

Analysis of Media Ownership Patterns and Political Campaigns Coverage in Kenya

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to examine how media ownership patterns influence political campaign coverage in Kenya, with particular focus on ownership structures, editorial policies, political news reporting, and media regulation. Despite constitutional guarantees of press freedom and democratic participation, concerns persist about the concentration of media ownership among political and corporate elites, which may undermine journalistic independence, balanced political reporting, and democratic accountability during electoral processes. This study employed a qualitative systematic literature review design. The review analysed scholarly and policy sources selected from academic journals, books, media reports, government publications, and credible online databases. The selected literature focused on media ownership, political communication, editorial policies, and media regulation within global, African, and Kenyan contexts. Data were analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns, concepts, and relationships relevant to the study objectives. The findings reveal that ownership concentration significantly influences political campaign coverage in Kenya through editorial interference, commercialisation of political news, political alignments, and self-censorship among journalists. The study further establishes that media owners frequently shape editorial policies and newsroom practices in line with political and economic interests, thereby compromising objectivity and pluralism in political reporting. Additionally, the findings indicate that regulatory institutions face considerable challenges in promoting accountability, transparency, and independence within the media sector due to weak enforcement mechanisms and political interference. The study concludes that media ownership patterns remain a significant factor shaping political communication and democratic governance in Kenya. The article recommends stronger regulatory reforms, enhanced transparency of ownership, protection of editorial independence, and promotion of media pluralism to strengthen fair political reporting and democratic participation.

Key terms: Editorial policies, media ownership, media regulation, power structures, political campaigns coverage.

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between media ownership and political campaign coverage remains a significant concern in democratic societies because ownership structures can influence editorial direction, news framing, and public access to balanced political information. In Kenya, there are intensified concerns over political influence, commercial interests, and elite control of media institutions during electoral periods, particularly following the reintroduction of multiparty politics in 1991 and the highly contested elections of 2007, 2013, 2017, and 2022. The media plays a central role in shaping political discourse, informing citizens, and facilitating democratic participation. However, the concentration of media ownership among politically connected individuals and corporate elites has raised questions regarding impartiality, editorial independence, and the fairness of political campaign coverage.

Media ownership refers to the patterns through which individuals, corporations, political actors, or institutions control and manage media organisations and communication platforms (Baker, 2006). Ownership structures may include private, state, corporate, cross-media, or politically affiliated ownership arrangements that influence organisational priorities and editorial decision-making. Political campaign coverage, on the other hand, refers to the manner in which media institutions report, frame, interpret, and disseminate information concerning political candidates, parties, electoral processes, and campaign activities during election periods (McQuail, 2010). Editorial policies are the institutional guidelines and professional principles that regulate newsroom practices, gatekeeping processes, news selection, and publication standards within media organisations (Shoemaker & Reese, 2013). Media regulation refers to the legal, institutional, and policy frameworks established to promote accountability, transparency, professionalism, and fairness within the media sector (Napoli, 2001). In Kenya, media regulation is carried out by institutions such as the Media Council of Kenya and the Communications Authority of Kenya, which oversee professional standards, licensing, and ethical compliance in the broadcasting and print sectors.

Since independence in 1963, Kenya's media landscape has undergone a substantial transformation from colonial and missionary-controlled communication systems to a commercially competitive and politically influential industry. During the post-independence era, the state maintained significant control over broadcasting through the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation, while private media ownership gradually expanded in the 1990s following political liberalisation and economic reforms. The emergence of major private media conglomerates such as Nation Media Group, Standard Group, Royal Media Services, and Radio Africa Group transformed the media environment into a highly competitive sector characterised by increasing corporate ownership and political interests. Although media pluralism expanded during this period, concerns also emerged regarding ownership concentration, commercialisation, and political interference in news production.

The influence of ownership structures on political reporting has become particularly visible during election campaigns, where accusations of biased reporting, selective framing, unequal candidate visibility, and partisan editorial positioning frequently arise. Media organisations in Kenya often operate within commercial and political environments where owners possess direct or indirect political affiliations. Consequently, editorial decisions regarding political news coverage may reflect the economic or ideological interests of proprietors rather than professional journalistic norms. This situation poses challenges to journalistic autonomy, objectivity, and balanced political communication, especially during competitive electoral periods, when the media is expected to uphold democratic accountability and provide equitable access to political information.

Previous studies on Kenyan media have examined media freedom, election reporting, political communication, and the professional challenges facing journalists. Scholars such as Nyanjom (2012), and Otieno (2020) have highlighted concerns about political influence, commercialisation, and ownership concentration in Kenya's media industry. However, existing studies have largely focused on general media performance, electoral violence, press freedom, or journalistic ethics without systematically examining

how specific ownership patterns directly shape political campaign coverage and editorial policies across media institutions. Furthermore, limited scholarly attention has been given to the effectiveness of regulatory institutions in promoting accountability and transparency regarding ownership influence on political reporting. As a result, the relationship between ownership structures, editorial practices, and political campaign coverage in Kenya remains inadequately explored within contemporary media scholarship.

Therefore, this study addresses this gap by analysing how ownership patterns influence political campaign coverage in Kenya, how ownership structures shape editorial policies and political news reporting, and how regulatory institutions contribute to accountability and transparency in the media sector. The study significantly contributes to media studies, political communication, and democratic governance by providing a contextual understanding of the interaction between media ownership and electoral communication in Kenya's evolving democratic environment. The findings are expected to contribute to ongoing debates concerning media pluralism, journalistic independence, regulatory reform, and democratic accountability in Kenya. Therefore, this paper specifically analyses the influence of ownership structures on the coverage of political campaigns; how ownership structures shape editorial policies and the reporting of political news, and the role of regulatory institutions in fostering accountability and transparency in media ownership.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The interplay between media ownership and political campaign coverage has become a significant area of scholarly inquiry due to concerns regarding media independence, democratic participation, and the concentration of communicative power among political and economic elites. Globally, studies demonstrate that ownership structures influence editorial priorities, news framing, political representation, and public access to balanced information. Media organisations are therefore not merely neutral institutions of information dissemination, but actors operating within political

and commercial systems that shape public discourse and electoral communication.

From a global perspective, Herman and Chomsky (1988) argue that ownership structures play a central role in determining media content through what they conceptualise as the Propaganda Model. According to the theory, media institutions operate through interconnected filters, including ownership, advertising, sourcing, flak, and ideology, which collectively shape news production. Ownership is considered a dominant filter because large corporations and politically connected elites often control media organisations and influence editorial priorities in ways that protect political and economic interests. The theory suggests that media institutions may privilege elite perspectives while marginalising dissenting voices, especially during politically sensitive periods such as elections.

Subsequent studies have expanded this argument by examining how concentrated ownership affects democratic accountability and political communication. Besley and Prat (2006) contend that concentrated media ownership can contribute to political capture and corruption because owners may suppress information that threatens their political or commercial interests. Similarly, Stiglitz (2017) argues that wealthy individuals frequently invest in media organisations as strategic instruments for shaping public opinion and influencing political outcomes. These studies provide important insights into the political economy of media ownership; however, they primarily focus on Western democracies and do not adequately examine how ownership structures shape campaign reporting in developing democracies characterised by ethicised politics and weak regulatory institutions. Consequently, there remains a limited understanding of how ownership manifests within African electoral contexts, particularly in Kenya.

At the African level, studies on media ownership have largely focused on media liberalisation, commercialisation, and elite influence in postcolonial democracies. Ogola (2011) argues that media liberalisation in Africa expanded private ownership and diversified communication platforms, but also intensified commercialisation and political interference

in editorial practices. According to the study, ownership structures significantly affect content selection and representation, especially during politically sensitive periods. However, Ogola's analysis remains broad and does not specifically examine how ownership patterns influence political campaign coverage or newsroom decision-making during elections. The study also does not adequately analyse the role of regulatory institutions in managing ownership influence within electoral reporting.

Similarly, Chuma and Wasserman (2017) observe that African media systems often operate within environments characterised by political patronage, ownership concentration, and weak institutional oversight. These structural conditions undermine journalistic autonomy and reduce diversity in political reporting. While the study highlights broader governance challenges affecting African media systems, it pays limited attention to the relationship between ownership structures and political campaign coverage. The study, therefore, leaves unresolved questions about how ownership interests shape editorial policies, candidate visibility, and the framing of electoral issues during political campaigns.

In Kenya, the media industry has experienced substantial growth following political liberalisation in the 1990s and the expansion of digital communication technologies. The increase in television stations, vernacular radio channels, newspapers, and digital platforms has enhanced media influence in shaping political discourse and electoral behaviour. Nevertheless, concerns persist regarding ownership concentration and political influence within the Kenyan media landscape. Nyanjom (2012) argues that Kenya's media environment is increasingly dominated by politically connected elites and large corporate organisations whose interests may influence editorial direction and public discourse. The study further suggests that ownership structures affect the media's capacity to function as an independent democratic institution. However, the study primarily focuses on media freedom and governance without systematically examining how ownership patterns influence political campaign reporting and editorial decision-making during elections.

Otieno (2020) similarly argue that media ownership structures in Kenya significantly affect journalistic independence and editorial autonomy. According to the study, commercial interests and political affiliations increasingly shape newsroom practices and political reporting, especially during election periods when media organisations become central platforms for political communication. While the study identifies the relationship between ownership and media independence, it does not specifically investigate how ownership structures influence the framing of political campaigns, the selection of political actors, or the visibility of competing political narratives. Furthermore, the study provides limited discussion regarding the effectiveness of media regulatory institutions in promoting transparency and accountability in ownership practices.

Wanjiku (2017) further contends that many major media organisations in Kenya are associated with influential political and business elites who possess substantial power to shape public opinion during elections. Media corporations such as Nation Media Group, Standard Group, Royal Media Services, Radio Africa Group, and Mediamax Network Limited dominate ownership across television, radio, print, and digital platforms. The study argues that such concentration may influence political narratives and editorial priorities during electoral periods. However, the analysis remains largely descriptive and does not sufficiently examine how internal editorial policies are shaped by ownership interests or how journalists negotiate political pressures within media institutions.

Existing scholarship also inadequately addresses the role of media regulation in managing ownership influence during political campaigns. Institutions such as the Media Council of Kenya and the Communications Authority of Kenya are expected to promote ethical standards, accountability, and transparency within the media sector. However, few studies have critically assessed whether these institutions effectively regulate ownership concentration and political influence in electoral reporting. As a result, there is limited empirical understanding of how regulatory frameworks shape editorial independence and political campaign coverage in Kenya.

Further, the analytical foundation of this study is strengthened by the Propaganda Model and Social Responsibility Theory, which collectively provide a framework for analysing the relationship between media ownership, editorial policies, political reporting, and democratic accountability. The Propaganda Model, developed by Herman and Chomsky (1988), explains how ownership structures and economic interests shape media content and political communication. The theory argues that media organisations operate through institutional filters that influence news selection, framing, and dissemination. Ownership is regarded as one of the most significant filters because media proprietors often have political and commercial interests that can influence editorial decisions. Within the Kenyan context, the theory is particularly relevant because major media organisations are owned or influenced by politically connected individuals and corporate elites. During political campaigns, such ownership structures may influence candidate visibility, framing of political issues, and prioritisation of specific political narratives. The propaganda model, therefore, helps explain how ownership interests may shape political campaign coverage and potentially compromise journalistic independence and media pluralism in Kenya.

In addition, the study applies Social Responsibility Theory, which emphasises the media's ethical obligations to serve the public interest through balanced, accurate, and objective reporting. The theory emerged as a response to libertarian perspectives that prioritised unrestricted press freedom without sufficient accountability. According to McQuail (2005), Social Responsibility Theory argues that media institutions must uphold professional ethics, fairness, objectivity, and accountability while promoting democratic participation. Tankard and Severin (2001) further argue that journalists have a duty to ensure integrity, balance, and public accountability in news dissemination.

Within Kenya's electoral environment, Social Responsibility Theory is relevant because media institutions are expected to provide fair and impartial political campaign coverage despite ownership pressures and political affiliations. The theory also underscores the importance of regulatory institutions

in enforcing ethical standards and promoting accountability within the media industry. Consequently, the theory supports the study's examination of how editorial policies and regulatory mechanisms shape political reporting during election periods.

The integration of the Propaganda Model and Social Responsibility Theory provides a comprehensive analytical framework for the study. While the Propaganda Model explains the structural and ownership-based influences on political campaign coverage, Social Responsibility Theory emphasises the media's normative and ethical obligations within a democratic society. Together, the theories enable a deeper understanding of how ownership structures, editorial policies, and regulatory institutions interact to shape political communication and democratic governance in Kenya.

Overall, existing studies demonstrate that ownership structures influence media content, editorial priorities, and political communication. Nevertheless, several gaps remain insufficiently addressed. First, previous studies have not systematically examined how ownership structures directly influence political campaign coverage during elections in Kenya. Second, limited attention has been paid to how ownership interests shape editorial policies and newsroom practices in political reporting. Third, the role of regulatory institutions in fostering accountability and transparency in media ownership remains underexplored. Additionally, most studies remain descriptive and fragmented, with limited integration of theoretical perspectives capable of explaining the interaction between ownership influence, editorial decision-making, and democratic communication. This study addresses these gaps by providing a theory-driven analysis of media ownership patterns and political campaign coverage within Kenya's contemporary electoral environment.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research design, using a systematic literature review, to examine media ownership patterns and political campaign coverage in Kenya. The design was appropriate because it enabled a comprehensive and critical synthesis of existing

scholarly evidence on ownership structures, editorial policies, political reporting, and media regulation in the Kenyan media landscape. According to Booth et al. (2016), a systematic literature review facilitates the identification, evaluation, and synthesis of relevant studies in a transparent and rigorous manner, thereby enhancing reliability and scholarly depth.

Data collection involved a systematic search of secondary data sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, policy documents, newspapers, official government publications, media reports, and credible online databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR and Scopus. The search process utilised keywords and phrases including “media ownership,” “political campaign coverage,” “editorial policies,” “media regulation,” “political communication,” and “Kenyan media.” The inclusion criteria focused on scholarly, credible sources published in English that addressed media ownership, political reporting, electoral communication, or media regulation in global, African, and Kenyan contexts. Sources that lacked relevance, credibility, or direct connection to the study objectives were excluded.

The study employed purposive sampling to identify relevant scholarly materials aligned with the research objectives. Approximately 40 academic and policy sources were initially identified, screened, and reviewed, from which 25 highly relevant sources were selected for final analysis. Data extraction involved reviewing the selected materials to identify recurring concepts, arguments, findings, and patterns relating to ownership influence, editorial practices, political campaign coverage, and regulatory accountability.

The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis procedure guided the coding and categorisation process. Relevant information from the reviewed sources was coded into thematic categories based on recurring keywords, concepts, and issues. The major themes identified included ownership concentration, political influence on editorial policies, commercialisation of media, media regulation, journalistic independence, and political campaign framing. The findings were then synthesised and interpreted in relation to the study objectives and

theoretical framework to establish patterns, relationships, and existing research gaps regarding media ownership and political campaign coverage in Kenya.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Influence of Ownership Structures on Political Campaign Coverage in Kenya

The first objective of the study sought to investigate the influence of ownership structures on the coverage of political campaigns in Kenya. Findings from the reviewed literature indicate that ownership concentration significantly shapes political reporting, editorial direction, and the framing of electoral issues within Kenya’s media landscape. Although the Constitution of Kenya guarantees freedom of expression and media independence, evidence from reviewed studies demonstrates that political and commercial interests continue to influence campaign reporting across both public and private media institutions.

Reporters Without Borders (2021) observed that political elites in Kenya exercise substantial influence over media operations through ownership ties, political patronage, and indirect censorship. Similarly, the Reuters Institute Digital News Report (2021) noted that media ownership concentration among politically connected individuals often results in political reporting that prioritises elite interests over public concerns. These findings support the argument advanced by Cheeseman et al. (2018), who contend that ownership concentration in Kenya contributes to political bias and compromises journalistic independence during election periods. The reviewed findings collectively suggest that ownership structures directly influence how political campaigns are framed, which candidates receive prominence, and the extent to which critical political perspectives are represented in news coverage.

The reviewed literature further indicates that political actors frequently acquire or control media outlets to secure strategic influence during elections. For instance, Ndonge and Otieno (2020) cite the case of politician Ali Mwakwere, who utilised Kaya FM during the 2010 Matuga parliamentary by-election to advance his political interests. This example demonstrates how

ownership of media platforms may function as an extension of political mobilisation and campaign strategy. Simiyu (2014) similarly argues that political elites pursue media ownership because it provides a strategic advantage in shaping voter perceptions and influencing political discourse. These findings align with the Propaganda Model, which posits that ownership structures act as filters through which political and economic interests shape media content (Herman & Chomsky, 1988).

The findings also reveal that commercial interests increasingly shape political campaign coverage in Kenya. Ndonye and Otieno (2020) argue that media organisations operate within competitive commercial environments where audience ratings, advertising revenue, and political alliances influence editorial priorities. This trend has intensified following the expansion of digital media and online news platforms, which have increased competition for audiences and advertising revenue. While digital growth has enhanced access to political information, it has also encouraged sensationalism and politically aligned reporting aimed at attracting audiences and commercial support.

Further findings from the International Press Institute (2019) indicate that media ownership in Kenya remains concentrated among a small number of corporations controlling television, radio, print, and digital platforms. Major media houses such as Nation Media Group, Royal Media Services, Standard Group, and Radio Africa Group dominate the communication sector and possess extensive influence over political narratives. Ownership concentration limits diversity of political perspectives because owners may shape editorial content according to personal ideological or political preferences. A notable example highlighted by Kipkoech, (2023) is Royal Media Services' political positioning during different electoral periods, including its support for former President Mwai Kibaki and later alignment with Raila Odinga during the 2013 elections. Such shifts demonstrate how ownership interests may affect media neutrality and campaign reporting.

The reviewed studies, therefore, demonstrate that ownership structures significantly influence political

campaign coverage through editorial interference, commercialisation, political alignments, and concentration of communicative power. These findings reinforce concerns regarding media pluralism and democratic accountability in Kenya's electoral environment. They further suggest that ownership influence undermines the media's normative role as an impartial watchdog and public forum during political campaigns.

Additionally, the findings reveal that government influence contributes to self-censorship among journalists. Freedom House reports cited in the reviewed literature indicate that journalists frequently avoid reporting content perceived as hostile to political elites or government authorities due to fear of political retaliation, legal intimidation, or economic consequences. Consequently, political campaign coverage may exclude alternative viewpoints and reduce the diversity of democratic debate available to citizens during elections.

Influence of Ownership Structures on Editorial Policies and Political News Reporting

The second objective sought to examine how ownership structures shape editorial policies and the reporting of political news in Kenya. Findings from the reviewed studies indicate that ownership influence extends beyond organisational control to directly affect newsroom operations, editorial policies, and journalistic practices. Media owners possess substantial authority in appointing senior editors, establishing organisational priorities, and determining political positioning during election periods.

Human Rights Watch (2018) emphasised that independent media is fundamental to democratic governance and public accountability. In a study involving journalists from leading Kenyan media houses, including Nation Media Group, Standard Group, and Royal Media Services, approximately 98 per cent of journalists agreed that media independence is essential for democracy and effective governance. The significance of this figure lies in its demonstration of broad professional consensus among journalists regarding the importance of editorial autonomy in political reporting. However, despite this recognition, the reviewed studies indicate

that newsroom independence remains constrained by ownership interests and political affiliations.

Simiyu (2014), in a study examining political coverage during the 2013 Kenyan elections, found that 66 per cent of journalists reported that their independence in covering political matters had been compromised by media ownership influence. The study further revealed that 55 per cent of respondents identified ownership structures as the principal cause of bias in political campaign reporting. These percentages originated from survey responses collected from journalists working in major Kenyan media organisations during the 2013 election period. The findings are significant because they empirically demonstrate the extent to which ownership interests interfere with editorial decision-making and professional journalistic standards.

Simiyu (2014) also found that 22 per cent of journalists attributed bias in political reporting to the “brown envelope syndrome,” in which journalists receive financial inducements or political incentives to shape coverage in favour of particular political actors. Another 23 per cent associated bias with irresponsible journalism and weak professional ethics. These findings suggest that editorial bias in Kenya results not only from ownership pressure but also from broader structural and ethical challenges within the media industry. The findings, therefore, reveal a multi-layered relationship between ownership influence, political patronage, and journalistic vulnerability.

The reviewed studies further indicate that intimidation and political pressure significantly undermine editorial independence. Human Rights Watch (2018) documented at least 17 cases involving physical attacks against 23 journalists and bloggers between 2013 and 2017. The report further noted that at least two journalists lost their lives while undertaking politically sensitive reporting. One prominent case involved the killing of journalist John Kituyi, founder of *The Mirror Weekly*, who was known for investigative political reporting in Eldoret. These incidents demonstrate the hostile conditions under which journalists operate and highlight how political intimidation contributes to self-censorship and weakened investigative journalism.

The findings also demonstrate the growing role of digital media and citizen journalism in shaping political communication. Abboud et al. (2024), in a study examining media practices during the 2017 elections, found that 78 per cent of respondents believed social media and citizen journalism enhanced political participation and public engagement. The significance of this finding lies in its indication that digital platforms have expanded access to political discourse beyond traditional mainstream media. However, the study also found that journalists expressed growing concerns about misinformation, partisanship, and declining editorial control in online political communication. Consequently, while digital media has democratized access to political information, it has also intensified concerns regarding political polarisation and biased reporting.

Collectively, these findings demonstrate that ownership structures shape editorial policies by influencing newsroom autonomy, political framing, journalistic practices, and the prioritisation of political narratives. The findings further suggest that ownership influence undermines the ethical principles associated with Social Responsibility Theory, particularly objectivity, fairness, and accountability in political reporting.

Role of Regulatory Institutions in Promoting Accountability and Transparency

The third objective sought to analyse the role of regulatory institutions in fostering accountability and transparency in media ownership in Kenya. Findings from the reviewed literature indicate that although regulatory frameworks exist, significant weaknesses remain in enforcing accountability, protecting journalistic independence, and regulating ownership concentration.

Nyanjom (2012) argues that media operations in Kenya are heavily influenced by legal and political structures governing freedom of expression, licensing, censorship, and ownership regulation. While the legal framework recognises media freedom, state interference and political influence continue to affect journalistic independence. The findings indicate that ownership regulation remains insufficiently developed

to prevent concentration of media control among politically connected elites.

Findings from Human Rights Watch (2018) further indicate that journalists perceive existing regulatory institutions as ineffective in protecting press freedom and promoting transparency. In a survey of journalists from major Kenyan media houses, 28 per cent of respondents indicated that regulatory institutions had a minimal impact on fostering accountability and transparency within media ownership structures. Additionally, 71 per cent of them emphasized the need for legislative reforms to strengthen media independence and enhance journalist protection during political reporting. These figures are significant because they reflect widespread dissatisfaction among journalists regarding the effectiveness of current regulatory mechanisms.

The reviewed studies also assessed the Media Council of Kenya's performance in promoting ethical political reporting during the 2013 elections. Simiyu (2014) found that only 31 per cent of the surveyed journalists considered the institution effective in promoting accountability, transparency, and media independence. In contrast, 69 per cent of the surveyed journalists expressed dissatisfaction with its regulatory performance. These findings suggest a disconnect between regulatory expectations and institutional capacity to address ownership influence and political interference in the media sector.

Ugangu (2020) also identifies licensing systems and political influence over broadcasting regulation as barriers to accountability and transparency of ownership. The findings suggest that licensing procedures may reinforce political patronage by favouring politically connected media owners while limiting broader participation within the communication sector. Consequently, regulatory frameworks may unintentionally sustain ownership concentration and weaken media pluralism.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that regulatory institutions in Kenya face significant challenges in promoting accountability, transparency, and independence within the media industry. Weak enforcement mechanisms, political interference, and

ownership concentration continue to undermine efforts to protect democratic political communication. The study therefore underscores the need for stronger institutional reforms, transparent mechanisms for ownership disclosure, and enhanced legal protections for journalists to safeguard editorial independence and promote balanced political campaign coverage in Kenya.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: This study examined the relationship between media ownership patterns and political campaign coverage in Kenya by investigating how ownership structures influence political reporting, editorial policies, and media regulation. The findings demonstrate that ownership concentration among politically connected individuals and corporate elites continues to shape the nature, framing, and direction of political campaign coverage in Kenya. Media organisations frequently operate within political and commercial interests that influence editorial decisions, limit journalistic autonomy, and compromise balanced political reporting.

The study further established that ownership structures significantly affect editorial policies and newsroom operations. Media owners often exercise indirect or direct influence over editorial content, political alignments, and the selection of political narratives disseminated to the public. Consequently, journalists operate within restrictive institutional environments characterised by political pressure, commercialisation, and self-censorship. Such conditions undermine the media's democratic role as an independent watchdog and weaken public trust in political news reporting.

Additionally, the findings revealed that existing regulatory institutions face considerable challenges in promoting accountability, transparency, and media pluralism. Weak enforcement mechanisms, political interference, and insufficient frameworks for ownership disclosure continue to hinder effective regulation of the media sector. Although institutions such as the Media Council of Kenya play a significant role in safeguarding ethical journalism, concerns remain regarding their effectiveness in protecting

editorial independence and ensuring equitable political campaign coverage.

Overall, the study concludes that media ownership patterns remain a critical determinant of political communication and democratic governance in Kenya. Strengthening media independence, enhancing transparency of ownership, and reinforcing regulatory accountability are therefore essential for promoting fair political reporting and sustaining democratic participation during electoral processes.

Recommendations: The study recommends that the Kenyan government, media stakeholders, and regulatory institutions strengthen policies to prevent excessive concentration of media ownership among political elites and corporate actors. Transparent mechanisms for ownership disclosure should be strengthened to promote accountability and public confidence in media institutions. Regulatory bodies should also be empowered to enforce ethical standards, protect journalists from political intimidation, and safeguard editorial independence during political campaigns.

Media organisations should establish stronger internal editorial safeguards that minimise owner interference

in political reporting. Journalists should be further supported through professional training on ethical political reporting, investigative journalism, and digital media literacy to reduce vulnerability to political manipulation and commercial influence.

The study also recommends reforms in media licensing and regulatory frameworks to encourage media pluralism and equitable representation of diverse political perspectives. Additionally, stronger collaboration between civil society organisations, media regulators, and academic institutions is necessary to promote democratic communication and responsible political journalism.

Future research should investigate the influence of digital media ownership and algorithmic political communication on electoral reporting in Kenya. Further studies should also examine the impact of vernacular radio stations, social media influencers, and emerging digital platforms on political mobilisation and voter behaviour. In addition, there is a need for comparative empirical studies examining the influence of ownership across print, broadcast, and digital media platforms during different electoral periods in Kenya.

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