

The Political Economy of Print Media and Its Impact on Journalism Practice in Cameroon

Isidore Agem Abah*, Kingsley L. Ngange, Nengieh Lizzie Wantchami, Stephen N. Nnode

Department of Journalism and Mass Communication University of Buea, Buea, Cameroon

Email: *ashlyisidore@gmail.com

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Abstract

Print media are the foundation and backbone of all forms of media worldwide. However, this pivotal sector, which underpins journalism practice in Cameroon, currently faces profound existential challenges. In an era marked by rapid proliferation of social media, declining advertising revenues, rising production costs, dwindling sales, a weak reading culture, and swift dissemination of information, the print media industry in Cameroon finds itself at a critical juncture. If the print media slips into a precipice in Cameroon, it would not only be detrimental to journalism practice, but also to the polity, since print media are beacons of professional journalism, expose corruption through the watchdog role, promote democracy, accountability, public discourse, and serve as reliable sources of historical development. This study, thus, explores how ownership patterns, regulation and funding shape journalistic practice in Cameroon's print sector. Using eight in-depth interviews with publishers from major urban centres, the authors apply political economy theory and thematic analysis to extract five recurring impacts: bias, weakened outlets, praise-singing, unequal access to information and ethical compromise. Results indicate that lax entry rules and state leverage over advertising encourage "Alleluia Journalism" while eroding credibility. The authors call for stricter licensing, an information access law and decriminalisation of press offences.

Keywords

Political Economy, Print Media, Journalism Practice, Cameroon

1. Introduction

The media do not exist in a vacuum; they operate within a social system or in a structured relationship with other institutions that shape their content (Reese, 1993; Reese & Shoemaker, 2016). These structured relationships between the me-

media and other institutions can either be voluntary or coercive. Thus, the print media, especially newspapers, have been an integral part of people's lives for over 400 years (Chandra & Kaiser, 2015). This paper investigates how the political economy, which is the social and power relations between the government and the media that guide the production, distribution, and consumption of communication resources (Mosco, 1996), impacts journalism practice in Cameroon. Journalism practice is the systematic process of researching, gathering, treating, and disseminating news and information to an audience (Fleming, 2005; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001; Ngange, 2012; Ndode, 2020).

There are conflicting statistics regarding the official number of print media organs (newspapers) operating in Cameroon. Sadi (2023) contends that 700 newspapers exist in the country and attributes this significant figure to the highly liberal legal framework driven by the government's strong political will to promote the freedom to operate and the freedom to own and publish newspapers. In contrast to Sadi, the National Communication Council (NCC), in its 2024 publication titled *Cameroon Media Map*, asserts that there are 760 approved newspapers in the country.

The NCC's statistics are at variance with the 2023 Cameroon Media Landscape Report published by Centre d'Etudes de la Presse, which holds that there were over 200 registered newspapers and magazines in Cameroon (CENAP, 2023). However, whether there are 700 newspapers according to Sadi, 760 according to the NCC, or over 200 according to CENAP, one fact remains clear: Fewer than 200 of these newspapers publish regularly. Most newspapers in Cameroon emerge and quickly fade away after less than three years in operation. Some of the surviving papers operate from the suitcases of their publishers without any recognised office space or paid reporters. These papers tend to surface only when there is a controversial issue involving a political figure, a business tycoon, or a national event from which they can profit quickly before disappearing again, waiting for the next controversy. This practice, which defines the print media sector in Cameroon today, has been termed "Hit-and-run Journalism" by veteran Cameroonian journalist Charlie Ndi Chia (Ndi Chia, 2018, private communication).

The situation facing newspapers in Cameroon is further aggravated by the fact that from 1990 to the present day, nearly 50 newspapers have ceased operations, while others have transitioned to online publications. If one were to include the early newspapers that advocated for independence and self-rule in Cameroon, which have since become defunct, it would illustrate the dire state of the print media sector, depriving the current generation of Cameroonians of this significant national heritage. The rate of newspaper closures in Cameroon, the reduction in print runs of others, and the transition of others to online formats call for an urgent academic investigation into the political economy of newspapers in the country. This issue arises at a time when print media globally is beset by numerous challenges, such as the threats posed by social media (Oduro, 2019; Patel, 2010); decreasing newspaper sales and advertising revenues (Angelucci & Cagé, 2019;

Chyi & Tenenboim, 2019); declining readership (Jiang, 2023; Tillinghast, 1981); and rising costs of newspaper production (Pattabhiramaiah et al., 2018).

The global challenges facing print media are so formidable that Franklin (2014) warns that traditional print media may soon become extinct and that printed books might vanish as newspaper readership declines, with many newspapers worldwide ceasing publication or shifting to online editions due to falling advertising revenue. The demise of print media would represent a monumental tragedy, not only for journalism but for society as a whole, as print media (newspapers) play an essential role in every polity. Newspapers shape public opinion and influence government policies; they act as a bridge between the government and the people; they serve as a voice against injustice; they help to raise health and environmental awareness during crises or emergencies; they are sources of information; and they offer an excellent platform for advertising (Shabir, Safdar, Seyal, Imran, & Bukhari, 2015). Thus, the role of print is still as substantial today as it has been for over 400 years.

2. Historical Development of Print Media in Cameroon

The evolution of mass media, particularly print media in Cameroon, is intrinsically linked to the nation's colonial history. The territory known today as Cameroon was first annexed by the Germans and christened Kamerun. During the German colonial period, the colonial authorities exerted control over all aspects of life: political, economic, social, religious, and cultural (Richardson, 1999). This hegemonic influence laid the groundwork for understanding the early development of the press in Cameroon, which was predominantly initiated by the colonial powers. The genesis of newspaper ownership in Cameroon occurred in 1903 with the establishment of *Das Evangelische Monatsblatt* (Evangelical Newsletter), recognized as the first newspaper in the territory. According to the scholar, the introduction of this newspaper served the dual purpose of disseminating Christian teachings and facilitating communication between the German colonial administrators and their home government.

Das Evangelische Monatsblatt was printed in Stuttgart, Germany, and primarily addressed German activities related to evangelism in Kamerun. Gallagher (1991) further documents that the first Baptist missionaries, who arrived in Cameroon shortly after, published *Mwendi Ma Musango* in 1906, while Protestant missionaries released *Elolombe Ya Cameroun* in 1908 and *Mefoe* in the Duala language. These early religious publications not only established precedents for media ownership in Cameroon but also played a significant role in shaping the media landscape during the colonial period, ultimately influencing the nation's democratic processes. Despite their historical significance, none of these indigenous language newspapers, published by missionaries or colonial authorities, remains in existence today.

Also, Gallagher (1991) asserts that in 1914, the German colonial administration introduced *The Amtsblatt* (Official Gazette), followed by the establishment of

L'Eveil du Cameroun in 1919. By 1930, Cameroonians living in the diaspora began to critically analyze the governance of the colonial regime, expressing dissatisfaction with its perceived harshness and inhumanity. This climate of discontent led to the publication of *Mbale* (The Truth) in 1930, a newspaper that adopted a critical stance toward colonial governance. However, this critique provoked the ire of the colonial authorities, resulting in the suppression of the newspaper in 1931.

In 1937, another indigenous publication, *Nleb Bekristen*, was founded in Yaoundé and published in the Ewondo language, serving as a tool for evangelism similar to its predecessors while educating Cameroonians about Christian values and norms. During World War I (1914-1916), Allied forces led by Britain and France launched an offensive against the German colonial administration in Cameroon, successfully expelling it from the territory. Following this conflict, the territory was partitioned between Britain (1/5) and France (4/5) (Ngoh, 1979). Under each of these colonial administrations, the mass media landscape was shaped distinctively by the policies of the occupying powers.

As Dze-Ngwa (2015) indicates, the first newspaper in the English-speaking regions, under British rule, was the *Cameroon News Sheet*, published in 1930 in Buea, followed by the *Cameroon Chronicle* in 1940, established by the Basel Mission. Significant papers during this period included *Cameroon Post*, *Cameroon Times*, and *Cameroon Champions*, which often operated along political lines.

Fanso (1989) states that newspaper publications in French Cameroon lagged behind those in the Anglophone regions, with the debut of *Le Journal Officiel* and *La Gazette du Cameroun* occurring in 1923 under French administration. The emergence of the private press in French Cameroon did not take place until the 1940s, resulting in the establishment of papers such as *Cameroun Libre* (1940), *Bulletine Press* (1941), *L'Eveil du Cameroun*, *La Voix du Peuple* (1948), *La Presse du Cameroun* (1955), and *L'Effort Camerounais* (1955). The legacy of British and French colonial administrations has left an indelible mark on the media landscape in Cameroon, evidenced by the persistent divide between English and French media. Presently, the state-owned daily, *Cameroon Tribune*, stands out as a bilingual newspaper in the country. For want of a paper that could well cater to readers of English expression, *Cameroon Insider*, a publication of the Cameroon News and Publishing Corporation (SOPECAM), was created in 2019. The promulgation of Law No. 90/052 on December 19, 1990, relating to press freedom, ushered in an era of increased newspaper plurality and fragmentation in Cameroon.

Among the more established English language newspapers in Cameroon are *The Post*, *The Guardian Post*, *Eden*, *The Sun*, *The Voice*, *The Horizon*, *Municipal Updates*, and *The Median*. *The Guardian Post* and *Municipal Updates* are dailies. The remainder are biweekly, monthly, and occasional papers. In the French language domain, prominent newspapers include *Le Messenger*, *Mutations*, *L'Oeil du Sahel*, *Le Jour*, *La Nouvelle Expression*, *Le Popoli*, and *L'Anecdote*. Of this number, *Le Messenger*, *Mutations*, *Le Jour*, and *La Nouvelle Expression* are prominent dailies. The current media scenario remains largely divided, with publications typically

reflecting either purely English or French perspectives or operating in a bilingual format. The 1990 press law initiated a polarization across Cameroon's media landscape. Despite the apparent plurality and fragmentation of newspapers, Nyamnjoh (2005) argues that those familiar with the standards of traditional journalism, both in content and form, are likely to view many of the publications in Cameroon with skepticism, rooted in the pervasive political economy of print media in the country.

3. Ownership Structure of Print Media in Cameroon

A fundamental component of the political economy of print media centers on media ownership and how specific ownership types influence the organization of labour, media production, strategies, and the operational dynamics of media institutions. The identity and degree of ownership in the media landscape hold significant implications (Baker, 2006; Forcha & Ngange, 2022). To scholars, understanding who owns media outlets is not only critical but of paramount importance because influential media owners possess the capacity to manipulate information for their own gain, a perspective supported by Prat (2015). Scholars have documented instances where early and contemporary media magnates like William Randolph Hearst, Joseph Pulitzer, Rupert Murdoch, Silvio Berlusconi, the Warner brothers, and Johannes Rupert, who control substantial media shares, have been associated with the practice of "Yellow Journalism," attempting to sway public opinion to their benefit (Hanitzsch, 2019; Strömbäck & Kaid, 2009). In the Cameroonian context, media ownership assumes even greater significance as the sector navigates the complexities engendered by media convergence. This area of study has garnered increasing scholarly attention, with social scientists and academics taking a keen interest. For example, Forcha and Ngange (2022) delve beyond conventional public and private ownership types to examine the implications of diverse media ownership structures on the professional capacities of journalists in Cameroon. In parallel, Ngange and Elempia (2019) investigate sensationalism within both the public and private press sectors in Cameroon. With the onset of media pluralism, catalyzed by the liberalization and deregulation of the media sector in the 1990s following the enactment of Law No. 90/052 of 19 December 1990 concerning Freedom of Mass Communication, individuals and corporate entities possessing the requisite financial resources have attained greater access to media ownership opportunities. This legislative development has facilitated a broader discourse on media ownership and its implications in contemporary society.

Muluh (2017) emphasizes that, beyond the longstanding public and private sector debate surrounding media ownership patterns, individuals with personal agendas, particularly politicians, own and control media outlets in Cameroon. This perspective aligns with Oso's (2012) views, who notes that while no newspaper in Nigeria is currently owned by any political party, the political affiliations of major national newspapers are quite apparent, largely reflected through their pro-

prietors. In contrast to the situation in Nigeria, as highlighted by [Oso \(2012\)](#), [Nyamnjuh \(2005\)](#), and [Forcha and Ngange \(2022\)](#) indicate that certain political parties in Cameroon actively own and operate newspapers. For example, the ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) owns and manages *L'Action* newspaper, while the Social Democratic Front (SDF) previously owned the *Socialist Chronicle* until its closure in the late 1990s. Similarly, [Ngange and Elonge \(2019\)](#) point out that during the early struggles for self-rule, politicians and political parties in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon primarily relied on two influential newspapers, *Cameroons Champion* and *Cameroon Times*, to convey their distinct political perspectives.

On November 21, 1960, *Cameroons Champion* published articles supporting Dr. Emmanuel Mbella Lifafa Endeley's Cameroon People's National Congress (CPNC) and its integration with Nigeria. This viewpoint was countered by Dr. John Ngu Foncha's Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP), which was backed by *Cameroon Times* on December 9, 1960, advocating for reunification with French Cameroon. Amidst the traditional public and private ownership models, [Muluh \(2017\)](#) highlights that the emergence of new media ownership entities has become increasingly prominent. These include NGOs, municipal councils, and religious organizations, which have diversified the media ownership landscape. Researchers agree that the proliferation of these non-traditional owners has led to various ownership patterns, such as cross-ownership, horizontal ownership, chain ownership, religious ownership, sole proprietorship, and conglomerates ([Forcha & Ngange, 2022](#); [Danesi, 2009](#); [Madhav, 2008](#); [Muluh, 2017](#); [Tanjong, 2012](#)). **Table 1** summarizes the ownership structure of the print media in Cameroon.

4. Government Regulation and Censorship of Print Media in Cameroon

The regulatory framework governing print media in Cameroon is shaped by an interplay of government policies, economic conditions, and the sociopolitical milieu. [Ewumbue-Monono \(1992\)](#) asserts that the evolution of the regulatory framework in Cameroon is intricately linked to the country's political history and its dual legal system, which comprises Common Law in Anglophone regions and Civil Law in Francophone regions. According to the researcher, before enacting the first press law in Cameroon in 1966, media practitioners in Francophone Cameroon were subject to a distinct set of regulations, which were generally more restrictive than those of their Anglophone counterparts. Consequently, following Cameroon's reunification, Cameroon adopted the communication model predominant in French Cameroon, characterized by public ownership, wherein the government maintained substantial control over the press. The media in Cameroon have therefore witnessed different forms of regulations in three distinctive epochs: the colonial, post-independence system of Ahidjo and Biya, the period of the "illusion of reforms" ([Takougang, 2019](#)), and the period of democratization.

Table 1. Print media ownership patterns.

N°	Ownership Pattern	Explication
1	Individual Ownership	The individual has control. This allows him to take responsibility for all policy-making decisions of the company and is accountable for them. It is best suited for small-scale media houses, be it newspapers or news channels.
2	Partnership	The relationship between persons who have agreed to share the profits of a business carried on by all or any of them acting for all. The minimum limit is two partners, while the maximum is 20.
3	Corporation	It is one of the most common forms of ownership patterns. The minimum number that can be a part of it is 5. It is an association of individuals under the authority of the law, which has a continuous existence independent of the existence of its members and powers and liabilities distinct from its members. The BBC is an example of a corporation. They are spread across web portals, television and radio. Increasing capital can easily expand operations, and transfer of control is flexible. However, corporation taxes are imposed.
4	Employee Ownership	In this form of pattern, employees own a major part of media share. They are also responsible for the decision-making. Also, the sense of ownership that the employees have helps the organisation to grow faster.
5	Chain Ownership	This means the same media company owns numerous outlets in a single medium, a chain of newspapers, a series of radio stations, a string of television stations or several book publishing companies. A typical example of a chain ownership pattern in Cameroon is Municipal Updates Media Group which owns <i>Municipal Updates</i> and <i>The Chronicle Times</i> Newspaper.
6	Cross Media Ownership	When the same company owns several media platforms like newspapers, magazines, musical labels, and publishing houses, it is called Cross-media ownership. An apt example of Cross Media Ownership in Cameroon is ACMAR Media Group, which owns Dash TV, Médiafrique radio, and ACMAR Media, among others.
7	Vertical Integration	A media company monopolises the production of the ingredients that go into the making of media products. For example, a newspaper outlet may own several hundred acres of forests where wood is cultivated for manufacturing newsprint. Other newspaper companies may own a factory that produces the printing ink in bulk or some other process used in the industry.
8	Conglomerate	Ownership of several businesses, one of which is a media business. For example, a publishing company owning a newspaper along with chemical, fertiliser, cement, rubber or plastic factories, distillery, or a major corporation has controlling shares in several media-related businesses. Their main business will be a high-profit industry, but they run a media company for prestige or to exercise social and political influence on decision-makers in the private or public sector and the government of the day. They own newspapers, magazines, radio, cable TV and TV channels. For example, Groupe L'Anecdote has Anecdote newspaper, Africa Express Magazine, Satellite FM, VISION 4 TV, Société SODEEC SA.
9	Government Ownership	Applies to media owned and financed by government. Such media are expected to be public service corporations.

Source: Adapted from Forcha and Ngange (2022) and Sjøvaag and Ohlsson (2019).

Ngoh (2017) also affirms that the regulation of media in Cameroon has historical roots that can be traced back to the colonial period, during which media outlets were predominantly controlled by colonial powers serving their vested interests. Following the nation's independence in 1960, the Cameroonian government assumed control over media institutions, thereby consolidating state influence over print media. Churchill (1992) observes that before 1966, the legislative framework governing the media landscape in Francophone Cameroon was derived from the French law on press freedom established on July 29, 1881. This legal framework was introduced in the mandated territory in 1923 and underwent amendments in 1936 (Bourgault, 1995). After attaining self-governing status, the Cameroonian Assembly adopted the 1881 law as Law No. 55 - 35 on May 27, 1959. This legislative instrument governed the press in Francophone Cameroon until the enactment of the 1966 press laws by President Ahmadou Ahidjo.

Conversely, the origins of press law in the Anglophone sector can be traced back to the Licensing Act of 1662 in Britain. However, the legislative instrument that significantly impacted journalism in this region was the Nigerian Newspaper Ordinance No. 10 of 1903 (Ngangum, 2019). This ordinance was subsequently amended by several laws, including the Newspaper Ordinance No. 40 of 1917, the Newspaper Ordinance No. 26 of 1941, and the Eastern Nigerian Law of 1955. Ewumbue-Monono (1992) asserts that, "By the time the Nigerian Newspaper Ordinance was enacted, Southern Cameroon was operating as an autonomous region, but it was only after unification in 1961 that the West Cameroon Newspaper Ordinance was passed to govern the establishment of newspapers" (p. 21). Following the reunification of Cameroon, the practice of vetting and censorship, as stipulated in the 1959 French Cameroon law, was extended to the Anglophone regions under the directives of the then Minister of Territorial Administration. This extension was met with vehement opposition from Anglophone journalists, who viewed it as unconstitutional, arguing that the 1959 law was established before the reunification. The apex of this dissent occurred in mid-1966, when the 1959 law was rejected in West Cameroon on grounds of unconstitutionality. Drawing on the media regulations instituted during the colonial epoch, Makwen (2022) asserts that British Southern Cameroons experienced a relative degree of press freedom, as the colonial authorities exhibited little interest in media affairs.

In contrast to the British, the French authorities adopted a more repressive stance regarding the media, particularly against opinions perceived as capable of inciting the local populations against colonial rule. Ewumbue-Monono (1992) further underscores the intensification of protests in West Cameroon in mid-1966 when the provisions for vetting and censorship from the 1959 French law were implemented in the Anglophone sector. He contends that this move was a significant political embarrassment for the Federal Government, prompting a rapid response that led to the adoption of Law No. 66/LF/13 on December 21, 1966, by the Federal Assembly. Awasom (2019) elucidates that following Cameroon's attainment of independence, the government systematically assumed control over

media institutions, thereby solidifying state influence over print media. In the wake of liberation from colonial domination, African nations were confronted with a myriad of challenges. Mbaku and Takougang (2004) assert that one of the principal challenges for many African heads of state post-independence was effectively addressing the hopes, expectations, desires, and demands of their constituents.

Driven by a commitment to consolidate national unity, Ahmadou Ahidjo enacted Ordinance No. 62-OF-18 on March 12, 1962, which prohibited the publication or reproduction of any materials deemed subversive. Bourdon-Higbee (1975) highlights a significant irony of the post-independence experience from an African perspective. The scholar contends that African news media generally experienced greater restrictions in their ability to report and critique compared to their colonial predecessors. He argues that upon the transfer of ownership of European newspapers to African governments, these outlets were rapidly transformed into instruments of state propaganda.

This stringent control over the media proved particularly challenging for certain regions of Cameroon, especially the English-speaking regions, which had enjoyed relative press freedom under colonial rule but were subsequently subjected to oppressive regulations. Amidst the ongoing struggles of the Anglophone press with the 1962 Ordinance, Ahidjo enacted another severe media law on December 21, 1966, Law No. 66-DF-1. This piece of legislation has been described as “draconian” by various scholars (Churchill, 1992; Endong, 2019) due to its introduction of state censorship and the licensing of newspapers. The law established a censorship regime through the Ministry of Territorial Administration, as detailed in Article 11 of the legislation. Tita, Wantchami, and Muluh (2016) argue that under Ahidjo’s regime (1960-1982), the press faced severe challenges characterized by harassment, pre-and post-publication censorship, seizure, and the banning of newspaper establishments.

The enactment of the December 21, 1966 law had a particularly detrimental impact on West Cameroonian media outlets, such as *Cameroon Times*, *Cameroon Champion*, and *Cameroon Outlook*, which had flourished under a more liberal press environment (Muluh, 2012). Nyamnjoh (2011) notes that the legal milieu in which the private press operated following the law’s promulgation was exceedingly repressive. Chumbow (2012) documents that *Cameroon Times*, to illustrate the drawbacks of censorship, published blank pages in its selected editions. During this period, print media were mandated to submit dummies of newspapers to Senior Divisional Officers for the vetting of stories deemed seditious before they could be printed. Epule (1998) maintains that Anglophone publishers were the first to raise objections against the oppressive press law established in 1966 and subsequently spearheaded the formation of the West Cameroon Association of Journalists in 1967 as a form of resistance.

Corroborating Epule’s perspective, Ewumbue-Monono (1992) notes that the abhorrent nature of the 1966 press law prompted five amendments: Decree No.

69/LF/13 (November 1969), Decree No. 73/6 (December 1973), Decree No. 76/27 (December 14, 1976), Decree No. 80/18 (July 14, 1980), and Decree No. 81/244 (June 22, 1981). In contrast to Epule's assertion, [Muluh \(2012\)](#) notes that journalists who defied the law faced imprisonment. Referencing [Nkemayang \(2008\)](#) in a comparative study of media regulation and freedom of expression in Black Africa, [Endong \(2019\)](#) asserts that:

The 1966 press laws and its edits of 1981 did not only aim at gagging the press but equally sought to protect those at the centre stage of power. Through a rigid censorship mechanism, which integrated harassment, death threats, summary arrest, torture, and physical elimination of journalists, media contents were tailored to suit the whims and caprices of those parading the marble corridors of power (p. 238)

The post-colonial era, often characterized by [Mbaku and Takougang \(2004\)](#) as a salient period of democratization, introduced a new framework for media regulation, notably the enactment of Law No. 90/052 of December 19, 1990, which addressed Freedom of Association and Freedom of Mass Communication. [Ewumbue-Monono \(1992\)](#) contextualizes the drafting of the 1990 press law within a politically charged environment in Cameroon, highlighting four principal motivations: political, professional, economic, and international pressures. Professionally, he posits that many journalists, especially those of the private press, advocated for enhanced freedom of expression. Their advocacy for a more liberal press system garnered international attention and support from non-governmental organizations like Journalists Without Borders, Article 19 (a British organization with similar objectives), Index on Censorship, and Amnesty International. In response to this climate, government policy shifted from a strategy of censorship to one aimed at promoting responsible journalism.

To further liberalize the media environment, [Muluh \(2012\)](#) underscores that the then Prime Minister, Peter Mafany Musonge, signed Decree No. 2000/158 on April 3, 2000, liberalizing the country's audio-visual sector. However, despite the ushering in of this legal framework that liberalized the press, the enduring legacy of state control persisted. [Ngoh \(2017\)](#) argues that the regulatory frameworks in place frequently functioned not to facilitate a free press, but rather to stifle dissent. [Ewumbue-Monono](#) contends that the government, influenced by various circumstances, was obliged to permit some degree of freedom and some regulations. This ultimately led to the establishment of institutional regulation with the creation of the National Communication Council (NCC).

[Mbaku and Takougang \(2004\)](#) see the creation of regulatory bodies such as the Ministry of Communication and the NCC as pivotal in shaping the media environment and addressing governance challenges. The NCC is characterized as a consultative body operating under the authority of the Prime Minister. The Council's main mission is to assist the authorities in formulating, implementing, and monitoring the national communication policy in Cameroon. While the African Media Barometer (2018) highlights the merits of the NCC, pointing at a declining

trend in libel cases brought before courts since the NCC began addressing media complaints, [Ngangum \(2020\)](#) challenges this assertion, arguing that the legitimacy of the NCC is a subject of contention. The scholar highlights significant operational challenges that the Council is grappling with: political interference ([Mboukou, 2019](#)), which undermines the NCC's mandate to foster an independent media landscape; constraints imposed by the 1990 media law, which mandates that the authority to suspend or ban media outlets resides exclusively with the Minister in Charge of Territorial Administration (MINAT) ([Ngangum, 2020](#)); political influence due to the Council's dependence on government funding ([Ngangum, 2020](#)); inadequate human resources to fulfill the Council's regulatory obligations effectively ([Baché, 2020](#)); and the public's perception of the Council as an extension of state control rather than an independent regulatory authority.

While authorities claim that Cameroon's regulatory framework is designed to promote responsible journalism, censorship remains widespread. [Simon \(2014\)](#) highlights that many media organizations fear shutdowns or penalties from the government if they publish content considered subversive by state officials. [Human Rights Watch \(2020\)](#) affirms that this censorship campaign against independent newspapers criminalizes both online and offline content deemed defamatory or harmful to national security. The rights organization warns that such legislation could extend to print media, further undermining their reportorial and watchdog functions. In like manner, [Mendong \(2022\)](#) notes that the government intensified its censorship efforts on print media during the Anglophone crisis, which began in 2016. The scholar observes that authorities imposed restrictions on the media in the Northwest and Southwest regions, home to many English-speaking Cameroonians. Journalists covering the crisis faced intimidation, detention, and violence ([Mendong, 2022](#)). Independent newspapers reporting on the conflict frequently encountered closure or heavy sanctions from the government. [Mendong's](#) assessment is echoed by [Reporters Without Borders \(2023\)](#), which states that journalists and media workers covering the Anglophone crisis are monitored by security forces, discouraging open dialogue and reporting on sensitive political matters due to fears of reprisal.

In light of these conditions, including threats and censorship, [Ndaot \(2019\)](#) warns that such administrative measures may considerably diminish public trust in the media. Amidst these challenges, numerous international organizations, including Human Rights Watch and Reporters Without Borders, have released reports condemning government censorship and calling for reforms to safeguard journalists' rights. In response to mounting international pressure, the Cameroonian government has publicly advocated for media pluralism; however, meaningful changes remain unimplemented ([Nkolo, 2021](#)).

5. Economic Challenges Faced by the Print Media in Cameroon

Print media have been at the forefront of information dissemination, shaping

public opinion and holding power to account in Cameroon. Despite these critical roles, the sector faces significant challenges ranging from digitalisation to operational costs. One of the greatest challenges is the emergence of digital technology. Findings of a study conducted by the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) suggest that over 50% of Cameroonians access and consume news through digital platforms (CDC, 2022). This pattern significantly diminishes the readership and circulation of newspapers, and impacts advertising revenue, as advertisers prioritise digital platforms that offer better targeting and tracking options. Another economic malaise of print media in Cameroon is declining revenue and advertising. In its 2020 report, the International Press Institute observes that advertising revenues for print media in Cameroon dropped by >30% between 2015 and 2020 (IPI, 2020). The situation today is similar. The institute attributed the significant drop to the cost effectiveness of digital advertising. This is worrisome, given that advertising revenues are the lifeblood of print media. With precarious economic conditions in Cameroon, marked by high inflation and low purchasing power, and with many businesses cutting down on marketing budgets, the print media continue to struggle to secure the necessary funds via advertising to cover its operational costs.

Fominyen (2021) also identifies high operational costs as one of the economic challenges facing the print media in Cameroon. According to the scholar, the cost of paper, ink, and distribution continues to rise, while the economies of scale that previously supported larger print runs have diminished due to declining circulation. Many print publications find it increasingly difficult to remain competitive as they struggle with overstaffing, outdated equipment, and the expense of maintaining physical storefronts (Fominyen, 2021). Again, changing consumer preferences among the younger generation are also posing economic challenges for the print media sector in Cameroon. Based on the results of a survey conducted by the Communication and Media Research Institute (CMRI), over 70% of the respondents between 18 and 30 revealed that they rarely read print newspapers (CMRI, 2023). This demographic shift poses a substantial challenge for print media companies, which must adapt their content delivery methods to engage this audience effectively. The greatest economic challenge of the print media in Cameroon is the regulatory framework in place. Tchinda (2022) contends that government policies and censorship can hinder the operations of independent publications. According to the scholar, media practitioners face restrictions and potential retaliation for reporting on sensitive issues, which can discourage a free press and diminish public trust in print media. Tchinda further asserts that the high costs of compliance with regulatory requirements can weigh heavily on smaller publications. As they seek to navigate these regulations, they may divert resources from content creation and marketing, further exacerbating their economic struggles.

6. Journalism Ethics vs. Journalism Practice in Cameroon

In their quest to shape public opinion, foster democracy, and ensure governance

accountability, Cameroonian journalists are bound to uphold a set of principles that guide their profession. These principles include truthfulness, independence, impartiality, and responsibility. [Probuscka \(2018\)](#) attests that truthfulness is a value that organizes interpersonal relationships and increases the level of social trust. By this token, journalists, by the tenets of their profession, are bound to uphold the truth, strive to report accurately, seek information from reliable sources, and engage in proactive verification of facts ([Ndoh, Ngange, Boyomo-Assala, & Ndode, 2023](#)). In fact, truth is the cornerstone of ethics and practice.

Another ethical principle in journalism is independence, which requires journalists and print media organs to maintain their editorial autonomy from the influence of political entities and business interests. [Ngoh \(2018\)](#) observes that the principle of independence in journalism in Cameroon is wishful thinking, since many media houses are owned by politically connected individuals, leading to conflicts of interest.

Like [Ngoh \(2018\)](#), [Mbah \(2021\)](#) underpins that journalists in Cameroon find it increasingly difficult to maintain fairness and impartiality in reporting because they are operating within a critically and politically polarized environment where media coverage may favour particular political factions ([Mbah, 2021](#)). To the researcher, the economic situation in Cameroon has made accountability and respect for privacy daunting challenges for ethical journalism in the print media in Cameroon. By dint of their role as watchdogs of society, journalists are expected to be accountable for their work, correcting errors and addressing the impact of their reporting on individuals and society. Such a high sense of accountability is even more vital in a country like Cameroon, where misinformation can lead to significant social unrest.

Similarly, while journalists strive to uphold the public's right to know, they must also endeavour to strike a balance between the public's right to know and the respect for individuals' right to privacy. As journalists in Cameroon grapple with ethical conundrums, their striving for ethical journalistic practices is mired by various challenges like government censorship ([International Federation of Journalists, 2020](#)), violence against journalists ([Committee to Protect Journalists, 2020](#)), economic constraints ([Fonkoua, 2019](#)), inadequate training ([Buh, 2021](#)), and digital transformation ([Ateh, 2021](#)). Despite the constraints that ethical journalistic practices face in Cameroon, characterised by repression, government censorship, and economic constraints, the media remain a powerful tool for promoting democracy, accountability, and public discourse.

7. Theoretical Framework

This research is anchored on the Political Economy Theory (PET). Articulated by Herbert Schiller (1973), PET investigates the intricate interrelationship between economic structures, political influence, and cultural dynamics. [Schiller \(1996\)](#) postulates that mass media and communication systems are far from being neutral conduits of information; rather, they are profoundly intertwined with the eco-

conomic and political contexts from which they arise. He further contends that these systems predominantly favor the interests of dominant groups, thereby shaping public perceptions and reinforcing extant power structures.

Through PET, Schiller critiques the commodification of culture, positing that media serve as instruments for sustaining the status quo and fostering consumerism. He advocates for a critical analysis of how economic interests mould media content and public discourse, raising pertinent concerns regarding their implications for democracy and social equity. Schiller's critique echoes earlier insights from Marx and Engels, particularly their assertion that "the class which has the means of production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production" (Marx & Engels, 1971: p. 64). PET is firmly situated within the traditional Marxian framework, which maintains that economic factors shape political dynamics and, by extension, media narratives. Thus, this framework underpins the extent to which politics and economy influence media production, distribution, and consumption. It also sheds light on how ownership structures, regulation, and funding affect journalistic practices and the print media's role in society, particularly in Cameroon (Ngange & Ndode, 2024).

8. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative research design, employing case study with in-depth interviews. Eight newspaper publishers, purposively selected from public and private media ownership patterns (*The Post*, *Cameroon Tribune*, *The Guardian Post*, *Le Jour*, *The Recorder*, *L'Oeil du Sahel*, *Mutation* and *The Rambler*), across five major urban centres (media-rich cities): Buea, Bamenda, Douala, Yaounde, and Garoua, constituted the sample. The selected regions encompass the nation's media-rich urban centres and the country's four distinct cultural zones (Grassfield, Coastal or Sawa, Sudano-Sahelian, and Fang-Béti). These zones reflect the socio-cultural and political dynamics that are prevalent throughout the country. The eight newspaper publishers chosen for this study exemplify the dominant trends in Cameroonian newspapering, which include dailies, biweeklies, weeklies, monthlies, and periodicals. This selection enables a nuanced examination of the government's interaction with the print media, allowing for an exploration of whether these relationships differ according to the genre of publication. Furthermore, the selection of these eight publishers was deliberate, as their publications represent Cameroon's official languages (English and French). This linguistic representation is essential for bridging the country's linguistic divide, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter at hand. Longevity also played a critical role in the selection process; by choosing publishers with a history dating back to 1974, when *Cameroon Tribune* was established, through to 2016, with the launch of *The Rambler*, the researchers analyzed the evolution of the political economy of print media over time. Overall, this sample size and composition adequately reflect the diverse ownership structures that characterise the Cameroonian media landscape, encompassing both public and private entities.

Meanwhile, the interview guide used in this study was organised into four sections. Section A, which constitutes the analytical core of this paper, evaluated the political economy of print media and journalism practices in Cameroon. This section included 23 meticulously crafted questions that explored the intricate relationship between government entities and print media. It specifically focused on the influences of ownership structures, regulatory frameworks, and funding sources on journalistic practices, editorial independence, and the credibility of media outlets. The estimated duration for this section was approximately 20 minutes. Section B, comprising 12 questions, examined the challenges confronting print media in Cameroon and their implications for journalism practice. Key themes included resource limitations, both endogenous and exogenous pressures from stakeholders, and ethical considerations that significantly impact the media landscape. The average duration for this section was 10 minutes. Section C, also consisting of 12 questions, addressed the future of print media within the context of a predominantly digital era. It explored the evolving regulatory frameworks and the viability of print journalism in light of technological advancements. The average length for this section was estimated at 10 minutes.

To ensure inclusivity and facilitate a natural dialogue, interviews were conducted in either English or French, based on the participants' preferences. To establish reliability in the interview process, two techniques were implemented. Firstly, the interview guide underwent a pilot test with some publishers who were not involved in the main study. This preliminary testing aimed to ascertain the relevance of the questions and their ability to elicit substantive responses. Secondly, following the transcription of interview responses, participants were provided with summaries to verify the accuracy of their contributions, ensuring that their perspectives were accurately represented by the researchers.

Thematic analysis was used to analyze and interpret the data collected using Bryman's Six Stages of Thematic Analysis: data analysis, code generation, theme identification, theme refinement, concept examination, and write-up. The political economy theory informed the coding frame of this study, by emphasising the interplay between economic structures and political power. For instance, the code-theme *weak print media industry* is intricately connected to the coding of *government funding*. This connection illustrates how the allocation of financial resources by the government, through funding and subsidies, can significantly impact print media vitality. Typically, the government tends to provide more funding and favourable financial terms, such as tax concessions, to media outlets that align with its interests, often favouring less critical or more compliant publications. Conversely, critical media outlets frequently face heavier taxation and receive scant financial support, creating a disparity that undermines their operational capacities. This dynamic exemplifies how economic interests can shape political agendas and influence broader social outcomes, which is a fundamental concern of PET. Such practices highlight the challenges faced by print media in maintaining editorial independence and credibility in the face of economic de-

dependencies, ultimately questioning the integrity of journalism as a public service within the socio-political landscape. Meanwhile, direct quotations were used from the interviews to support the themes.

9. Results

The findings of this paper are derived from the data collected, which are a direct response to the research objectives. The main research objective was to investigate the impact of the political economy of print media on journalism practice in Cameroon. Findings show that the political economy of the print media impacts journalism practice in Cameroon negatively in various ways: biased reporting and lack of media credibility, a frail print media industry, the emergence of praise-singing and “Alleluia Journalism,” unequal access to official information, and the prioritization of personal gain over media integrity as explicated below.

Theme 1: Biased Reporting

Biased reporting emerges as a significant consequence of the current political economy of the print media, with negative ramifications on journalism practice in Cameroon. When questioned about how government-media relations (political economy) affect journalism practices in Cameroon, most of the participants said that the current relationship fosters biased reporting and undermines media credibility. The excerpts below encapsulate these sentiments:

The current relationship between the government and the media affects the press industry through the lack of objectivity and encourages bias in reporting. This is shown by the companies in question, which is reflected in the difficulty of defining their precise editorial line. Not to mention the fact that, despite the open and secret favours they receive, the working conditions of their staff leave much to be desired (Interviewee 2).

The consequences of the political economy of the print media on journalism practice are that it encourages reporters to skew publications to suit a particular narrative. It also leaves the print media actors operating in dispersed ranks to the advantage of the ruling class (Interviewee 3).

The centrality of theme 1 hinges on the fact that objectivity is often regarded as the standard of journalistic integrity, constituting a cornerstone of responsible reporting and bestowing intrinsic value upon news narratives. It serves as a guiding principle that enables professional reporters to identify and rectify their own biases, thereby ensuring that such prejudices do not permeate the dissemination of news and information of public interest. A biased journalist or a media organization devoid of objectivity and credibility poses a significant danger to societal functioning, as a considerable portion of the citizenry relies on media outputs for informed decision-making. In this context, Interviewee 2 highlights that journalistic objectivity is frequently compromised in favour of “secret favours” bestowed upon media entities, which often fail to accurately reflect the working conditions of their staff. Such practices raise profound concerns regarding the integrity of journalism in a nation like Cameroon.

Theme 2: Weak Print Media Industry

The data collected and analyzed indicate that the prevailing political economy of the print media in Cameroon has significantly weakened the print media industry. The following excerpts capture these views:

The consequences of the political economy of the print media on journalism practice are manifold. First, it weakens the media and threatens its credibility in handling sensitive issues of national import. When such moments come, reports are rarely independent. They skew publications to suit a particular narrative (Interviewee 3).

The political economy of the print media weakens the newspaper industry, which is why print media entities are in the doldrums. The quality of journalism is being affected as good writers increasingly migrate to other professions. As a result, the state seems to enjoy having a weak press that it can easily control (Interviewee 4).

Note that the print media back here has been deliberately and conveniently weakened for effect. It only suffices for one to be able to scribble one or two awkward lines to become a newspaper publisher and editor (Interviewee 6).

A fragile and weakened print media organization, just like a fragile media landscape, is vulnerable to internal and external pressures, which may be mounted by influential politicians, advertisers, corporate magnates, and multinational corporations. In such weakened media outlets, content often reflects the interests and biases of these powerful entities rather than serving the public interest. Consequently, these institutions struggle, and at best, fail to fulfill their critical roles in bolstering democracy, disseminating unbiased information, promoting transparency and accountability, and enhancing public awareness, which are hallmarks of robust and independent media organizations. Moreover, citizens find themselves unable to depend on such faltering media outlets for accurate information, essential for understanding societal dynamics, engaging in political discourse, and making informed decisions. The propensity of these weak media institutions to produce one-sided narratives and propaganda poses significant risks to an entire polity. As Chimamanda (2009) noted, the emergence of single or one-dimensional narratives can lead to default assumptions and incomplete conclusions, fostering misunderstandings. This simplistic portrayal of complex realities may distort public perception and reinforce harmful stereotypes. The authority wielded by media figures in shaping narratives is profound, as it can dictate how individuals and situations are perceived, ultimately impacting social discourse.

Theme 3: Rise of Praise-singing and “Alleluia Journalism”

Empirical evidence from this research further illustrates that the current state of the political economy of the print media in Cameroon has precipitated a resurgence in praise-singing and “Alleluia Journalism,” as captured by the following excerpts.

The government is constantly at war with newspapers that are critical of its pol-

icies while pampering those who sing their praises in what I call “Alleluia Journalism” (Interviewee 1).

Hundreds of candy wraps exist; their owners and workers line up daily with begging bowls, singing praises for government top brass and politicians for a small fee. Here, journalists crawl on all fours for supper, even as the government uses the proliferation of newspaper titles to justify free media and free speech (Interviewee 6).

The excerpt from Interviewee 1 highlights the government’s strategy of cultivating a print media landscape that perpetually extols government virtues. This approach has led to a systematic assault on critical and independent media voices while simultaneously fostering complacency among those media outlets that engage in “Alleluia Journalism”.

Theme 4: Unequal Access to Official Information

Based on interviews conducted for this study, the data reveal that unequal access to public information between public and private media outlets constitutes a significant challenge impacting journalism practice in Cameroon, as articulated in the excerpts below.

In terms of the general practice of journalism, the porous relationship means the private print media are rarely given access to official information (Interviewee 3).

Pro-government media have greater access to official sources of information and receive substantial adverts and or other forms of support from government institutions and companies to keep them afloat in their support of government activities. Private or independent media, mostly seen as pro-opposition, receive little or nothing in terms of advertising from government-owned institutions and companies (Interviewee 7).

According to Interviewees 3 and 7, print journalists in Cameroon experience disparate levels of access to official and public information. Journalists and media institutions that uphold pro-government narratives or are less critical of governmental actions and policies are accorded preferential access to official information and associated benefits, such as advertising opportunities. Conversely, those who adopt more critical perspectives face limitations in access to official information and restrictions that hinder their access to similar privileges. This dichotomy may compel emerging print media organizations to compromise their editorial independence in pursuit of the advantages afforded to less critical media outlets by the government.

Theme 5: Trading Ethical Principles for Personal Gain

The findings of this research further suggest that the prevailing political economy of the print media in Cameroon exerts pressure on journalists to compromise, trade, or forsake ethical principles in favour of personal gain. This phenomenon underscores the broader implications of an economically constrained environment on journalistic practice and integrity.

Hundreds of candy wraps exist; their owners and workers line up daily with

begging bowls, singing praises for government top brass and politicians for a small fee. Here, journalists crawl on all fours for supper, even as the government uses the proliferation of newspaper titles to justify free media and free speech (Interviewee 6).

In a context of impoverishment, journalists may be tempted to give in to unethical proposals and sacrifice ethical principles for personal gains (Interviewee 8).

The interpretation accorded to this theme is that, every profession adheres to a framework of rules and ethical principles, and journalism is no exception. The fundamental ethical tenets of journalism—truth and accuracy, independence, fairness and impartiality, humanity, and accountability—guide practitioners in their mandate to keep the public informed. Journalists, as the primary conduits of information for the citizenry, must navigate these ethical obligations diligently to avoid misinformation and disinformation. The Society of Professional Journalists admits that ethical journalism seeks to ensure the free exchange of information that is accurate, fair, and comprehensive. However, as interviewees 6 and 8 note, the pervasive conditions of poverty and hardship may compel journalists or media organizations to relinquish these ethical principles in pursuit of personal or institutional benefit. Such compromises are detrimental to the integrity of journalistic practice.

10. Discussion

This research has uncovered five essential themes relating to print media struggle for survival, using political economy as theoretical basis. Concerning biased reporting, it is incumbent to highlight that maintaining journalistic objectivity; which equates with freeing oneself from biases, is more critical than ever in a contemporary news ecosystem increasingly characterized by opinion, advocacy, and partisanship. Today, misinformation, disinformation, and fake news have become pervasive. Journalistic objectivity cultivates trust between media organizations and their audiences (Probuca, 2018); a relationship wherein trust engenders credibility. Credibility is paramount for enabling audiences to make informed decisions regarding the media content they consume in their daily lives. Yet, increasing concerns about story neutrality, bias, and the existence of impartiality in reporting (Fominyen, 2021) remain preoccupying. There are hopes that improvements in the economic situation of journalists and media houses could partly contribute to salvage this situation.

Further to this discussion, this study has revealed a weakened print media sector (theme 2). It can therefore be deduced that citizens could find themselves unable to depend on such media outlets for accurate information, essential for understanding societal dynamics, engaging in political discourse, and making informed decisions. The propensity of these weak media institutions to produce one-sided narratives and propaganda poses significant risks to an entire polity. As Chimamanda (2009) noted, the emergence of single or one-dimensional narra-

tives can lead to default assumptions and incomplete conclusions, fostering misunderstandings. This simplistic portrayal of complex realities may distort public perception and reinforce harmful stereotypes. The authority wielded by media figures in shaping narratives is profound, as it can dictate how individuals and situations are perceived, ultimately impacting social discourse.

To add, theme 3 touched on the prevalence of praise-singing and Alleluia Journalism. These fundamentally undermine the principles of objective journalism and engender a culture of sycophancy, deemed one of the most pressing issues within contemporary journalism. As [Obaze and Fasahnu \(2006\)](#) and [Dragomir \(2018\)](#) elucidate, sycophantic reporting occurs when a media outlet persistently praises the government or certain individuals despite widespread malfeasance or ineptitude in leadership. When journalists or media organizations succumb to sycophancy, they pose significant risks to societal integrity. [Umeogu and Ifeoma \(2012\)](#) articulate seven perils associated with sycophantic reporting:

- It undermines the credibility of the entire profession, alienating the public who perceive the disingenuous nature of such coverage.
- It severely hampers journalists' ability to perform their duties effectively while enmeshed in praise-singing.
- It obscures the performance of those being lauded, as unqualified praise clouds their judgment.
- It facilitates the abuse of media power, particularly during elections, where unethical journalists utilize their platforms to favor specific political figures and shape the political agenda accordingly.
- It deprives the public of their right to accurate and truthful information.
- It lacks legal recourse in court; unlike libel and slander, there is no constitutional avenue to challenge sycophantic behaviour.
- It engenders false behavior, generating a cycle of misrepresentation and deceit.

Consequently, a weakened or diminished media landscape and the emergence of sycophantic journalism jeopardize the core principles of democracy that inform public discourse in Cameroon.

Theme 4 recognized that information access among media is unequal. The right to access information is recognized as one of the fundamental human rights essential to the journalistic process. It serves as a crucial mechanism for enabling journalists to gather the facts and data necessary to fulfil their professional responsibilities. Moreover, this access empowers citizens to understand the processes by which decisions impacting their lives are made, the management of public funds, and the criteria guiding institutional actions. Reliable sources of information are the lifeblood of journalism; without them, journalists risk resorting to the dissemination of rumors, subjective opinions, distorted or misleading information, and fake news, which pose significant risks to citizens who rely on accurate reporting for informed decision-making ([Ndoh, Ngange, Boyomo-Assala, & Ndode, 2023](#)).

Finally, theme 5 dwelled on a rather regrettable thematic area: the trading of professional integrity for personal gains. In this direction, [Ebeze \(2007\)](#) asserts that the erosion of ethical standards has led to a decline in journalistic objectivity, characterized by inaccurate reporting, sycophantic journalism, and fallacies in media content. The abandonment of ethical standards not only exposes readers, listeners, and viewers to misinformation, but also fosters a culture of societal immorality, undermines journalistic standards, and perpetuates irresponsible practices within the realm of journalism and mass communication.

11. Conclusion

The main objective of this study was to investigate how the political economy of the print media affects journalism practice in Cameroon. The findings indicate a link between the state of the political economy of the print media and journalism practice in Cameroon. Results show that the political economy of the print media fosters biased reporting that undermines media credibility, weakens the print media industry, and makes it susceptible to internal and external pressures that exacerbate the challenges faced by this industry in Cameroon.

Furthermore, findings reveal that the political economy of the print media has led to praise-singing and “Alleluia Journalism,” engendering sycophantic reporting that contradicts the best practices of objective journalism. Moreover, the state of the political economy of the print media has widened the gap in access to official information between journalists of public and private media. While journalists from public media and less critical private media outlets have easier access to official news sources and public information, independent and critical private media organs are often systematically denied such opportunities, leading to the dissemination of rumors, misinformation, disinformation, and fake news.

Additionally, the prevailing political economy has compelled journalists to compromise their journalistic and ethical standards in favour of personal interests. Results highlight a departure from the ethical principles of journalism, which advocate for a robust and independent media free from external pressures and manipulation. They also hinder the media’s ability to fulfil its crucial role of informing, educating, and entertaining the public, which undermines the media’s function as a powerful tool for promoting democracy, accountability, and public discourse.

Findings further lend credence to the theoretical framework employed in this study, which is the Political Economy Theory. This theory rests on the premise that politics and economics influence media production, distribution, and consumption, and that those who control the means of production invariably control media output. From the findings, it is evident that the government controls the means of production in Cameroon and greatly influences media output through its various actions and policies, as elucidated herein. In conclusion, results underscore the need for the government of Cameroon to review its policies towards the media and to consider it a dependable ally in enhancing democracy, national de-

velopment, and cohesion, rather than an adversary, as is the case in certain situations.

Recommendations

Some major recommendations from this study are: Firstly, the government should critically review its policies governing the establishment and operation of print media organisations in Cameroon. The findings reveal that most media organisations are granted authorisation by the government to operate without conducting due diligence to ascertain whether those behind the media organisations possess the requisite financial and human resources to run independent and sustainable media institutions, and whether they have a recognised office space. When such authorisations are granted without proper oversight, these outlets become detrimental to journalism practice, championing biased reporting, praise-singing, and “Alleluia Journalism”, while sacrificing ethical principles for personal gain just to survive. This characterises the current state of the print media in Cameroon, with over 700 newspapers, yet fewer than 200 publish regularly and not more than 15 as daily publications.

Secondly, there is a pressing need for the promulgation of an Information Act and the decriminalization of press-related offences in Cameroon. As the findings have revealed, there is unequal access to public and official information between public media and private media outlets. While public and less critical print media are granted access to official information, independent and critical private media outlets are not, which encourages the spread of rumours, misinformation, disinformation, and fake news, ultimately harming the populace. Furthermore, print media practitioners in Cameroon are facing press-related offences like libel, which is punishable by law.

Limitation

One of the notable limitations of this study is the constrained sample size, which may hinder the comprehensive representation of the diverse perspectives within the broader print media industry in Cameroon. While the selection of eight publishers offers valuable insights, it may not encapsulate the full spectrum of experiences and viewpoints prevalent among various stakeholders in the sector. Furthermore, the reliance on self-reported data from participants introduces the potential for bias, as individual experiences and opinions can significantly shape perceptions and interpretations. Additionally, the study’s results may encounter transferability challenges when contextualised within different environments or regions, thus limiting the broader applicability of its conclusions beyond the specific Cameroonian context. These factors underscore the need for caution in generalising the findings and highlight the importance of further research that encompasses a wider array of voices within the industry. Notwithstanding, the study has attained the goal for which it was intended to obtain rich qualitative insights into the links between the political economy of print media and journalism

practice.

Conflicts of Interest

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

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