Question 12: In what ways do conflicts of	Misrepresentation of facts, bandwagon[ism], dishonesty	It affects a journalist's personality and/or

Interview Guide	Emerging themes	Remarks
interest affect your professional output in Big FM/ STEP TV?	with reportage, loss of credibility, inaccuracy, turning a blind eye to public interests, against religious faith, time-consuming, loss of sponsors, risk to life, and job loss.	reputation as much as the quality of their reportage.
Question 13: In what ways can these conflicts of interest affect good journalism practice in the media as an entity in the society?	Partisanship, misinforming the public, isolation from the public and society, kills journalists' creativity, promotes one-sided stories, loss of hope, coercion of journalists, and increases corruption.	It affects the public and journalists alike negatively.
Question 14: How do you view the journalistic profession in the near future going by the evolving influences of media owners?	Fully-commercialised, politicised, stunted, extinction of professionalism, diminished media space, restrictive media, decline, death of liberalism and objectivity, loss of jobs, more censorship, non-existence, loss of value.	Retrogressive future is envisaged, though, there are hopes for improving on the status-quo.

Data from *Table 5* above reveal the themes that emerged from answering questions 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14, which address research question three.

The themes that emerged from Question 10 revealed that, in some ways, media ownership has influenced the professional decision-making of journalists/editors. In terms of decision making, the mixed reactions were highlighted as shown in themes like: “taking decisions that favour the boss,” “affects the recruitment process”, “opportunities to learn new things” (through trainings and networking), “right to exercise duties professionally”, and “there is no way”.

These are some feedback from the respondents at BIG FM:

B2. “It has not yet happened.”

B4. “Sometimes, I have to make a decision to forego certain steps in preparing or writing news stories, especially where there are no funds; for example, investigative journalism involves a lot of funds.”

B5. “They give us directives like - do not air anything that will be seen as going against the government.”

B6. “Positively, media ownership (as in the boss’s management ideology), has exposed me to different classes of people who at the end have contributed to my well-being professionally through trainings. On the other hand, it has created rows between me and my sources of information.”

See some responses from STEP TV too:

S1. “When there is less protective gear for me as a journalist investigating a story, which my boss is not in support of, I am left with no choice but to do what the owner finds comfortable, to protect my life and job.”

S2. “In the aspect of recommendation for recruitment, our bosses decide when to employ, despite our recommendations. At times, they employ non-professional journalists who they will pay less money.”

S5. “Positively, the media owner has influenced me by sending me to workshops whereby I have learnt a lot of new things and also interact with the community, hence increasing my viewership professionally.”

S6. “There has been influence in the aspects of covering stories of their interests, especially on political parties.”

S11. “On the contrary, in my department, I have the right to exercise my duties professionally.”

S13. “By asking me not to discuss certain issues about the government, especially the regime in power in order to avoid litigation matters.”

S14. “There is no way.”

At some point, the media owner's interference has influenced the objectivity of journalists on both sides of the coin. On journalists' objectivity, themes from question 11 indicate that: being biased, changing angles of stories, running unbalanced stories, job protection, holding back, and obstructed reportage, are the leading consequences of media owner's conflict of interest on journalists' objectivity in reportage; although, a few participants opined that it stimulates them positively and, in some cases, it helps them to be at alert (self-regulation). However, four respondents (B2, S3, S5, and S11) particularly insisted that the media owners' conflicts of interest do not influence them in any way (themes from question 11).

At BIG FM, most of the responses are cited below:

B1. “It has only affected me in the aspect of killing news hour, because of money; thereby giving news a little time other than it was meant to be.”

B3. “By making me change angles of my stories.”

B4. “Some stories had to be run unbalanced, which is not good for the profession.”

B5. “We have decided not to do sensitive stories involving government, because of the media owner.”

B6. “Because of job protection, at times, as a practitioner, I have to forego objectivity and save my job. In other words, at times I consider applying ‘situationist theory’.”

By ‘Situationist theory’s application on the job according to **B6**, it is seen that his actions or decisions are influenced by external factors like the current situation at hand and not by internal factors, traits or his motivations.

Then at STEP TV, some of their responses are cited as follows:

S1. “It makes me hold back at times.”

S2. “So far, I do what my professional code says, not what my boss needs.”

S4. “It doesn’t allow me to wholesomely bring out the stories, especially if they are considered political by any kind.”

S8. “It has not influenced me so much, because, in most cases, I do my profession when he is not around.”

S12. “Positively, it is making me a better communicator.”

S13. “This makes me more vigilant and more cautious in choosing the topics of discussion on air.”

S14. “My objectivity has not been influenced in any way because the medium owner here allows me do my job professionally.”

With the above responses, one can only say that beyond ‘objectivity’ as a core ethos of the journalism profession, other aspects of ethics like ‘truth’, ‘accuracy’, ‘balance’, and ‘fairness’ among others also come to play with media ownership influences and/or interferences being an issue. And to a reasonable extent, those pockets of influences and/or interferences have far-reaching consequences on professionalism by the way news is reported and aired for public consumption.

The themes that emerged from question 12, showed that misrepresentation of facts, bandwagon[ism], dishonesty with reportage, loss of credibility, inaccuracy, blind eye to public interests, against religious faith, time-consuming, loss of sponsors, risks of life and job loss (see question 12), are the leading effects of conflicts of media owners’ interests on the professional output of the respondents. All the respondents shared their points of view as to how conflicts of

interest affect their professional output at BIG FM and sometimes their personal reputation as journalists. Here are some responses from BIG FM:

B1. “It has brought about misrepresentation of facts, misinformation to the public instead of advising the public correctly. You join the bandwagon to protect yourself and the media owner, because of fear of government and media owners’ sanctions. It kills your personality or reputation as a professional. I love my life!”

B2. “It is self-explanatory. There are times the public is denied stories with impact and are listening to stories of no value, but not always. It can happen like twice in a year.”

B3. “I fail to be truthful and objective on a particular issue because I may lose sponsorship.”

B4. “These conflicts deny the interviewer the right to information as enshrined in the laws of the land.”

For STEP TV, the respondents stated various ways conflict of interests affects their professional outputs. Behold some responses here:

S1. “It leads to loss of credibility and accuracy in the work.”

S9. “These conflict of interests affects my professional output in such a way that I turn a blind eye to newsworthy stories that might be of public interest, because of my affiliations to the community where the news or individuals emanate from. I, at times, tend to ignore such stories.”

S12. “The obvious conflict of interests I face daily on the job, is upholding my Christian values, which to a reasonable extent tallies with my professional values in terms of truth and objectivity. However, my angle of truth may be different from that of a non-Christian and as a result, they pay less attention to my presentation because of my religious stance or beliefs.”

S14. “It is time-consuming, since I take long pondering on the way forward.”

In the end, all these conflicts of interest that compete for various loyalties at the same time will lead to low patronage, and eventually a deprivation of the watchdog and surveillance roles of journalism where the need arises.

The effect of these conflicts is not limited to professional output but also affects journalism practice and extends to the entire society (seen themes from question 13). Some of those effects include: partisanship, misinforming the public, isolation from the public and society, kills journalists' creativity, promotes one-sided stories, loss of hope, coercion of journalists, and increase corruption largely, because journalists objectivity were affected due to bias, changing angles of stories, running unbalanced stories, trying to protect their jobs, holding back some information and obstruction of proper reportage. Bad as the effects are, there are also positive themes that stimulate journalists positively, such as positive motivation, making journalists more vigilant, and motivating their resolve to abide by the journalism codes. Here are respondents' feedback to question 13.

At BIG FM, respondents say:

B1. "You end up entertaining and informing the public in favour of the government, individuals, or an organisation, thereby failing to educate the public correctly; this being that information is two-sided (it can be good or bad). A good example is with regard to the *Land Bill* amendment – Article 26 of the 1995 Constitution, the government pressurises the media to speak in their favour as sole landowners, at the expense of the eligible landowners. Again, these days, media owners often don't want detailed information on air; rather, they 'kill' news time because it has been booked already; news is timed in exchange for financial benefit. Sometimes, money interrupts news e.g., bringing up more adverts as news inserts during a news programme on air."

B3. “Our roles as journalists will not be done, and so, other society members will distance themselves from us, which will end up making our work more difficult, because we cannot exist in isolation from the society we operate in.”

B4. “It will limit the journalist’s ability to write good (critical) news stories about certain companies, unless the story is in form of public relations like reputation management and/or goodwill of the company only.”

B6. “Most times, conflicts of interest promote one-sided information and also tend to hide or sit on the facts of an information, or in a news story, hence, denying the community or public the ability to get real information.”

While at STEP TV, I got responses like:

S2. “It makes the journalist lose hope in their profession and on the long run the media’s credibility is at stake.”

S6. “It leads to failure to use the profession to cause an impact in the society.”

S7. “There will be poor output of news in terms of balanced reporting by journalists for fear of being sanctioned by bosses.”

S8. “Of course, it will affect good journalism practice in the media, as journalists will be quietly coerced to do what their bosses want at the expense of true journalism.”

S14. “It can deny the audience a chance to professional broadcast, especially when broadcasters have to hide certain relevant information or package in a specific way.”

From all these responses, it can be seen that conflicts of interest to a great extent affect good journalism practices in the media as an entity in the society because the media do not operate in isolation, but within a society.

Going by the evolving influences of media owners, the critical exterminating factor of their influence on the future of the journalistic profession is that it has low prospects for improvements but severe consequences on journalism practice, press freedom, and society in the long run. This is because the priority placed on the business interest of media owners as against the ideal public interest or public service role of the media, might eventually lead to full-commercialisation of the media and journalism practice. More so, shortly, journalism may be politicised, become stunted, be extricated, there will be diminishing media space, more restrictions, a decline of liberalism, death of journalism and objectivity, loss of jobs, more censorship, non-existent and loss of value (see themes that emerged from question 14). Some responses are cited below:

At BIG FM, respondents say:

B1. “It will be fully commercialised. Everyone will go where money is. You produce a story individually, with money as prerequisite e.g, killing a good story for money. On the other hand, it also depends on the environment we are in. If the environment becomes better, then the profession will have improved, changed for good or thrived.”

B2. “It will be diluted by media owners, due to the political interests. 80 percent of the broadcast media (radio and television) in Uganda are owned by politicians.”

B3. “Ideally, it is supposed to be one of the best professions in the world, but if things do not improve, our journalism will never grow. As a result, professionalism will be stunted. In other words, there will be no professionalism at all, because the new entrants will never take ethical issues serious and therefore, professionalism will die with time.”

B4. “Unless the government and journalists’ associations come out clear on the need to stick to professionalism, I see the profession derailing.”

B5. “There will be a diminishing media space, in the near future. The media environment will be restrictive in nature, due to the political environment.”

B6. “If the stakeholders; likely the government, do not come to regulate the media, especially, with considerations on professionalism, in five years to come, the media will not have a steady progress in Uganda. There will be a decline, because of the control of media owners, if not stopped.”

While at STEP TV, some of the respondents like *S1* and *S6* have similar opinions. See some responses as follows:

S2. “Something should be done, because, things are not going on well on the side of journalists in the country. In five years, if not improved, most journalists will lack what to do (lose their jobs), or lost touch with professionalism, in order to keep their jobs.”

S4. “In terms of technology, it is becoming better, but I foresee more censorship as time goes by.”

S6. “The freedom and courage of journalists will be no more; they will just be there in a disguise.”

S7. “There will be more trained and qualified journalists, due to the ever-increasing number of graduates who studied journalism, but going by the evolving influences of media owners, I have no answer for that now.”

S8. “I think in the near future, there will be no rights for journalists to do their things professionally as they ought to.”

S9. “If no measures are put in place, the profession may be over politicised.”

S10. “It will lose meaning of being a media profession, because, if they lose the informative role of the media, then the meaning is lost.”

S11. “There will be no much difference, because, nothing has been put in place to fight the problem of media ownership control. It will still remain the same, unless, it is changed.”

S13. “In the near future, there should have been adequate regulations by the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC), on the standards and control on the work of journalists.”

S14. “If media owners interfere with the work of journalists, then, such acts will water-down professionalism in the media.”

4.5 Conclusion

The future of the journalistic profession, going by the evolving influences of media owners, if not checked, has been predicted to have a far-reaching consequence, mainly on the negative side, especially with regard to media professionalism dying a natural death. However, if things are worked on positively, the environment will be more conducive for journalists to uphold their professionalism and blossom for society's good. To this end, respondents from both media houses spoke their minds, looking at the future in view.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the results from the qualitative data presented and interpreted in chapter four. It focuses on analysis using the themes that emerged from participants' interview responses in alignment with the research questions guiding the study. The theories and literature outlined in Chapter two also influenced the analysis and discussion of findings.

The findings from the interviews with journalists and editors examine the ethical implications of media ownership for the professionalism of journalists in Uganda. They highlight the intricate power dynamics and ethical decisions that shape the media landscape, emphasising the critical relationship between media ownership, ethical journalism, and the influence of political and economic forces. The respondents' experiences reflect both external and internal pressures that influence their professional integrity, and these challenges are compounded by the dual control mechanisms journalists face: one from the media owners (owing to business and/or commercial interest) and another from the government of the day (owing to political interest), which in turn affects the society (public interest) in the long run.

This analysis is divided into themes and sub-themes to align with the research questions for the study.

5.2 The Dilemma faced by Journalists and Editors due to Media Owners' Conflicts of interest

Media owners often create conflicts of interest that journalists are forced to navigate daily. These dynamics create ethical dilemmas, influencing both their professional decision-making and the

overall integrity of the media industry. Research question one was addressed by the following questions one, two, three, four, five, and six in the interview guide under the following sub-themes:

5.2.1 Understanding of Ethics and Professional Codes

The first theme that emerged from the interviews is a shared understanding of the concept of ethics among journalists. Responses from questions one and two indicated that all participants interviewed had a basic understanding of the concept of ethics and also knew about the professional code of ethics for journalists in Uganda. Nonetheless, the depth of understanding varied, with some offering only basic definitions and others exhibiting comprehensive knowledge of ethical principles. All the opinions were highlighted in themes, such as "balanced stories," "verified reportage," "unbiased reports," "truth," etc., which emerged from the participant's responses to the questions.

From the responses on whether their media house style tallies with the professional code of ethics for journalists in Uganda, as indicated in question three, all the respondents answered affirmatively. However, respondents from BIG FM (B2 and B3) were divided in their opinion from the rest of the participants, as they had conflicting responses, where they answered the affirmative ("yes") contrary to the dissenting response ("no") they also gave. B2 responded that:

Yes, to a large extent, because as far as the programming is concerned, we comply.

However, on rare occasions, our programmes are tampered with by talk shows based on what is trending (B2).

Whereas, B3 remarked that:

Yes, but sometimes not. And No too, because sometimes our bosses look at making money and so you find yourself allowing certain programmes on air which do not match the code of ethics (B3).

It was evident that, on the one hand, some journalists are not threatened by this dilemma because they feel their medium's house style aligns with the professional code of conduct and that media owners also try to conform to ethical and professional journalism, especially journalists from STEP TV. While on the other hand, other journalists noted occasional discrepancies, as they are caught up with programme tempering, trends, money, and programme compromise due to pressures from the top, as noted by B2 and B3 above. See what some other respondents (B1 and S6) said to show that their house style is in alignment with the professional code of conduct:

Yes, because all our stories are professional. We always bring out balanced stories from both sides. For instance, in politics, we feature both the opposition and the ruling party; we don't discriminate! Also, we don't accept bribes, which is spelled out in the code of ethics both for the Uganda Journalists Association (UJA) and the National Institute of Journalists of Uganda (NIJU). Government regulatory bodies closely monitor us, and all this while, we have not received any summoning letter from the regulatory bodies (B1).

Also, S6 asserted that:

Yes. We are prohibited from being partisan. False information is also not allowed; every piece of information must have a reliable source (S6).

That notwithstanding, following the themes that emerged from question four, there is strong evidence that media owners strive to remain ethically compliant with the tenets of journalism (primarily due to government sanctions); thus, they do not necessarily put journalists and news editors under pressure all the time. However, a few instances of non-compliance with

professional and ethical journalism standards put the journalists and editors under pressure thereby creating ethical dilemmas

5.2.2 Conflicts of Interest and Ethical Dilemma

Conflict of interest encompasses a situation that challenges or compromises a reporter's and/or journalist's ability to fulfil ethical duties, a term Skjerdal (2012) refers to as competing loyalties. Conflicts of interest and/or competing loyalties among journalists were a significant theme throughout the interviews. As derived from this study, conflicts of interest refer to specific pressures, such as political, financial, and familial, that pose ethical challenges and lead to ethical dilemmas for journalists and editors. In response to question four, which revolved around conflicts of interest they face on the job, journalists at both stations overwhelmingly acknowledged facing ethical dilemmas such as pressure from programme sponsors (business owners, the government and/or politicians) to spin stories, bribery attempts, or emotional entanglements when a story involved one's home community (personal relationships). For instance, respondent B1 shared that bribing a journalist in the face of the prevalent economic hardship constitutes a conflict of interest as well as an ethical dilemma:

- a. Bribe – there is much bribing of late; so many politicians or leaders want to pay their way through the media because they are not well-respected by the people they lead, due to their bad leadership.
- b. Tight laws or fear of government sanctions - Like some stories are right or true, yet fear of government sanctions or threats sets in, so we cannot air them; e.g. the age limit removal – you either don't talk about it if you are against it, or you just support it (B1).

While B4 noted that

Being a business or commercial radio station, big companies always want to influence what news we air, especially when issues affecting them come up (B4).

In most commercial radio stations like BIG FM, business interest is often prioritised over public interest, particularly concerning how the news is produced and presented for public consumption.

For some other respondents, like S12, personal interest stands in the way. He expressed thus:

The tendency to elevate my faith (being a Pastor) and views above all else (I am a presenter of faith and gospel truth) (S12).

Here, personal interest or belief becomes a propeller for an ethical dilemma for the journalist.

The challenges of balancing personal beliefs (e.g., religious or political views) with the need to remain objective in their reporting are competing loyalties that often compromise these practitioners' ethical ideals. On a similar but different note, a respondent from STEP TV (S14)

found a way to reach a compromise on these conflicts of interest. S14 categorically said:

Like the need to tell the truth when at times, it will hurt a sponsor. For example; we may have a negative story about an organisation or a production company like Movit, but, just as we plan to put it on air, we imagine what consequences it may have on the business, especially if the organisation is programme sponsor at the station. However, I normally insist on telling the truth. I do this by going to the sponsor to engage them to tell their own side of the story, and once that is done, we air whatever is being said. By this, we have given them a chance to express themselves, which makes our reporting balanced (S14).

Although telling the truth or balancing a news report from both sides of the aisle, especially with the aim of portraying the sponsors' point of view under the consequences of a negative news, is tantamount to being lopsided, as the motive behind such act was still geared towards being in the good books of the sponsor, majorly for financial and/or economic interests as an end in view.

This corroborates what B4 noted earlier, that "big companies always want to influence what

news is aired, especially when issues affecting them come up.” Thus, affirming that indeed, business interests play a crucial role in what is being presented as news to the public. This underpins economic factors as a propeller for ethical dilemmas, especially when there is a need to tell the truth, which is a major ethical standard of the journalistic profession. This situation makes ethical dilemmas unavoidable and underpins the manifestations of critical political economy theory assumptions as posited by McQuail (2010) that media practices are shaped by economic and political imperatives.

5.2.3 Media Ownership Structures, Editorial Independence, and Journalists’ Autonomy

A critical theme that emerged was the influence of media ownership on the journalistic profession. Media owners' control often leads to conflicts of interest that compromise journalistic objectivity and editorial independence. The influence of media owners who may prioritise political, financial, or religious interests conflicts with the duty of journalists to serve the public with impartial and truthful reporting, thereby impacting their autonomy as well. When asked if there are occasions where the professional code of ethics conflicts with the media owners’ interest (question five), S8 and other respondents captured this reality by saying:

Yes, e.g. is that, we may do a good news story on the opposition, but because of the owner’s business and/or political interests with the ruling party like the National Resistance Movement (NRM), such stories will be dropped definitely (S8).

In the above scenario, some stories do not see the light of day due to the media owner's business and/or political interests. Journalists were routinely told to drop stories, modify angles, or promote narratives beneficial to advertisers, sponsors, or political allies, especially where owners had political or commercial interests and sometimes without being given an apparent reason. Still in response to question five, other respondents also noted that:

Yes, definitely; for example, if someone who is a politician is against or for the government, but the information he has conflicts with the ethical code of conduct, such information is allowed, provided he pays for it. However, during the 2016 elections, we were selective of news being reported, especially that of the opposition like Besigye, which was a 'no-go area' (B1).

Yes, generally. Like if the owner is a politician, definitely, you may end up not being objective (B3).

Yes. For example, during electioneering where the media owner who is affiliated to a political party, wants his fellow political party member to be given an upper-hand in a news coverage other than his opponent, yet, there is need for impartiality as stipulated by the code of ethics (S9).

Additionally, media owners' interference emerged as a powerful, recurring driver of ethical compromise, where journalistic objectivity was often compromised for the sake of job security or the station's commercial interests. In doing what the media owner wants at the expense of their journalistic duty to the public (question six), most journalists agree that such occurrences happen irregularly. However, on some occasions and/or in certain circumstances, they are beyond their control. B6 attests to this:

Yes, not often. Exactly, such scenarios occur and at times, as a media practitioner, I have to forego ethics to do what the media owner wants, in order to save my job (B6).

Moreso, journalists discussed various instances in which their media owners' interests influenced the editorial content, often in ways that conflicted with their duty to provide accurate, unbiased news to the public (question six). Some respondents agreed that occasionally (under some

circumstances), the media owner's (business or political) interest supersedes public interest, because of the political and economic control factors. Respondents B1 and S6 explained:

Yes, less often, like once in a year (it is irregular). It all depends on the circumstances, e.g. money. Everything rotates around money when it comes to media ownership interference B1).

Yes, but, not often. It is only during political seasons (S6).

This highlights the ethical dilemmas faced by journalists as they balance their duty to the public with the need to preserve their jobs and careers in an environment heavily influenced by powerful media owners, underscoring how these pressures lead to ethical compromises. This observation supports the concept of "competing loyalties" articulated by Skjerdal (2012), as these conflicts directly challenge the principles of journalistic objectivity and the pursuit of truth. As such, journalists are torn between their duty to the public, their job security, and the interests of media owners.

This phenomenon also aligns with McQuail's (2010) assertion that economic control over media outlets forces journalists to compromise their objectivity. These conflicts create a dilemma where journalists must balance professionalism with the potential consequences of job loss or punitive actions. Conflicts of interest arising from editorial choices and media ownership are a daily challenge for journalists and editors. They affect their ability to adhere to ethical standards and professional responsibility, creating an ethical dilemma for these practitioners. This takes us to the next theme from the study, as it creates a ripple effect for the journalist.

5.2.4 The Two-Tier Level of Control: Media Owners and Government

An exceptional theme that emerged from the responses is the dual control journalists experience: one from media owners and managers and the other from the government. This is so because, at

times, media owners have specific interests (business and/or political) to protect; as such, journalists are compelled to either conform to the media owner's and/or government's wishes or uphold journalistic integrity which to an extent was affirmed by respondent S1 regarding the conflicts of interest they encounter daily on the job. He clearly expressed that:

One of the conflicts of interest we face has to do with reporting what we see and some forces like government dictating over what should be reported or said (S1).

The tension between professionalism and economic or political interests is a central issue. As noted by Respondent S1, sometimes "government dictating what should be reported", exemplifies how external pressures influence journalists' autonomy and decisions. Conflicts were particularly pronounced when stories had political or commercial ramifications.

Many respondents described their media houses as being significantly influenced by both entities, having to balance the interests of media owners and the government of the day, respectively. In response to occasions where the media owners' interests conflict with the professional code of ethics, one respondent noted that:

Yes, like when you want to talk about politics, the media owner restricts us for fear of government sanctions; not necessarily for his personal interest, but for government interest (which in the end, still conflicts with professionalism) (S10).

Accordingly, B1(b), in his response to the conflicts of interest he encounters daily during his professional obligations, stated thus:

... b. Tight laws or fear of government sanctions - Like some stories are right or true, yet fear of government sanctions or threats sets in, so we cannot air them, e.g. the age limit removal – you either don't talk about it if you are against it, or you just support it (B1).

These statements emphasise the challenges journalists face when balancing multiple competing interests that limit their ability to fully adhere to ethical journalism standards. Journalists are often caught in the tension between their duty to the public and the demands of those who control the media organisation (herein referred to as the media owners and the government). This dual pressure creates an environment in which journalists must navigate competing loyalties (Skjerdal, 2012), making their ethical decision-making increasingly complex, a term I refer to as a *'double dilemma.'*

The findings suggest that journalists working in privately-owned media outlets are often caught between their media owners' demands and the government-imposed restrictions. Respondents expressed how media owners often enforce editorial policies that align with their business interests or political affiliations, which journalists must either accept or resist. This presents a significant and pervasive challenge undermining media professionalism as well as a 'silent killer' of the profession because these journalists juggle serving the interests of two masters' at the same time (competing loyalties) while struggling to maintain personal and professional balance. This dynamic is consistent with critical political economy theory, which posits that media ownership, influenced by political and economic factors, significantly shapes media content and practices. McQuail (2010) emphasises that economic control and political pressures influence journalistic practices, and the interview responses validate this perspective. For instance, one of the prepositions of the theory that supported the findings emphasised that economic control and logic are determinants of media practice. Here, economic control remains in the hands of the government and, by extension, media owners, which they utilise to obtain compliance to their whims and caprices at the expense of professionalism. Therefore, it is logical that the players

(government, media owners, and journalists) understand this economically enforced compliance and its consequences.

Although these pressures exist, however, from their response to question six regarding the number of times these practitioners have been asked to do what the media owner wants at the expense of their duty to the public, it was unanimous among most participants (B1, B2, B3, B4, B5, B6, S6, S8, and S10) that the occurrence of the pressures was “often”, “at times”, “irregular”, “once a year”, “twice a year”, “during political seasons”, or at some “rare circumstances”. These themes justify the occurrence of such media owners' interference due to conflict of interests and, hence, are suggestive of the minimal dilemma faced by journalists and news editors. Ownership structures and/or influences are particularly troubling in the context of political stories, where media owners may suppress unfavourable news to maintain favourable relations with the government or influential businesses. These controls reflect the underlying issues identified by Skjerdal (2012), who discusses "competing loyalties" in journalism, where journalists must balance their duties to their employers, the government, and the public simultaneously!

In response to research question one, which revolves around *'The Dilemma Faced by Journalists and Editors Due to Media Owners' Conflicts of Interest,*' these findings are supported empirically by previous studies in the area. They confirm that journalists and news editors are in a perpetual dilemma over media owners' conflicts of interest on professionalism and ethical journalism. For instance, Mare (2018), who analysed the situation as "caught between a rock and a hard place," found that covert and overt pressures from advertisers, shareholders (including media owners' interest and government), news sources, and editorial management are militating against the institutionalisation of ethical business journalism in African newsrooms. These conflicts of interest, according to Mare, pose a significant threat to press freedom and put

journalists and news editors in a dilemma. Mare's (2018) findings align with the current findings attempting to answer research question one on the ethical dilemma faced by journalists and news editors as a result of conflicts of interest among media owners. The findings of this study further validate one of the assumptions of critical political economy theory, which proposes that public interest in communication is subordinated to private interests. Here, the interest of news editors and journalists which is to serve the public with unbiased news reports is swallowed by the interests of the media owner (mainly to remain in business and to make a profit), thereby compromising ethical codes of journalism and by so doing put the journalists in a dilemma between protecting their jobs by serving the interest of the media owner and remaining professional about ethical journalism.

Also, the findings are supported by Ekayanti and Xiaoming (2018), whose study on journalism and political affiliation of the media and the influence of ownership on Indonesian newspapers found that political ownership of newspapers may not directly affect professional values, but it can affect practice indirectly through interventional practices in the newsroom. Ekayanti and Xiaoming's findings further suggest that the political alignment of the media owner may bring about conflicts with the media owner in an attempt to protect their political interests. This assertion was also corroborated by the findings of Milojević and Krstić (2018), who associated the hierarchy of influences as forms of media owners' conflicts with corrupting relationships between political, economic, and media elites. That is why Maweu (2014), in her findings, noted that the clash of journalistic values and capitalist values leaves journalists with no option other than striving to meet both the shareholders' expectations while maximizing profit for the media owners. Ekayanti and Xiaoming's findings support the result of the current study in research question one, which emphasises that these influences affect journalists and their professional

performance as much as they create a dilemma for them. Many journalists, thus, view this as an assault on their professional autonomy and identity, as they are left to reconcile the opposing logic of the journalistic field and the economic field (Wilding et al., 2018).

Therefore, the findings are consistent with the literature, which suggests that the involvement of media owners or stakeholders may obstruct press freedom by creating a conflict between interests and the professional practice of good journalism, potentially leading to breaches of the code of ethics. This is also rooted in the theoretical underpinnings of Skjerdal (2012) on the concept of "competing loyalties," which is outlined as injurious and harmful to the ethics of journalism and creates conflicts of interest. Depending on the environment, these conflicts of interest may constitute a dilemma for journalists and news editors.

5.3 The Coping Mechanism Deployed by Journalists and Editors Regarding Media Owners' Conflicts of Interest

Regarding research question two, the respondents were interrogated to know the coping mechanisms deployed by them with regards to media owners' conflicts of interest. Themes that emerged from answers to questions seven, eight, and nine provided answers to the research question. Strategies such as self-censorship, avoidance of contentious stories, collaboration with other media outlets to handle sensitive stories, compromising professional standards, and applying different media and ethical theories (e.g., Antinomian, Situationist) were implemented to navigate these ethical dilemmas, all in a bid to maintain job security.

5.3.1 Perception of Private Media Ownership

From participants' responses, it is evident that journalists and media professionals' perception of media ownership (as queried by question seven) portrays how they deal with their jobs. The

themes revealed in question seven indicated that journalists and media professionals associated media ownership with "full control," "political affiliations," "personal interests," and "business ventures," which they believe influence their professional practice.

Respondents B1, B3, B6, S3, S6, and S11, perceive the meaning of media ownership in the current dispensation in Uganda as ownership based on total control, political affiliation, interests, business venture, among others, respectively.

Media ownership means full or partial control of the media by directors (individuals), group or government. It also depends on the political affiliations of the media owner (B1).

It means anyone who has money and has seen potential in the media business, and with interests (B3).

Media ownership to me, means for one to establish and control a media house for the purpose of business, serving the community and promotes information dissemination with the intention to create jobs for the people in a given locality (B6).

S3 and S6 added that:

A business ownership of the media, not necessarily a professional ownership, because the owner may be a businessman who knows nothing about media professionalism (S3).

Media ownership means: business enterprise, employee exploitation, lack of respect for the employees, etc. In short, it's like they just help us! (S6).

S11 has a different concept of what media ownership entails, particularly in the Ugandan environment. See what he had to say:

In Uganda, it is a little tricky. It is like waking up and starting up a media house for business. Most people who own media houses in Uganda, aside the government, are either politicians or businessmen (S11).

Scholars such as McChesney (2008) conceptualised media ownership as the concentration of control in the hands of individuals, groups, or corporations, with implications for democracy and professional practice. McQuail (2010) emphasises that ownership reflects broader political and economic forces that shape how media operate in society. Ilomuanya et al. (2023) extend this perspective to the African context, noting how ownership often intersects with political affiliations to limit press freedom. On their part, Obijiofor and Hanusch (2011) argued that the media should not be seen as any other business, because of their public service obligation in the society in which they operate. The findings of this study, as presented in Chapter Four, show that journalists at BIG FM and STEP TV view media ownership more practically, linking it to political affiliation (B1), financial investment (B3), and community service or job creation (B6), while S3 viewed it as business-driven rather than professional, S6 associated it with exploitation and lack of respect for employees, and S11 stressed that most Ugandan media outlets are owned by politicians or businessmen. Here, these perspectives are seen as both aligning with and diverging from scholarly definitions, demonstrating that while ownership is recognised as a business and social service venture, it remains vulnerable to political influence, thereby raising ethical challenges for professionalism in Ugandan media practice. This comparative discussion shows that in practice, media ownership in Uganda embodies both the theoretical concerns outlined in the literature and the practical dilemmas faced by journalists. This duality shows that journalists perceive ownership not only as a structure of control but also as a lived reality that directly shapes their professional environment.

The perception of private media ownership by most journalists and editors has been an integral part of their professional dilemmas, owing to the conflicting interests and the psychological impact it has on them. This notion prompted these practitioners to employ various strategies to manage conflicts of interest.

5.3.2 Self-Regulation, Sticking to Professional Codes, Avoidance, Tolerance, and Collaboration

In response to these conflicts of interest and the ethical dilemma, journalists deployed various coping strategies, including self-regulation and/or self-censorship, deferring to management decisions, and occasionally shifting content to other media houses that can handle the pressure. Journalists and media professionals were divided regarding how to deal with the problem of media owners' conflicts of interest. Some (as indicated in the themes from question eight) believe that "playing along" and "prioritising their jobs" is the way to survive the ordeals. In contrast, others are more strategic about the problem by tilting towards "self-censorship," "sticking to professional codes," and "distancing themselves from owners' influence." Most of the responses here tilt towards self-regulation as a coping strategy, which is an attempt to find a balance in the dilemma, mainly saving the journalist or media practitioner's job and, at the same time, observing the ethical codes of journalism.

Despite knowing the ethical mandate of objectivity and balance, the fear of dismissal or punitive measures leads many to opt for "safer" content. S4 candidly stated, "Self-censorship is done in order not to conflict with the owner." S1 affirmed, "I obviously play along." Meanwhile, some respondents (B4, S8, S9, and S13, for example) mentioned that tolerance and/or distancing themselves from problematic assignments is a way of handling conflicting situations on the job.

In order not to compromise the ethics and professionalism, I forego certain stories or go for obvious ones (B4).

It is so challenging because we have to bear with the situation since he is the one who pays our salaries (S8).

For me, I choose to distance myself from such stories or situations to avoid being caught in the bracket in order to stay safe on the job. If I keep my job, I keep my profession! (S9).

Tolerance is what makes me able to deal with these issues (S13).

Here, these practitioners apply self-censorship for fear of losing their income and/or economic power as well as their professional prowess, which automatically comes from their job. Furthermore, self-regulation and/or self-censorship emerged as a common coping mechanism, where some journalists attempt to stick to their ethical principles even when under pressure and sometimes avoid controversial topics to comply with the owner's wishes.

B3 from BIG FM expressed, "I always stand on my professional codes, though sometimes, I am unable to," revealing the internal conflict between maintaining ethical standards and meeting the demands of media owners. Similarly, S7 from STEP TV noted, "I tend to remain professional," indicating that some journalists attempt to maintain their professionalism despite external pressures. Supporting this, S6 disclosed a strategy of "sticking to my professional code of conduct and shunning stories that cause conflict." These statements demonstrate how journalists attempt to distance themselves from problematic editorial decisions by adhering to their professional ethics, all as a coping mechanism in view of the demands of the media owners.

In these accounts, self-preservation becomes tied to strategic self-censorship or "keeping one's head down," thus compromising the watchdog role of the press. This reflects the challenges of

maintaining journalistic integrity when economic pressures and political interests dominate the media landscape. However, Journalism codes of ethics tend to be more effective in the context of self-regulation (Kimumwe, 2014), though using self-regulation efforts in the media fraternity (especially in Uganda) has so far not yielded much progress (Chibita, 2010). This might be so because “Self-regulation is not addressed in any law or government policy, but some industry players and government officials believe it is the way to go” (Maractho, 2015, p. 16).

Again, in a bid to play safe, some journalists tend to tread with caution while carrying out their daily obligations to the extent that even when they have concerns about a situation, they do not have the final say over matters arising. One respondent acknowledged that:

We advise positively or professionally about it, though we do not make final decisions, and at times, our suggestions are taken, but the implementation is so slow, or rather, not so effective (B1).

This suggests that while journalists may raise concerns about their job, they often lack the temerity to challenge the media owners' decisions, leading them to find alternative ways to navigate these constraints. As a result of these underlying circumstances, these journalists employed another coping mechanism for government and/or media owners' conflicts of interest, such as collaborating with other news outlets who have the willpower to take on challenging new stories irrespective of whose ox is gored. A few resort to collective strategies, as B5 explained:

This is handled by sharing stories with media houses that have the capacity to handle government pressure. For example, stories with legal backing will be handled by lawyers (B5).

Such actions enable these journalists to fulfil their social responsibility roles of seeking the truth and informing the public, regardless of the odds against them.

In the study, the practice of self-regulation was described as a coping strategy, albeit one that is not always effective. It is important to note that the self-regulatory approach as a coping mechanism also recognises and follows McQuail's (2010) principles of critical political economy theory, especially in the dimension of economic control and monopoly of media structure. Thus, journalists and media practitioners would want to earn a living to support their families and careers by trying to balance the profit motive of their employers, as well as trying to maintain ethical journalism standards. However, these dimensions of the theory restrict them from practicing the complete recommendations of the journalism code. To this extent, some journalists go the extra mile by applying other theoretical frameworks as different stratagems.

5.3.3 Using Theoretical Frameworks

Participants identified a variety of coping strategies to manage ownership pressures. While some try to balance professional ideals with economic realities, others apply the media and other ethical theories and/or viewpoints to circumvent conflicts where possible. Applying the media and other theories, such as “situationism”, “antinomianism”, and “absolutism”, has been a game-changer for some journalist in carrying out their day-to-day activities (professional obligations), especially for B6, who categorically stated that:

I handle conflicts of interest basing on the media theories; i.e. ‘Antinomian’, ‘Absolutist’ and ‘Situationist’ theories. I apply one at a time depending on the existing situation of the location from where I execute my duties (B6).

This significantly stood out as a fascinating and notable strategy in response to question eight in the sense that the respondent uses these ethical and philosophical viewpoints to justify his actions professionally as a journalist, even when they are not enshrined in the Ugandan Journalism Code of Ethics. Situationism, antinomianism, and absolutism are not media theories, but they can be

applied within the framework of media ethics. More broadly, they are ethical and philosophical concepts with applications across various fields such as ethics, political philosophy, theology, and social psychology, offering different ways to understand human behaviour, morality, and authority. Absolutism (or legalism) upholds fixed, universal moral rules; situationism emphasises context-sensitive judgment guided by love; and antinomianism rejects binding moral laws altogether. Taken together, these three represent contrasting approaches to ethics, highlighting the tension between universal rules, the rejection of rules, and context-driven moral decision-making (Fletcher, 1997; Dimmock & Fisher, 2017). Nonetheless, they provide practical coping frameworks and/or strategies for journalists navigating conflicts of interest with media owners, showing how they balance universal standards, situational demands, and the temptation or pressure to compromise ethical norms.

While these practitioners rely on professional codes or personal moral frameworks, the data suggest that these coping mechanisms are not always sufficient to preserve journalistic independence when ownership pressures intensify. Therefore, it is advisable to take some preventive measures to address the current situation.

5.3.4 Proactive Measures to Address Media Ownership Control

This theme explores potential solutions for ensuring media independence and ethical journalism. In light of the ethical challenges posed by media ownership on professionalism, many respondents suggested several proactive measures to mitigate these issues. These include the employment of professional journalists who understand the importance of ethical standards, media ownership by professional journalists who respect journalistic independence, sanctions against erring media owners, dialogue, training and retraining of journalists, issuance of professional license, journalists' self-regulation, more sensitisation for media owners, and

stronger legal frameworks to hold media owners accountable for unethical practices (themes from question nine).

Some respondents, like B1 and S1, believed that media ownership should be in the hands of professionals who understand the role of journalism in society. This would help minimise conflicts of interest and ensure the public is served with honest and reliable news. B1 made the following points:

- a. By employing media professionals to lead the organisation, because at times, a media house may be led by someone who is not a media professional as a manager.
- b. Professional journalists should own the media houses themselves and not just business-oriented people.
- c. There is need to sensitise the media owners to understand how the media works in order to avoid interruptions and ethical abuse of the profession, and not just to see the monetary aspects alone.
- d. Media organisations like the Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda (HRNJ-Uganda), should continue to fight for the protection and rights of journalists; a bill on the safety of journalists should be introduced (B1).

Acquiring media houses by journalists and employing journalists as media managers will go a long way to put professionalism in perspective in the media industry, particularly in privately-owned media. This is because it is believed that if media owners are professionals, they will understand the value of ethical journalism and stop pressuring journalists into compromising their values.

Again, B1 and other respondents (B3 and S14) highlighted the need for sensitisation and training for both the media owners and the practitioners who work for these media houses. They maintained that beyond the business and/or economic interest of the organisation, there is a need to know how the media operates ethically. S14 puts it bluntly:

Some media owners are ignorant and so, need sensitisation, so that they acquire knowledge on the nature of the industry they are indulging in. I think the media owners have to go on the drawing board, or look inwards intentionally to encourage

professionalism within the staff they employ, other than concentrating on making money, or else, we will continue to experience a lot of cases that result from unprofessional code of conduct; like libel, defamation, among others (S14).

Furthermore, other respondents (B1, B5, S6, and S7) suggest that media-supporting organisations like the Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda (HRNJ-U) and related bodies should oversee how journalists are treated by their employers and fight to protect journalists' rights where necessary. Respondent B5 suggested:

- a. To start with, journalists should form partnerships with civil society organisations to empower them.
- b. Again, journalists should join professional bodies like the Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda (HRNJ-Uganda) to help fight for their rights when violated.
- c. Journalists should be trained and exposed to know their rights, then, they can do their profession (B5).

In fact, S7 puts it this way: “There is a need for practicing journalists to form strong and sound associations that can fight for their rights.” S13 said: “Journalists should advocate for more media freedom, especially during the time of politicking.” These statements suggest that a strong and effective journalist union can help mitigate the control system of media owners and other external pressures as these journalists knowing fully well that they are not alone in the fight, will have confidence in carrying out their duties without fear of retribution, which will go a long way in boosting professionalism. In a different tone, B4 feels that “Journalism Associations should engage media owners and tell them how their conflicts affect professionalism.” He maintains that dialogue with media owners might be a better way to curb their excesses than putting up a fight for these journalists.

At the same time, many other respondents, such as B6, S2, S3, S4, S8, S9, S10, and S11, think that setting clear boundaries for media owners through strong legal and/or regulatory frameworks would be a better option to help bridge the existing gap in the media industry. This is because it

has been observed that legislation on media ownership in the Ugandan media space is silent (Maractho, 2015). S11 pointed this out in his statement:

- a. In my opinion, there is a big gap between media owners and the regulatory authorities. So, the gap between the media owners and the regulatory authorities should be bridged. This can be done by extending their regulations to the media owners, not the journalists alone.
- b. Other measures should be put in place to curb the excesses of media owners. For instance, regulatory authorities and media personalities are okay, but the media owners need to be enlightened on how the media is run.
- c. A bill for media ownership (that is how the media should be owned and managed) should be proposed, because regulatory authorities in their capacity control the media content for national consumption.
- d. Again, media self-regulation within the media house should be encouraged. As a media personality, if my boss tells me to do something the right way, it is not bad, it is only bad if it is unprofessional (S11).

Here, S11 also emphasised the importance of self-regulation among journalists in so far as it is done ethically, narrating that media self-regulation should only be discouraged if it points in the wrong direction professionally. This solution reflects a desire to professionalise the media industry and create a system of checks and balances where journalists can perform their duties without fear of external interference.

The aforementioned coping mechanisms and proactive measures for research question two reflect the need for systemic changes that safeguard journalistic integrity and ensure that media outlets prioritise public interest over private or political motives. These suggestions align with the broader literature and findings on media ownership and control, which call for reforms to ensure that journalists can operate independently and ethically while thriving professionally.

This assertion above supports Matthews' and Onyemaobi's (2020) findings on precarious professionalism. The findings exposed the fragility of professional practice in the Global South, which is largely caused by conflicts of interest and control of press freedom, which inadvertently leaves journalists trailing a coping trend between their lives, jobs, and professionalism.

According to Matthews' and Onyemaobi's findings, journalists' experiences of "precarious professionalism" leading to "fragile professionalism," "ingrained in-job instability," and incorporated "professional and personal selves" are offshoots of media owners' economic control over them and the nature of media structure, which tilts towards monopoly. Both underpinnings are the first and second prepositions of critical political economy theory by McQuail (2010).

Furthermore, Sokowati and Junaedi's (2020) findings support the coping mechanisms x-rayed as themes in the current study. Sokowati and Junaedi found that the involvement of the investors in the media life encouraged the rethinking of the three characteristics of alternative and new media which were identified as de-professionalised, de-capitalised and de-institutionalised in nature. In their study, Sokowati and Junaedi noted that the new investment (of Tirto.co) presented new problems and implicated the existing policies of Mojok.co, such as the problem of ownership and control. The problems and/or challenges associated with media ownership and control provide many changes in the production of alternative media content and, by extension, affect journalists' disposition to professionalism and ethical journalism. For instance, the study found that the control mechanism, the shifting of editorial policies, and the production practices are consequences of political economy. This is challenging to journalists as it affects their coping strategies negatively.

In all, participants dealt with conflicts through various coping mechanisms: some referred to media and other ethical theories like "situationist" ethics to justify pragmatic decisions, some applied self-regulations, some sought to remain quietly professional, while others avoided contentious assignments altogether or shared them with external outlets. For the proactive measures journalists propose to address the conflicts of interest caused by media ownership, respondents emphasised the need for "stronger laws" and "media ownership by professionals"

who understand ethical journalism. There was also a call for "training" and "self-regulation" to ensure journalists maintain ethical standards despite external pressures. These recommendations align closely with the scholarly debates reviewed in my study. For instance, the call for stronger laws resonates with McQuail's (2010) critical political economy theory, which argues that concentrated media ownership undermines editorial independence and requires regulatory safeguards to protect the public interest, while media ownership by professionals echoes Obijiofor and Hanusch's (2011) argument that media must serve a public service role, not just business interests. Likewise, training and self-regulation connect to Nwabueze (2005) and Whitehouse (2010), who emphasise that professional development and ethical codes are essential safeguards against media ownership pressures. These connections show that the respondents' views did not only validate existing literature, but they also provide context-specific insights into how reforms, professional ownership, training, and ethical reinforcement might be implemented to strengthen professionalism in the Ugandan media environment.

5.4 The Effect of Media Owners' Conflicts of Interest on Good Journalism Practice in the Media and Society

There is no doubt that media owners' conflicts of interest affect ethical journalism practices in the Ugandan media space. During the interview, the participants feared that the implications of these existing conflicts of interest might be grievous and may, in turn, threaten the natural essence of the journalism practice. They unanimously agreed that media owners' conflicts of interest, if not handled judiciously, would have dire consequences on journalists' professional output, and on the society at large, especially with regard to the future of press freedom and the journalistic profession in Uganda. These emanated from the themes that were culled from the

participants' opinions on questions 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14 as they were used to provide answers to research question three.

5.4.1 Consequences of Conflicts of Interest on Journalists' Professional Output and on the Society

Regarding how media owners' conflicts of interest affected their professional output, the themes that emerged from Question 10 portray that there are far-reaching consequences because, in the views of most respondents, media ownership has influenced their professional decision-making as journalists and/or editors in some ways. Most journalists agreed that they will always tend to favour media owners and the third parties' or stakeholders' interests because of the fear of government sanctions, lack of funds for investigative reports, job loss, or threats to their lives.

B5 made it known that:

They give us directives like - do not air anything that will be seen as going against the government. Being that BIG FM, is a commercial Radio station aiming at revenue, if you are not in the 'good books' of the government, the station can be closed (B5).

Another respondent supported this by stating that, "By asking me not to discuss certain issues about the government, especially the regime in power in order to avoid litigation matters" (S13).

Apparently, the government sanctions media outlets through the use of libel laws against the press, and the licensing and registration requirements for media outlets are withdrawn or made stricter (Karlekar & Dunham, 2014).

Moreover, Karlekar & Dunham (2014) alluded that the existential and close relationship between the government and some private media owners may lead to or result in the control of news content through formal and informal pressure on journalists. S6 posits that:

There has been influence in the aspects of covering stories of their interests, especially on political parties (S6).

Consequently, for these journalists, being partisan because of media owners' political interests has limited freedom of speech, which affects professionalism. S10 attests to this when he indicated that:

It stops me from saying what I should say, because I will consider the reaction of the media owner (S10).

Separately, participants B1, B6', S5, 'S11' and 'S14' downplayed the influences of media owners on their decision-making by bringing a positive angle to it. They view it from a positive angle of offering them opportunities to learn new things via training and networking with people professionally. Thus, they claim that:

Positively, the media owner has influenced me by sending me to workshops whereby I have learnt a lot of new things and also interact with the community, hence increasing my viewership professionally (S5).

Also, another respondent pointed out that:

Positively, media ownership (as in the boss's management ideology) has exposed me to different classes of people who have contributed to my well-being professionally through training. On the other hand, it has created rows between me and my sources of information (B6).

Whereas, S11 noted that, "On the contrary, in my department, I have the right to exercise my duties professionally", and S14 added, "There is no way."

From the findings, as shown in the themes analysed (themes from question 10), it is evident that there are ways in which conflicts of interest affect the professional output of the participants. These conflicts could lead to partisanship, misinforming the public, journalists' isolation from

the public and society, killing journalists' creativity, promoting one-sided stories, coercion of journalists, journalists' loss of hope in the profession, and increased corruption. This is primarily because some journalists' objectivity was affected due to bias, changing angles of stories, running unbalanced stories, trying to protect their jobs, holding back some information, and obstructed reportage (themes from question 11). With regards to protecting their job, B6, S6 and S10 disclosed:

At times, I am threatened to lose the job, so, I have to play accordingly (S6).

Because of job protection, at times as a practitioner, I have to forego objectivity and save my job. In other words, at times I consider applying 'situationist theory' (B6).

Using the situationist theory, the respondent tries to justify their actions and inactions as journalists in order to keep their job. On their part, other respondents like B4, B5, S1 and S4 talked about:

Some stories had to be run unbalanced, which is not good for the profession (B4).

It doesn't allow me to wholesomely bring out the stories, especially if they are considered political by any kind (S4).

We have decided not to do sensitive stories involving government, because of the media owner (B5).

'Holding back at times' (S1) or 'avoiding sensitive stories involving the government' (B5) or 'political by any kind' (S4) is purely a case of self-censorship owing to the influence of the media owner, mostly for fear of government sanctions. On his own, B3 admitted that the media owner's interference has in some ways influenced his objectivity, "By making me change angles of my stories." Typically, in most private media outlets, there is an increased pressure on journalists

‘to report along political lines’, owing to the media owner’s close ties with the government of the day, which has led to self-censorship (Karlekar & Dunham, 2014).

Meanwhile, S2, S7, S8, and S9 acknowledged that the media owner’s influence is there, though to an extent, but they chose to maintain professional standards. S9 puts it this way; “Not so much since I tend to stick to my objectives.” However, some respondents (S12 and S13) maintained that in some way, the media owner’s involvement has stimulated them positively by making them a better communicator, and also made them more vigilant and more cautious in choosing the topics of discussion on air, while some (B2, S3, S5, S11, and S14) have ‘not yet observed’ such and therefore, to them, it has no influence (which are the emergent themes from question 11).

Furthermore, Onyenankeya and Salawu (2020), in their study *On Bended Knees: Investigative Journalism and Changing Media Culture in Nigeria*, found that investigative journalism is hindered by various socio-cultural, economic factors, and professional deficits. Onyenankeya and Salawu further assert that the ownership of newspapers by politically exposed individuals and near-zero protection for journalists have worked to restrict investigative journalism. In response to how media ownership has influenced his professional decision-making processes, B4 noted that:

Sometimes, I have to make a decision to forego certain steps in preparing or writing news stories, especially where there are no funds; for example, investigative journalism involves a lot of funds (B4).

S1 also confirmed such actions when he acknowledged that:

When there is less protective gear for me as a journalist investigating a story, which my boss is not in support of, I am left with no choice but to do what the owner finds comfortable, to protect my life and job (S1).

These tendencies tend to imperil the press's watchdog role and constitute a hazard and threat to journalists, which many journalists, due to a high level of unemployment, try to cope against (Onyenankeya and Salawu, 2020). Onyenankeya and Salawu's findings support the current study finding, which ascertained that journalists, in their attempt to cope with media owners' conflicts of interests, all the more, compromise the ethics of journalism, especially when they are trying to save their lives and jobs by being bias, change the angles of the stories, run unbalanced stories, find ways for job protection, hold back information or truth, and obstruct accurate reportage. In the presence of these, professionalism and ethical journalism become dependent on chance circumstances, leading to miscarriage of reality via distortion of news and/or information being churned out for mass consumption. This happens largely because media owners who attempt to change or influence their news and storylines are the ones who provide for the journalists through employment opportunities and thus substantially hold economic control over them as propounded by McQuail's (2010) first preposition of critical political economic theory, which recognises economic control and logic as determinants of media practice.

As inauspicious as the situation may appear, its consequences ultimately impact journalists' objectivity. This often results in poor professional decision-making, as journalists tend to make decisions that will favour their bosses' interests. Sometimes, editors and media managers even recruit unqualified individuals to perform these tasks, prioritising loyalty over expertise.

The themes that emerged from question 12 were reflective of their resultant effects on the journalists' reputation, especially in terms of their integrity and the perception of the quality of

their reportage. For instance, participant B1 noted that some journalists like himself had no choice but to distort the news in some ways through “misrepresentation of facts” and “bandwagon[ism]”, whereas B3, B6, S1 and S6 adopted “dishonesty with reportage”, and “being biased” to avoid conflicts of interest with the media owners. This act can lead to a “loss of credibility” for these media outlets, and, to some extent, this dents the image of these journalists as professionals because public trust gradually becomes eroded. Thus, the public begins to distance itself from these journalists when they are supposed to rely on the media for the truth and accuracy of the news. B1 revealed that:

It has brought about misrepresentation of facts and misinformation to the public instead of advising the public correctly. You join the bandwagon to protect yourself and the media owner, because of the fear of government and media owners’ sanctions. It kills your personality or reputation as a professional. I love my life! (B1).

In the same vein, S9, and S12 opined that “turning a blind eye to public interests,” and at times, working “against one’s religious faith,” has become part of their coping mechanisms to various conflicts of interest that arise on the job daily. From these findings, it is apparent that to cope with the conflicts of interest arising from the job, the integrity and personality of the journalists are compromised, which has consequences for the media as an entity in society. See what one of the respondents acknowledged:

These conflicts of interest affect my professional output in such a way that I turn a blind eye to newsworthy stories that might be of public interest, because of my affiliations to the community where the news or individuals emanate from. I, at times, tend to ignore such stories (S9).

Similarly, S12 noted that his faith usually interferes with his duty as a journalist, as the society comprises people of diverse faiths.

The obvious conflict of interest I face daily on the job is upholding my Christian values, which, to a reasonable extent, tally with my professional values, in terms of truth and objectivity. However, my angle of truth may be different from that of a non-Christian, and as a result, they pay less attention to my presentation because of my religious stance or beliefs (S12).

On another note, B3 recounted how these conflicts of interest affected his professional output by stating, “I fail to be truthful and objective on a particular issue because I may lose sponsorship.”

S8 added:

If I stick to my guns as a professional at the expense of my boss’s instruction, at times, I fail to receive my basic allowance as a reporter, and at the end of the day, I lose out, so, I have to compromise to meet my basic needs too (S8).

The above response from S8, signifies the reason for the compromise in a bid to avoid hurting himself financially, even though the impact is glaring. Melaku’s Manipulative Approach refers to capitalists buying media businesses to control the means of production. In this approach, media content is controlled by those who own and manage broadcasting and press institutions. Media owners and organisations often use their platforms to serve their personal interests (whether business or political) rather than the public good.

To put it succinctly, S2 and S14 see the effects of these conflicts of interest as “time-consuming” on the job. S2 posits that: “It delays my work and it also affects my passion to deliver the best because of time.”

On how conflicts of interest affect good journalism in the society, themes that emerged from question 13 indicated that the consequences of media owners' continuous conflicts of interest on journalism practice have dire implications on the public, as well as on journalists such as partisanship, isolation, dearth of creativity, and promotion of one-sided story (themes from

respondents' B1, B2, B3, B4, B6, S2, S6 and S7 to question 13), as the current ownership regimes seem to promote or lock out particular views and persons (Maractho, 2015). B1 elaborated this by saying that:

You end up entertaining and informing the public in favour of the government, individuals, or an organisation, thereby failing to educate the public correctly; this being that information is two-sided (it can be good or bad). A good example is with regards to the Land Bill amendment – Article 26 of the 1995 Constitution, the government pressurises the media to speak in their favour as sole landowners, at the expense of the eligible landowners. Again, these days, media owners often don't want detailed information on air rather they kill news time because it has been booked already; news is timed in exchange for financial benefit. Sometimes, money interrupts news, e.g, bringing up more adverts as news inserts during a news programme on air (B1).

Political and economic imperatives emerged strongly from the data. Media houses, being commercial entities, are driven by revenue-generation goals that can distort news content. The pursuit of profit and the need to secure sponsorships can lead to selective reporting. This commercialisation pressures journalists to sideline stories that might threaten advertiser relationships or upset influential sponsors, thereby compromising the duty to inform the public fully and objectively. This is consistent with Maweu's (2014) findings, which explained that advertisers hold significant influence over the media given that advertising revenue constitutes one of the primary sources of funding for the media industry, and the advertising companies know that. Hence, in a bid to please the sponsors, most journalists, by the directive of the media owner who is trying to preserve his business, tend to hide certain information that may hurt a sponsor. S14 raised a concern that:

It can deny the audience a chance to professional broadcast, especially when broadcasters have to hide certain relevant information or package in a specific way (S14).

Much as the political economy of the media revolves around pursuing the business interests of the media, it also has a shared impact on the society, because public interest is exchanged for monetary compensation. A key component of the media's social responsibility in the society goes beyond just informing, educating, and entertaining the masses. There is a need to seek the truth and report it accurately and objectively to the benefit of the society in which the media operates, which is where the ethical implications of media ownership on the society come into play. As S1 points out:

Some of the ways the conflict of interest may affect good journalism practices are that it brings about a lack of accuracy and less credibility in the delivery of media social responsibility to the society (S1).

B2 attests to this when he maintained that "the core codes of conduct, like objectivity, accuracy, and balance, are not observed." S11 bemoaned that, "There will be compromised ethical standards." Indicating that the consequences of conflicts of interest in the society lead to non-adherence to the journalism ethics on which professionalism is based. As such, the media will fail to impact the society positively, as S6 mentioned:

It leads to failure to use the profession to cause an impact in the society (S6).

For respondents' S2, S5, and S8 the consequences are more grievous for the journalists themselves, leading to loss of hope in the journalistic profession owing to the physical torture and/or psychological coercion of journalists, sometimes, by not paying their wages if they stick to their guns. These respondents expressed thus:

It affects good journalism practice in the way you go to the field; where you find police harassing and chasing journalists, taking their cameras and so on, especially on the matter relating to government misdeeds (S5).

However, to keep body and soul together, these journalists are left without a choice but to yield to the demands of their bosses, as he who pays the piper, dictates his tune. Therefore, they compromise ethical standards at the expense of true journalism. S8 summarised it this way:

Of course, it will affect good journalism practice in the media, as journalists will be quietly coerced to do what their bosses want at the expense of true journalism (S8).

In accordance with S8, S2, posit that, “It makes the journalist lose hope in their profession, and in the long run, the media’s credibility is at stake.” These experiences corroborated the account of a former journalist who worked for these two media houses under study (BIG FM and STEP TV) in the past.

The implications of these actions affect the society, as the public is often kept in the dark and short-changed, especially when it comes to getting wholesome information about the goings-on in their environment. This is due to the political and economic power of the media owners, the government-of-the-day and at times commercial sponsors of these media houses on these journalists and their professionalism. Thus, they miss out on the right to exercise their duties professionally. Here, professionalism means knowing what to say and saying what is just, as Ward's (2010) Deontological theory states.

Deontological theory articulates the principle of what is just and what is our duty (Ward, 2010). It emphasises the principles behind actions rather than the actions' results. The role of deontology is to enable journalists to understand their duty or social responsibility in the society wherein they operate. This can be seen in the codes of ethics as cited in sections 2, 5, and 9 of the Ugandan

journalistic code. Deontology, as an ethical theory, enables the journalist to put away his feelings or emotions in his decision-making process. However, it works in line with the laws of the land and the professional code of ethics. Therefore, the journalist's ability to act ethically is based on their duty to inform the masses on the goings-on in society, as a rule, and not based on the consequences of the action. It is the obligation of the press to shed critical light on how the media themselves exercise their role in supporting the practitioners besieged with these dilemmas.

This theme highlights how media owners' conflicts of interest lead to biased editorial practices. Respondents admitted to altering the "angle of stories" and presenting "one-sided" narratives in response to media owners' preferences. Such practices compromise journalistic objectivity, as emphasised by Respondent S1, who noted that media owners' interference results in the "loss of credibility" from the public. These findings underscore the importance of independence and integrity in journalism, which is eroded when media owners have significant control over editorial decisions. As such, we look at the future of journalism in Uganda.

5.4.2 Future Outlook on Journalism Practice

This theme addresses the broader societal and professional implications of media owners' conflicts of interest. Journalists expressed concerns that these conflicts not only harm individual media outlets but also damage the credibility and trustworthiness of journalism as a whole. Sadly, the future of the journalistic profession, going by the evolving influences of media owners and, to some extent, the government through stringent regulations, if not checked, remains unclear, as it has been predicted to have a far-reaching consequence on professionalism and journalists' adherence to the code of conduct and ethics. Thus, professional journalism will be fully commercialised, politicised, stunted, going extinct, diminished by media space, restrictive, and decline with the death of liberalism and objectivity, leading to loss of jobs, more media

censorship, non-existent and/or derailing professionalism, and loss of value (themes that emerged from question 14). Some respondents like B1 and B3 proclaimed that:

It will be fully commercialised. Everyone will go where money is. You produce a story individually, with money as a prerequisite, e.g., killing a good story for money. On the other hand, it also depends on the environment we are in. If the environment becomes better, then the profession will have improved, changed for good or thrived (B1).

In like manner, B3 added:

Ideally, it is supposed to be one of the best professions in the world, but if things do not improve, our journalism will never grow. As a result, professionalism will be stunted. In other words, there will be no professionalism at all, because, the new entrants will never take ethical issues serious and therefore, professionalism will die with time (B3).

While some journalists hope for a change in the future so that the journalistic profession will thrive, many still have their fears that there will be little or no changes at all, owing to media owners' political and economic influence on these news outlets, because they see it as a business venture where they can make a profit. See what S11 imagined:

There will be no much difference because nothing has been put in place to fight the problem of media ownership control. It will still remain the same unless it is changed (S11).

As far as B2, S5, and S9 are concerned, the journalistic profession would have become partisan due to the growing political involvement of most media owners.

It will be diluted by media owners, due to the political interests. 80 percent of the broadcast media (radio and television) in Uganda are owned by politicians (B2).

S9 confirmed this by categorically stating, “If no measures are put in place, the profession may be over-politicised.”

This sentiment reflects concerns about the diminishing role of the press as an independent entity and its potential to become a mouthpiece for media owners’ political or economic agendas. Respondents like S3, S4, S7, and S12 view the future of journalism through a different lens, as a result of technological advances, the emergence of more media outlets, and a high influx of journalism graduates being churned out from universities. They posit that there will be speedy growth; however, this growth might be impeded by the government’s interference, leading to censorship as time passes. S3 and S4 foresee:

It is growing on the high speed, but the government’s interference is trying to bring it down (S3).

In terms of technology, it is becoming better, but I foresee more censorship as time goes by (S4).

Karlekar & Dunham (2014) discovered that press freedom in several countries was threatened by private media owners, especially those with close ties with government and/or ruling parties, most of which altered editorial content or dismissed key staff after acquiring previously independent outlets. This is the same with some journalists’ experiences in these private media outlets under study, as some respondents, S2 and S14, attest to this. S2 cried out, saying:

Something should be done because things are not going on well on the side of journalists in the country. In the near future, if not improved, most journalists will lack what to do (lose their jobs), or lose touch with professionalism in order to keep their jobs (S2).

To this end, respondents B5, S6, S8, and S10 foresaw a future where journalists' independence would continue to be eroded, resulting in a 'collapse of press freedom' and the 'loss of faith' in media institutions. B5 expressed sadness and is unhappy that:

There will be a diminishing media space, in the near future. The media environment will be restrictive in nature, due to the political environment (B5).

Meanwhile, S6 noted that, "The freedom and courage of journalists will be no more; they will just be there in a disguise." And, S10, added that:

It will lose the meaning of being a media profession because if they lose the informative role of the media, then the meaning is lost (S10).

This reflects the long-term risks associated with the dominance of media owners in shaping journalistic practices. At the height of these consequences, media owners' conflicts of interest on good journalism practice in the Ugandan media space, and then in the society at large, should be understood and apprehended. This is why respondents B4, B6, S1, and S13 proposed and hope there would be adequate regulations by the regulatory authorities to curb ownership control on professionalism. B4 made a clear remark that:

Unless the government and journalists' associations come out clear on the need to stick to professionalism, I see the profession derailing (B4).

If the stakeholders; likely the government, do not come to regulate the media, especially, with considerations on professionalism, in the future, the media will not have a steady progress in Uganda. There will be a decline, because of the control of media owners, if not stopped (B6).

Accordingly, these respondents called on the government and the journalists' association to step up their game and provide clarity on time to avert the impending danger to the profession, as S1

puts it: “Without drastic measures put in place, liberalism and objectivity will be down.” As Akpabio et al. (2013) observed in their study on editorial independence in Tanzanian media, the conflict between media owners' interests and the professional ethics of journalists can compromise the media's role as an independent check on power. Similarly, findings from the current study align with the literature on media ownership's corrosive effect on journalism by undermining its integrity and its public service function.

These themes from research question three are also supported both theoretically and empirically. For example, Jamil's (2018) findings on Freedom of expression and threats to journalists' safety as an analysis of conflict reporting in journalism education in Pakistan revealed that threats to their lives and abuses by the military, intelligence agencies, and militant organisations have remained high in the recent years as the major consequence of press emasculation is through owners' influence and control. The consequences provide room for heightened dilemmas, which pressure journalists and media practitioners to choose their lives, employment, and careers as against professionalism. In the views of McQuail (2010), such decisions are logical as people tend to lean towards themselves in dilemma situations. Equally, Okafor and Onyenekwe (2020) emphasised that one of the threats to the journalism profession, its efficiency, and safe practice remains the control of press freedom, which exposes journalists to mortal threats at a great disservice to the public. Their finding supports the current study, which is hinged on the problems of media ownership and its antecedent's evils, which affect journalists and the public in general. Maractho (2015) findings also somewhat attest to this, where she mentioned that: “Media ownership was singled out as the most critical challenge to media freedom and development, as opposed to direct government restrictions” (Maractho, 2015, p. 14). This phenomenon was also boosted by Kuyucu's (2019) findings on the effects of media ownership by businessmen in the

sample of Turkey, which revealed that media ownership affects the professionalism of the press and promotes the story of the media owner rather than the events and times of the society, which are meant to contribute meaningfully to the human society. Such circumstances have dual impacts, one to the journalists whose job is at stake, whose conscience is laboured and whose life is threatened and the other, to the society whose story is thwarted, whose future is controlled and the opinion of its people biased through misrepresentation.

Moreso, Akpabio et al. (2013), in their study, found that the influence of ownership on content cuts across both the privately-owned media and government-owned media. Though, the government-owned are mostly blamed for editorial interference (Akpabio et al, 2013). This contention is consistent with Skjerdal's (2012) assertion, which summarised the ordeal faced by a journalist who works for the Ethiopian News Agency (a government-run agency that has been in charge of distributing official news to the local media). Skjerdal described his puzzling encounter in Addis Ababa thus:

Then, the puzzle. As we had chatted for a while, he suddenly bent over the desk towards me to tell me a secret: «We're a government mouthpiece, you know![sic]» He whispered – loudly as if to say that everybody knows it, but we're not supposed to talk about it. I found this utterly bewildering. Clearly, there was a conflict here. On the one hand, the editor had a sharp conception of what it means to be a professional journalist. On the other hand, it seemed that he had somehow submitted to standards which are contrary to his professional mindset. How could he reconcile this conflict? Why would he not work for the private media instead, where he could realize his professional potential? Ultimately, how could he rescue a sense of professionalism while serving a state media institution? (Skjerdal, 2012 p. 2)

Nonetheless, Akpabio et al. (2013) discovered that “all parties are guilty”, because governments’ interference is geared toward the public good; like promoting national integration, unity and cohesion, yet, it can also be self-serving. Whereas, the proprietors of privately-owned entities unashamedly use the media to advance their outfits’ political and business interest (Akpabio et al.; 2013 p. 24), which in turn is detrimental to the good of the society. This is where Obijiofor and Hanusch (2011) findings as well as Melaku’s (2008) Manipulative Approach, come into play, as the capitalist’s (media owner’s) profit maximisation is elevated over public interest.

In all of these, it is observed that the journalists who work in privately-owned media are faced with a two-tier level of control; one from the media owners and/or managers, and the other from the government of the day. The tension between ethical journalism and the necessity of job preservation leads journalists to navigate increasingly complex moral landscapes. Thus, there is a need to view the actions and inactions of these journalists and editors through the lenses of ethical theories, which, to an extent, might justify their stance on certain situations that create dilemmas for them while executing their duties.

5.5 The Ethical Theories and Their Implications

An *ethical theory* has been defined as a principle put forward to explain, describe, prescribe, or predict human moral behaviour and, as a result, provide strong and effective positions from which to consider important moral decisions (Okunna, 2003). Ethical theories, including ones reviewed in this study like Deontology, propound an ideal society entrusting media practitioners and journalists to uphold professionalism. In contrast, journalists and media personnel are only dependent on the monopoly of media owners to earn a living. Consequently, this creates an ethical dilemma. Thus, to truly understand the thrust of ethical dilemmas in journalism, it is essential to remember that it is not just a one-sided issue.

The crux of journalism globally is geared towards serving the audience with news, views, and information on matters of public interest in accuracy, fairness, objectivity, and in a decent manner (which reflects the ethics of the profession) as propounded by ethical theories (Okunna, 2003). However, journalism cannot birth itself, it must be anchored on a media outfits and organisations whose prerogative is to achieve organisational success to recoup their investment with profits. Also, journalists are not islands; in a society that does not protect and care for their welfare, journalists are to make judgments based on their need for survival. Media practitioners with other sources of livelihood or income are more likely to uphold ethical standards than those whose lives may depend on the employment of media owners. Though more than an ethical problem, it is also a problem with personal morals, which concerns one's virtue.

The Virtue theories describe the moral character and specify an individual's ethical virtues (Ward, 2010). Virtue places emphasis on the individual attitude or character above all else. In the media, virtue ethics posit that the journalist's character or personal conviction should be the basis for their ethical thinking rather than rules about his act (deontology) or its consequences (consequentialism). The role of this theory is to enable the journalist to be bold and courageous in the face of opposing views regarding the daily discharge of his work. Even when a journalist is faced with a dilemma of what to do or not to do, it takes wisdom and courage to make the right decision. In the Ugandan scenario, Virtue ethics are enshrined in all the sections (one to-nine). To be honest, accurate, objective, and refuse to be bribed, a journalist needs a lot of courage and wisdom, coupled with integrity, in the current economic state of the country.

The Consequentialist theories articulate principles that define goodness and identify actions that promote the good (Ward, 2010). In this sense, the Utilitarian theory also works perfectly here. It proposes the utmost or the greatest good or happiness for the most significant number of people.

The journalist's ethical decision-making should consider the pros and cons, as outlined by consequentialism in the codes. Here, the end justifies the means, as the outcome of an action determines the morality of the action. The consequences of an action should be taken into cognisance of, if it does more harm than good to those involved. In the Ugandan Journalism Code, only sections two and nine clearly represent the utmost good of members of the society.

5.6 Conclusion

The interviews conducted with some journalists and editors in Uganda reveal significant ethical dilemmas stemming from media owners' conflicts of interest. The findings suggest that while some media owners strive to maintain ethical standards, others exert significant influence, often compromising journalistic integrity. The ethical dilemmas faced by journalists are shaped by competing loyalties to media owners, the government, and the public. The consequences of these conflicts are profound, affecting the credibility of the media, the objectivity of reporting and/or press freedom, and the society as public trust in the press is eroding by the day.

From the literature reviewed and findings from this study, Journalism, as a profession, is being affected by the day owing to implications of media owners' control syndrome as well as unfavourable and silent (statutory) regulations from the government. This is because media ownership was handpicked as the most critical challenge to media freedom and development, rather than direct government restrictions, yet legislation remains silent on ownership (Maractho, 2015). This ethically affects journalists in discharging their public service duties to the society in which the media operates because ethics revolves around the utmost good of the people, according to the ethical principles highlighted in the study.

However, as noted in the study, while self-regulation and adherence to ethical codes offer some solutions, the overall effect is a compromise in journalistic integrity. Self-regulation is an

imperfect solution, as economic control over journalists' livelihoods often forces compromises, leading to ethical violations, such as "misrepresentation of facts" or "loss of credibility." To safeguard the future of journalism, as the media landscape in Uganda continues to evolve, it therefore, behooves the government, media owners, and the journalists themselves to chart a way forward by implementing the findings from this study. In this case, both the business interest of media owners, as well as the professionalism (expertise and public service duties) of journalists, could be preserved in such a way that journalists can fulfill their duty to the public without fear of retribution or compromise. Thus, it is reasonable to suggest that promoting ethical standards in journalism cannot be separated from advancing human rights and welfare, as journalism remains a vital tool for the public good.

The findings from this investigation exhibit a strong alignment with the critical issues examined in the literature review and theoretical framework sections, as well as with the research questions articulated in the introductory chapter of the dissertation.

CHAPTER 6

IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the study and summarises the findings. It also presents the study's implications, limitations, recommendations, suggestions for future study, and conclusion.

6.2 Implications of the Study

The current study evaluated media owners' conflicts of interest on journalists' professionalism and freedom of the press, focusing on the dilemma of journalists, their coping strategies, and the effects of media owners' conflicts of interest on professional journalism. After analysis of the qualitative data, findings reveal that media owners' conflicts of interest and control are accurate and high in media houses in Mbale. Although media owners' conflicts of interest put pressure on journalists, especially regarding ethical journalism as enshrined in the professional codes, most journalists attempt to resist it and live up to their expectations, especially regarding threats to life and threats to their jobs.

The situation leaves the society with misrepresentation of facts, political control of the media, abuse of citizens' rights to information, emasculation of the press, and perversion of justice. The implication is that money, interest, political affiliation, and the government will be influencing journalism rather than the professional, ethical codes of journalism, which are put in place to guarantee press freedom, entronement of the rule of law, advancement of civil society, justice, and national development. Reviewing the components of the implications, one could quickly outline the following as critical implications of the study:

- Media owners are often driven more by financial gain than by integrity or adherence to journalistic codes of ethics. In such cases, profit is prioritised over accurate reporting and factual presentation, undermining the media's public service role in the society.
- Media owners are most likely to import their idiosyncrasies, such as ethnic and religious sentiments, into journalism, and having these interfere with trustworthy journalism smells catastrophe, tension, and insecurity at local, national, and international levels.
- Given their affiliation and alignment with political power, media owners are vulnerable to using their media platforms to serve their political interests. The situation emasculates democracy and reduces governance to partisanship and regime.
- Fear of government sanctions and closure also influences media owners to play second fiddle with the government, interfering with trustworthy journalism.
- Journalists' and editors' lives will always be at risk with threats to their jobs should they resist the control and interest of media owners and, in some cases, the government control.
- Some journalists may be influenced negatively by attempting to fabricate stories, misrepresent facts, or run unbalanced or lopsided stories to serve their employers' interests, to keep their jobs, and to protect their lives. This comes at a heavy price to the Ugandan society and the future of Mbale and its surroundings, as the people will need to be adequately informed.

6.3 Limitations of the Study

This study focused on media owners' conflicts of interest, journalists' coping strategies, and the consequences of owner-controlled journalism in a privately-owned media setting. A qualitative research design was employed to elicit responses from participants, which were then analysed

thematically. One limitation of this approach is the potential lack of precision in responses and the risk of respondent bias. To minimise these effects, the researcher asked categorical and confirmatory questions during interviews to ensure clarity and consistency in participants' answers. The reliance on thematic analysis further reduced response bias by focusing on emergent themes that illuminated participants' perceptions and experiences, thereby enhancing the credibility and generalisability of the findings.

While this approach provided rich insights into how ownership pressures translated into ethical dilemmas and coping strategies, the study largely reflected the conflict from the journalistic perspective. Less attention was devoted to the perspectives of media owners themselves, particularly their responsibility to ensure accuracy, uphold journalistic independence, and avoid undue editorial influence. This represents an important area for further inquiry.

Finally, the study was situated within the context of traditional private broadcast media. In today's environment, however, ownership conflicts are increasingly shaped by the dynamics of digitalisation and new media, which intersect with challenges such as misinformation, disinformation, and commercialised digital content strategies. These digital-era factors were beyond the scope of the present study but remain critical directions for future research.

6.4 Recommendations

This study highlights the urgent need to strengthen institutional and regulatory frameworks to safeguard journalistic independence from the conflicts of interest and ethical dilemmas caused by private media ownership. As highlighted in Chapter Five, respondents from BIG FM and STEP TV reported relying primarily on individual coping strategies, such as self-censorship, selective reporting, or ethical compromise, because existing associations were either weak, fragmented, or absent. This lack of institutional protection left journalists vulnerable to the

demands of owners whose interests often prioritised profit or politics over ethical reporting. These findings resonate with McQuail's (2010) observation that media systems are shaped by ownership structures and with Skjerdal's (2012) concept of "competing loyalties," which underscores how journalists are caught between professional codes and ownership pressures. Similarly, Oji (2007) and Chaudhary and Chaudhary (2020) demonstrate that press freedom and ethical journalism are strengthened where institutional frameworks are robust. Based on the findings and supported by literature, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **Revision and Enforcement of National Journalism Codes**

The National Institute of Journalists of Uganda (NIJU) should undertake a continual revision of the national journalism codes, especially in the areas of conflict of interest, editorial independence, fairness, and professional integrity. Clearer standards and stronger enforcement mechanisms would enhance ethical practice and limit owner-driven interference in editorial content.

- **Strengthening of Journalists' Unions**

Professional bodies such as the Uganda Journalists Association (UJA) and the Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda (HRNJ-Uganda) should be strengthened to provide moral, legal, and institutional support to journalists confronted with ownership conflicts. Stronger unions must be more unified, independent of political and owner influence, and equipped with enforcement powers to impose sanctions on erring media owners. Such unions would safeguard professional integrity, boost journalists' self-esteem, and enhance accountability in the media sector.

- **Mass Sensitisation Campaigns**

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) should organise mass sensitisation campaigns, such as Town Halls, to educate both journalists and the public on the importance of factual, ethical reporting, irrespective of ownership influence.

- **Proactive Civic Engagement**

Where professional journalism and press freedom are threatened, CSOs should also support proactive civic engagement, including advocacy, protests, and/or demonstrations, and other civil actions as legitimate democratic instruments to defend journalistic independence.

- **Training in Ethical Coping Strategies**

Institutions such as the African Centre for Media Excellence (ACME) and UJA should expand training programmes that equip journalists with ethical coping strategies. Such training will help practitioners navigate ownership pressures without resorting to self-censorship or compromising ethical standards.

- **Comprehensive Media Ownership Legislation**

The Government of Uganda, through the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC), should enact and enforce comprehensive legislation on media ownership. Such laws should clearly define ownership limits, address conflicts of interest, and establish safeguards for editorial independence. This would prevent excessive concentration of control and ensure a more pluralistic and democratic media environment.

6.5 Suggestions for Future Study

Future research should further dissect media owners' influence and control to identify the most likely areas of conflicts of interest and assess how these conflicts affect the wider public.

Comparative studies between private and public (government-owned) media would be valuable in highlighting differences and similarities in ownership-related pressures. It is also important to examine the common hazards journalists face as a result of media ownership conflicts and to explore strategies for mitigating these risks.

Additionally, future inquiries should engage media owners directly to better understand how they perceive and enact their ethical responsibilities within media organisations. Research should also investigate how digitalisation and new media reshape media owners' conflicts and influence journalistic integrity, particularly in the context of misinformation, disinformation, and commercialised digital content strategies. Such work would extend the present findings by situating conflicts of interest not only in the newsroom but also within the broader digital information ecosystem.

6.6 Conclusion

This study was focused on understanding journalists' dilemmas due to media owners' conflicts of interest in the professional practice of journalism and press freedom in Mbale, Uganda. The study focused its inquiry on STEP TV Mbale and BIG FM Mbale. Using a qualitative design and in-depth interview, the opinion of journalists in these media houses was elicited. Their opinions were analysed using the thematic approach, in which themes that emerged from their responses during the interview were used to ascertain their proper position of view on the questions asked. After data analysis, findings reveal a high prevalence of media owners' conflict of interest in journalism, although a few journalists reported not to have experienced such. Again, another finding indicates a two-tier level of control faced by journalists: one from the media owners' control and the other from the government, through unfavourable regulations that affect the day-to-day operations of journalists. In some cases, due to the commercialisation of the

media, some media owners side with the government to keep errant journalists in line or get rid of them to safeguard commercial interests, contrary to the promise of the 1995 constitution (Chibita, 2010) which shows that all parties (the private proprietors and the government) are guilty (Akpabio et al., 2013,). These problems leave journalists with the dilemma of aligning with media owners' interests, practicing self-regulation, or following the codes of conduct in journalism. Attempts to cope with the situation leave the journalists and editors distorting and misrepresenting facts, which is detrimental to the society. Although not all journalists are cowed by the media owners' conflicts of interest, threats to life and loss of jobs are the leading factors that compel journalists to bow to pressure in the interest of the media owners who unashamedly use the media to advance their outfits' political and business interests! (Akpabio, Katunzi and Mfaume).

In view of the findings from this study, the enactment of comprehensive media ownership legislation and the strengthening of robust journalistic unions are recommended to curb the excesses of media owners, enforce sanctions, pursue legal battles affecting members, and provide moral support to those endangered by ownership-driven emasculation of press freedom. The empirical evidence and the literature further underscore the importance of developing a stronger, more unified, and independent journalists' union capable of offering collective protection, upholding ethical standards, and enhancing professional integrity within Uganda's media landscape. Mass sensitisation and education on the gains of press freedom to national development were also recommended as a means of gaining public support for journalists; otherwise, indications are that there are more challenging times ahead for the media in Uganda (Chibita, 2010).

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Consent Form

The purpose of this study is to investigate how media ownership affects the professional output of journalists ethically as trained media practitioners. In this case, you will be required to respond to the researcher's (interviewer's) questions with regards to media ownership, professional ethics for journalists, your educational background, your media background and other experiences, as well as your role in this broadcast medium you currently work for.

While carrying out this study, you will be assured of the confidentiality of information and sources throughout and after the investigation. However, your responses may be recorded on tape or any other electronic device suitable for the interviewer to ensure accuracy and proper accountability of the data gathered to reflect your views. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and your responses will be credited to you, except if you state otherwise. There is no anticipated risk, stress, or discomfort.

Please, read the following and append your signature in the designated part, as a sign of approval to participate in the research:

I hereby give my consent to participate in the study titled: *Media Ownership and Its Ethical Implications on Professionalism: A Critical Look at Journalists' Experiences at BIG FM and STEP TV, Mbale, Uganda*, being conducted by Mrs. NENGER, PRISCA ADAEZE, a Masters' student of Journalism and Media Studies, at Uganda Christian University, Mukono. I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I can withdraw my consent at any given time without prejudice or penalty.

Researcher (Signature & date)

Respondent (Signature & Date)

APPENDIX B: Interview Guide

The following questions were used by the researcher as an interview guide to gather data from the respondents.

SECTION A:

General Data

- Hello,
- Tell me about yourself: your name (if you don't mind) and your position here at Big FM/Step TV.
- What does your job entail?
- How long is your media experience: in a media organisation?
- How long is your media experience in Broadcast media?
- How long is your media experience in Big FM/STEP TV?

SECTION B:

Interview Guide

1. Do you understand the concept of ethics?
2. What do you know about the professional code of ethics for journalists in Uganda?
3. Does your medium's house style tally with the professional code of ethics for journalists in Uganda?
 - a. If yes, in what ways?
 - b. If no, in what ways?
4. What kinds of conflicts of interest do you face on the job daily as a practicing journalist/editor?
5. Are there occasions where the professional code of ethics conflicts with the media owner's interest?
 - a. If yes, give examples.
 - b. If no, (move to the next question).
6. Has there been any time you are asked to do what the media owner wants at the expense of your duty to the public?
 - a. If yes, how often?
 - b. If no, (move to the next question).
7. What does media ownership mean to you?
8. How do you deal with these conflicts of interest that arise on the job daily, owing to media ownership structure?
9. What proactive measures should be put in place to curb the excesses of media ownership 'control syndrome' on the journalistic profession?

10. In what ways has media ownership influenced your professional decision-making as a journalist/editor?
11. How has the interference of the media owner influenced your objectivity as a journalist?
12. In what ways have these conflicts of interest affected your professional output at Big FM/STEP TV?
13. In what ways can these conflicts of interest affect good journalism practice in the media as an entity in the society?
14. How do you view the journalistic profession in the near future going by the growing influences of media owners?

APPENDIX C: Code of ethics observed by the National Institute of Journalists of Uganda,

NIJU

1. No journalist shall disseminate information or allegations without establishing its correctness or truth.
2. No journalist shall disclose the source of his/her information and shall only divulge them in the event of an overriding consideration of public interest and within the framework of the law of Uganda.
3. No journalist shall solicit or accept bribes in an attempt to publish or suppress the publication of a story.
4. A journalist shall not plagiarize the professional work of others or expropriate works or results of research by scholars without acknowledging their contribution and naming his/her sources of information.
5. A journalist shall obtain his/her information through the skilful application of journalistic principles and shall never bribe or offer inducements to sources.
6. No journalist shall deny any person with legitimate claim a right to reply a statement. Correction and rejoinders are to be published in appropriate form without delay and in a way that will be noticed by those who have received the original information.
7. A journalist shall at all times strive to separate his/her own opinions from factual news. Where personal opinions are expressed, the public shall be made to know.
8. A journalist shall take the necessary steps to correct any damaging report made on any individual or organization.
9. A journalist shall not originate or encourage the dissemination of information designed to promote or which may have the effect to promote tribalism, racism, or any other form of discrimination.

APPENDIX D: Journalism Codes of Ethics as Developed by the Independent Media Council of Uganda

1. Scope

This code shall apply to media practitioners involved in all stages of sourcing, processing media content for print, graphic and electronic platforms.

2. Professional Integrity

- 2.1 A journalist shall assist and participate in establishing, maintaining, enforcing and observing high standards of conduct so that the integrity and independence of the profession is preserved.
- 2.2 A journalist shall always identify him/herself and the media house where he/she works. Use of undercover or subterfuge methods to gain entry into restricted places or access to information shall be done only as matter of public interest and with the permission of the editor.
- 2.3 A journalist shall not tape or record anyone without the person's knowledge.
- 2.4 An exception may be made only if the recording is necessary to protect the journalist in a legal action or for some other compelling reason.
- 2.5 A journalist shall not solicit, accept bribes or any form of inducement meant to bend or influence professional performance. However, facilitation by third parties to enable a journalist to perform a bonafide assignment in specific situations shall not be deemed as an inducement provided that the assigning editor sanctions such facilitation.

3. Conflict of Interest

- 3.1 A journalist shall always declare to the editor any conflict of interest that arises in the execution of duty and may request for leave to disqualify him or herself from such assignment to avoid the conflict.
- 3.2 A journalist shall endeavour to remain free of associations and activities that compromises personal integrity or undermines the reputation of the profession.

4. Accuracy, Fairness and Balance

- 4.1 A journalist has the responsibility for the accuracy of the information he/she disseminates. The journalist shall also ensure that such information is fair and balanced. Journalists shall not indulge in unfair comment, falsification, distortion or misrepresentation of facts.
- 4.2 A journalist and the employing media house shall endeavour to thoroughly investigate allegations affecting individuals and institutions before disseminating them.
- 4.3 In the spirit of fairness and balance, the journalist shall endeavour to seek and include comment from the affected individuals or institutions in the same story or as quickly as practicable. Fairness shall also include reporting facts in the proper context. Where the affected party declines to comment or where the media house genuinely tries but

fails to extract a comment, such position shall be explained in the story published or broadcast.

- 4.4 Whenever it is recognized that an inaccurate, misleading or distorted story has been published or broadcast, it shall be corrected or clarified promptly, without waiting for a complaint to be raised first.
- 4.5 Corrections should also be reasonably proportional to the error in terms of impact.
- 4.6 Corrections shall be clear and shall carry an apology to affected parties. For purposes of clarity, corrections shall apply to errors of fact and inaccuracies while clarifications shall apply to misleading or distorted information.

5. Right of Reply

- 5.1 Media houses shall accord aggrieved parties the right of reply to material published or broadcast about them.
- 5.2 Journalists shall distinguish clearly in their reports between comment, conjecture and fact. News shall remain objective but a journalist may be partisan in commentaries and opinion pieces.
- 5.3 A comment shall be a genuine expression of opinion relating to fact. Comment or conjecture shall not be presented in such a way as to create the impression that it is an established fact.

6. Social responsibility

- 6.1 A journalist shall, in the dissemination of information, bear in mind his or her responsibility of educating and informing the public on matters affecting them and their responsibility in society. The journalist's responsibility shall include monitoring government and other centres of influence and power on behalf of the public; and this responsibility shall not be abused for whatever reason.
- 6.2 A media practitioner shall at all times defend the principle of the freedom of the press and other mass media by striving to eliminate unjustified news suppression and censorship.

7. Respect for privacy and human dignity

7.1 The public's right to know shall always be weighed vis-à-vis the individual's right to privacy.

7.2 Publications about the private lives of individuals, without their consent, are not acceptable except where public interest overrides the right of privacy.

7.3 It is justified to publish information about individuals where this is for: detecting or exposing criminal conduct; detecting or exposing seriously anti-social conduct; protecting public health and safety; and preventing the public from being misled by some

statement or action of that individual where such a person is doing something in private which he or she is publicly condemning.

7.3 Journalists shall seek to understand the boundaries of public and private space. In this regard, journalists can legitimately report about activities of individuals in a public place but not in a private environment.

8. Letters to the Editor

8.1 For purposes of the Code, Letters to the Editor shall include normal letters sent physically or electronically.

8.2 An editor who decides to open columns on a controversial subject is not obliged to publish all the letters received in regard to that subject. The Editor may select and publish only some of them either in their entirety or the gist thereof. The Editor shall, however, present a fair balance between the pros and cons of the principal issue and reserve the discretion to decide at which point to close the debate.

8.3 In case of radio and TV discussion programmes, hosts shall make reasonable effort to reach out for comment from persons mentioned. Hosts shall also encourage and balance comments from the audience sent by any of the modern means of interactivity.

9. Plagiarism

9.1 No media practitioner shall engage in plagiarism. Plagiarism consists of making use of another person's material or ideas without proper acknowledgement and attribution of the source of those ideas or material.

9.2 Words directly quoted from sources other than the writer's own reporting shall be attributed. In general, when other work is used as the source of ideas for stylistic inspiration the final report shall be clearly different from the original work.

9.3 The editor shall take final responsibility to ensure that published or broadcast content in stories or programs does not contain plagiarized material and that any borrowed content is properly attributed to the rightful author.

10. Non-disclosure of sources

10.1 A journalist shall protect the confidentiality of his/her sources of information and shall only divulge them at the demand of a competent court of law.

10.2 Journalists shall follow the in-house rules and get the editor's consent before granting confidentiality. Once such confidentiality has been granted, both the journalist and the media house shall honour it. It shall be the ultimate responsibility of the Editor to ensure that such protection is granted and guaranteed.

10.3 In order to have the clarity of mind and the confidence, the editor, being the final editorial authority, shall have liberty to demand of the journalist the source of the story. But the editor shall under no circumstances disclose the said sources to a third party.

10.4 The Editor shall also have the privilege to reject use of any story where he/she doubts the journalist's sources.

10.5 For the sake of the integrity and security of the profession, journalists shall not allow to be used as Police witnesses in the investigation of crime simply because the journalists covered the events where such crime was allegedly committed. Such compliance would erode the trust the public holds in the profession of journalism.

11. Intrusion into grief

11.1 Journalists shall not intrude into personal grief. Stories and pictures that may aggravate grief or cause distress to relatives and friends of the dead shall not be published.

Any reports about the dead and gravely ill shall be carried out with utmost discretion and due sympathy.

11.2 Journalists and media houses shall not profiteer from deliberate exploitation of the misfortune of those afflicted by grief. The media shall also avoid re-use of file pictures of situations of death and grave illnesses of persons likely to resurrect distress among relatives and friends.

12. Innocent relatives and friends

12.1 The media shall generally avoid identifying relatives or friends of persons convicted or accused of crime unless the reference to them is necessary for the full, fair and accurate reporting on the crime or legal proceedings and where such identification adds value to the story.

13 Victims of sex crimes

13.1 Media Institutions shall not identify victims of sexual assaults or publish or broadcast material likely to contribute to such identification unless the victims have given informed consent to such publications.

13.2 A journalist shall endeavour to explain to the concerned person the implications of such disclosure. In cases where consent is given subject to certain conditions, then such conditions shall be respected.

13.3 The journalists need to understand that ordinarily such publication does not serve any legitimate journalistic or public need and may bring social opprobrium (public disgrace and shame) to the victims and social embarrassment to their relations, family, friends, community, religious order or the institutions to which they belong.

13.4 Children shall particularly not be identified as victims, however remotely.

14. Protection of children

14.1 Children shall not be identified in cases concerning sexual offences, whether as victims, witnesses, or defendants.

14.2 Except in matters of public interest, e.g. cases of child abuse or abandonment, journalists shall not normally interview or photograph children on subjects involving their personal welfare in the absence of, or without the consent of a parent or other adult who is responsible for the children.

14.3 Children shall not be approached or photographed while in a formal institution without the permission of the institution's authority.

15 Children in criminal cases

15.1 Media institutions shall not publish or broadcast the names of any underage offenders (below 18 years) arrested by Police or tried in the criminal courts. Where such identification must be made, the media house shall explain the overriding reasons that led to such an editorial decision.

16 Publication of adults-only material

16.1 Out of respect to values of common decency, the media shall take extra care when dealing with adults-only material.

16.2 A media house, which publishes or broadcast adults- only material, shall ensure such material is not accessible to the underage (minors) and shall provide restricted places or time where willing adults can access such material.

16.3 Television stations shall also schedule adult movies later at night when children are in bed. Such programs shall be properly labeled with appropriate advisories including in the TV schedules published in newspapers.

16.4 Radio stations shall air adults-only programs late at night when children are in bed and they shall make appropriate promotional advisories to that effect.

17 Use of pictures

17.1 The Media must exercise due caution when using pictures. Choice and use of pictures should not cause unnecessary harm to persons concerned e.g., exploiting minors and people with disabilities. Special care shall be taken when using pictures of disasters.

17.2 The use of grisly, grotesque and gruesome pictures should be avoided except where there is overriding public interest. Illustrations accompanying stories of adult material shall be measured both in content and in caption.

18. Hatred

18.1 Media Institutions shall not publish or broadcast material that is intended or is likely to cause hostility or hatred towards persons on the grounds of their race, ethnic origins, nationality, religion or political affiliation.

18.2 Media institutions shall take utmost care to avoid contributing to the spread of ethnic hatred when reporting events and statements of this nature.

18.3 Media shall endeavour to regulate and balance debate and discussion of sensitive issues, like corruption, nepotism, favoritism so that they do not degenerate into hate literature.

19. Disadvantaged and marginalized groups

19.1 The media shall not publish material that is intended to ridicule, or impute ridicule of persons on grounds of their gender or physical disabilities.

19.2 The media shall also take steps to ensure that content for publication or broadcast, including paid-for content, is free of such contemptuous material.

20. Covering conflicts

20.1 The media shall exercise a high sense of individual and corporate citizen responsibility when covering conflict and while commenting on sectarian disputes. Covering conflict shall be done in a manner that is conducive to the creation of an atmosphere congenial to national harmony, amity and peace.

20.2 News, views and comments shall be backed by facts and measured in language and tone. But it shall be the responsibility of the media to highlight potential conflicts before they explode and seek to help society heal wounds after conflict.

21. Undue pressure or influence

21.1 Media owners, publishers and practitioners shall not suppress or distort information about which the public has a right to know because of undue pressure or influence from commercial, political or social interest.

22. Payment for Information

22.1 Media Owners, Publishers and Practitioners shall not publish, broadcast or suppress an editorial report or omit or alter vital facts in that report in return for payment of money or for any other gift or reward.

22.2 This ethic shall, however, not apply to advertisements or advertorials. Media houses shall clearly distinguish between editorial content and advertisements or advertorials.

22.3 Media owners, publishers and media practitioners shall not pay people to act as information sources unless there is demonstrable public interest value in the information

24. Advertisements

24.1 The media shall strive to preserve the sanctity and impartiality of news. As such media houses shall not allow news bulletins to be sponsored.

24.2 Journalists shall always be seen to remain independent and shall not dress in corporate branded wear when presenting programs or covering sponsored events.