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# **CONFLICT OF ETHICAL OBLIGATION AND ORGANISATIONAL COMMITMENT IN SECONDARY CONTENT SELECTION BY RADIO STATIONS IN OYO STATE, NIGERIA**

By

**BABATUNDE RAPHAEL OJEBUYI**

## **Abstract**

*Secondary gatekeeping, also known as secondary content selection, is a rising trend in Nigeria. Like the conventional media gatekeeping process, the practice is equally affected by various forces as news editors make their editorial decisions daily. Scholars have conducted empirical studies in the areas of media ethics and organisational policy as they apply in conventional gatekeeping process whereas secondary gatekeeping is yet to receive much scholarly attention despite its prevalence in the Nigerian broadcast industry especially with the alleged dereliction of ethical responsibility in the construction of secondary news content matters by editorial staff. This study, therefore, examined secondary gatekeeping by radio stations in Oyo State, Nigeria, in terms of the struggle between adherence to ethical prescriptions and organisational allegiance and how this conflict influences the news content decision of the editorial personnel. Anchored on gatekeeping theory, the study combined In-depth Interviews and Content Analysis as research designs. Findings show that news editors in the radio stations are almost always deprived of editorial autonomy in selecting secondary news contents as they are constantly influenced by organisational forces. These findings suggest that what the media gatekeepers give the public as news may not always be true mirror of social reality, but a different picture as dictated by sundry organisational factors.*

**Key words:** Ethics; Nigerian Broadcast Media; Organisational Forces; Radio Stations in Oyo State; Secondary Content Matters; Secondary Gatekeeping

## **Introduction**

A number of factors determine how the mass media construct social reality and the patterns of the news content they make available to the audience.

Three kinds of influence that underscore how the inherent interplay between audience preference and competitors' influence affects the gatekeepers' ultimate decisions were identified by Pearson, Brand, Archbold, and Rane (2001). The first is an agenda-setting influence, where editors' decisions about ideological and social issues and their selection of news items or their prioritising of news schedules might be largely shaped by other media. The second is a lesser competitive influence, where editors of a media organisation monitor other media in order to ensure their outlet is on top of the news agenda and not missing out on any significant news items. Pearson *et al.* (2001) describe this influence as a "safety net" that allows news editors to follow up on stories of which they might have been uninformed if other media did not make them available. The third is a reference influence where a media organisation uses other media as a reference source—something to be used to support an issue or to authenticate information before making it available to the audience. Central to all of the influences is the ownership factor. Editors (gatekeepers) of a media organisation must take care of the organisational policies and philosophies of its owner. This ownership consideration falls to the organisational level of gatekeeping analysis which comprises those internal values or variables that shape organisational operation, and these vary by organisations, and sometimes, groups' decision-making patterns (e.g., Barzilai-Nahon, 2005; Barzilai-Nahon, 2008; Shoemaker, Eichholz, Kim & Wrigley, 2001; Shoemaker, 2006).

The aggregate of these influences, as identified by Pearson *et al.*, patently underpins the trend in information dissemination process by the mass media as the trend in Nigeria, where certain media genre (broadcast media) constantly monitors, selects and reports the contents of other media (print), in order to satisfy their audience and remain relevant in the news market. This phenomenon is, in the context of this study, termed *secondary gatekeeping* (that is, secondary or second-level selection of information). In this case, the print media—newspapers especially—serve as the primary gatekeepers because they gather, select, process, and report facts which they consider significant from daily events. In the process, they perform their agenda-setting function by selecting which public affairs stories will be reported, and giving special prominence to some stories at the expense of others. Thus, the news media suggest which people, issues, and events are especially deserving of public attention, and help to shape public attitudes and opinion (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2002). The broadcast media, in addition to their primary gatekeeping and agenda-setting functions, do secondary gatekeeping by monitoring, selecting and broadcasting some portions of the contents of the print media. As they do these, all the criteria that are usually applied at the primary level of gatekeeping are also applied.

The motives for this secondary gatekeeping by the Nigerian broadcast media might be to remain firmly relevant in the ever competitive market, win the audience's loyalty, and make profit by broadcasting programmes that appeal to the audience as well as securing the advertisers' patronages. But the radio stations, while doing their secondary gatekeeping, may manifest some structural bias in terms of the composition of the content of their news (Levasseur, 2008) which may reflect the ownership influence and preference (Doyle, 2002). The validity or otherwise of the foregoing assertion is the primary pre-occupation of the current study.

Specifically, the secondary gatekeeping function of radio stations in Oyo State, Nigeria, in terms of the interplay between *forces* (conflict of ethical responsibility and organisational allegiance) and *structure* (news content) is the primary focus of this study. The study investigates the pattern of contents of news reviews by the radio stations with the core objective of exploring the dialectics of ethical responsibility and organisational loyalty by editorial personnel of radio stations in Oyo State, Nigeria, and how this conflict shapes news content decisions of the news editors. To achieve these objectives, one basic question was posed: How do editorial personnel of the select radio stations handle conflict of ethical obligation and commitment to organisation policy while selecting secondary news content?

### **Secondary Gatekeeping: A Rising Trend in the Nigerian Broadcast Industry**

Secondary selection of news is a practice where some media organisations monitor, screen, select, reproduce and report to the audience, contents of other competing news media. Riedel (2008) describes this practice as secondary gatekeeping—a trend yet to receive serious attention of media scholars, especially in Nigeria.

Although, this trend may appear relatively new in the Nigerian broadcast industry, it is not a new practice, at least in Europe and America. The newspapers supplied the news of early radio stations, especially in the United Kingdom and the United States of America (Streibert & Lewis, 1941). In Nigeria, before December 2008, the broadcast media—radio and television—always reviewed contents of newspapers and news magazines, and broadcast them to the mass audience. These secondary gatekeepers (radio and television), usually adopted different methods to broadcast the contents of other media they monitored. Some broadcast stations presented verbatim, almost the entire contents of the news items they selected from newspapers or news magazines, while some stations paraphrased the news items, or read only the headlines and the leads of the news stories. In some

instances, some broadcast stations translated the news stories from the English Language to the indigenous languages of the local audience. The broadcast stations coined for the programme, different titles such as “Headliner”, “From the Dailies”, “Press Review”, and “Koko inu Iwe Irohin” (“Newspaper Headlines”). In addition, the broadcast stations acknowledged their sources by directly mentioning the names of the newspapers being reviewed and referring their audience to the pages or sections where the reviewed stories could be found in the newspapers. The leading Nigerian newspapers whose contents were reviewed by these broadcast stations, especially in South-Western Nigeria, were *The Guardian*, *The Nation*, *New Age*, *Nigerian Tribune*, *Daily Independent*, *The Punch*, *Oke-Ogun News*, *The Sun*, *ThisDay*, and *Vanguard*, among others.

In 2008, the newspaper owners intensified their protest against this trend of secondary broadcasting and instigated some rounds of litigation against the broadcast stations. Consequently, in December 2008, the Broadcasting Organisation of Nigeria (BON) and the Newspapers Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN) met and BON announced a ban on the review of newspapers by radio and television stations in Nigeria (“Newspaper Chiefs Storm the Court”, 2003). This however, seemed to have little effect as the trend still continues, albeit in a more indirect style. The radio stations now adopt a new style of review whereby the presenters neither acknowledge the names of the selected newspapers that originally published the stories they review nor make reference to the audience to the pages or sections of the newspapers where the reviewed stories could be found. Programme titles such as “Headliner”, “From the Dailies”, “Press Review”, and “Koko inu Iwe Irohin”, no longer exist. What the radio stations now use instead are elusive names like “Day-Break Gist”, “Top Stories”, *Gbe e Si Mi L’eti*, “Review”, “Have You Heard?”, *Eti Oba N’ile*, *Tifun-Tedo*, “News Update”, and “Inside-out”. The stations, in a more blurry style, obliterate every trace of the sources of the news items they review. Most times, they embellish the reviews with locally sourced stories, and attribute some segments of the entire reviews to their local reporters whom they refer to as *stringers*—local informants (Ojebuyi, 2012).

### **Ethical Obligation and Ownership Influence in News Content Selection**

One of the significant variables in the news media business is the issue of ethics. Foreman (2010) defines ethics as “a set of moral principles, a code—often unwritten—that guides a person’s conduct” (p. 17). Michael Josephson, cited in Foreman (2010), identifies two aspects of ethics: First, ethics involves the ability to discern right from wrong, good from evil, and propriety from impropriety. Second, ethics entails the readiness to do what is right, good and proper. In summary, ethics is the pursuit of good when evil is a strong



alternative; it is coping with the challenge of doing the right thing even when that will force one to pay some price or make some sacrifice.

Media ethics is the moral principle that guides the media professionals in the discharge of their duties as agents of truths, who are expected to give accurate, objective, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day's events in a manner that gives meaning to these events. Scholars have justified the emergence of media ethics. One of them (Coleman, 2009) argues that the need for media ethics becomes imperative as news reporting becomes driven significantly by the free market rather than the truth. Media ethics becomes an increasingly important issue in modern society because the scope of media influence has expanded as a result of media multiplicity.

Though ethics explains the standard for acceptable conduct, there is hardly a universally acknowledged code of ethics, especially for electronic media journalists. What is accepted as professional code of conduct varies from one normative context and one media organisation to another. Even within an electronic media setting, code of ethics may vary from one department to another (Albarran, 2010) and from a media house to another. Yet, irrespective of their departmental or ownership types, media personnel are obliged to observe the specific and general code of ethics specified by their organisation. Journalists in particular, who directly process the primary product that the media organisation sells to the audience (Foreman, 2010), must always ensure as much as possible that their personal moral beliefs do not conflict with the organisational code of ethics.

It is professionally desirable that journalists practise sound ethics because, like other professions such as medicine, law, business and engineering, conducts of journalists have consequences for the mass audience to whom they are accountable. Journalists have some moral duties they must perform. Christians, Rotzoll, Fickler, McKee, and Woods, cited in Albarran (2010), identify five basic ethical duties of news media employees at all levels. These are summarised as (a) duty to self in terms of objectivity, individual integrity, and conscience, (b) duty to the audience by considering how their moral decisions will affect their audience, (c) duty to employer or organisation, (d) duty to professional colleagues, and (e) duty to society by carefully considering the issues of individual rights and confidentiality, while reporting news.

In Nigeria, for instance, a set of code of ethics has been formulated by collective efforts of the various unions in the journalism profession. Examples of these professional bodies are *The Nigerian Press Council (NPC)*, *Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ)*, *Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE)*, *Broadcasting Organisation of Nigeria (BON)*, and *Newspapers Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN)*. The code of ethics for the Nigerian journalists

covers a broad spectrum of matters such as editorial independence, accuracy and fairness, decency, privacy, public interest, access to information, social responsibility, reward and gratification, violence, plagiarism, press freedom and responsibility, privilege/non-disclosure as well as qualifications and registration of members (*Nigerian Press Organisation*, 2009). Press as defined by the code includes radio, television, wire services, newspapers, magazines and such other media of communication involved in the collection and dissemination of information for the mass audience. Therefore, anyone, whose responsibility is to collect or disseminate information on behalf of a media organisation, is a journalist, and is bound by this code of ethics.

Both ethics and bias are related concepts in news reporting. Where journalists fail, or find it difficult, to adhere to ethical principles and obligation as stipulated by their professional code of conduct, the issue of bias becomes inevitable. Levasseur (2008) identifies two taxonomies that broadly underpin the concept of media bias. These are *partisan bias* and *structural bias*. The first type—partisan bias—involves media reports that are tilted in favour of a particular political party. Media news that manifests a partisan bias favourably projects one political party at the expense of other political parties. Therefore, in political reporting, when people accuse the media of biased reporting, they are making reference to partisan bias. The second type of media bias—structural bias—springs from certain frameworks (e.g. customs, reporting routines, and commercial pressures) that operate within the news industry. For example, within any given media organisation, journalists face certain pressures and incentives. As the journalists are driven by these pressures and incentives, they develop particular routine practices. When reporters put a certain slant on their stories to adhere to these industry pressures and incentives, their stories reflect the industry's structural bias. The media's structural bias favours negative news and conflicts. Naturally, negative information and conflicts attract human attention (e.g., Agbese, 2008; Alao & Osifeso, 2009; Anaeto, Solo-Anaeto & Tejumaiye, 2009; Folarin, 1998; Uphuofu-Biri, 2006). Therefore, the media, in their attempt to satisfy their audience, always have bias for stories that portray individuals negatively and in a state of conflict.

The concept of bias is highly interwoven with media gatekeeping and newsworthiness decisions. This is because the journalists who determine what is newsworthy among the contending issues of almost equal status and importance are always guided by some prescribed institutional and professional criteria. These criteria always exert great influence on the editorial decisions of the journalists. This is where and why media bias creeps into the news reporting function of the media (D'Alessio & Allen, 2000). From the perspective of political economy, the news media are directly

or indirectly influenced by the social forces that frequently are the manifestations of dominant economic power. According to Martin (2005), media ownership, for example, is always a powerful factor that exerts great influence on the content of the news. This happens directly through promulgation of a statute or indirectly through institutionalisation of certain ideological environment that shapes how the journalists present their reports.

Journalists have obligations to society and their media organisations, and in their attempt to satisfy both constituencies conflict of interest arises. As Wilkins & Christians (2009) explains, "conflict of interest comprises a variety of instances where undeclared obligations or loyalties exist that might plausibly intervene between journalists or journalism organizations and the public they principally serve" (P. 229). In reality, it may be practically impossible for journalists to be free from the web of conflict of interest as they perform their journalistic duties. This is because journalists are part of the larger society where numerous forces interplay. These forces are also present in their respective media organisations.

In most cases, Nigerian journalists are caught in the complex web of dilemma of choosing between adherence to the ethical principles as prescribed by their professional code of conduct, and commitment to organisational dictate, which is always the reflection of ownership patterns. Influences of ownership on journalists and other editorial personnel in terms of what they select as news are pervasive in the Nigerian media industry. In different ways, owners of media organisations may exert influence over media content structure and distribution. This may happen through the allocation of resources, staff welfare and autonomy, and even direct intervention in the editorial decisions. Naturally, in the larger system of the political economy of the media, media ownership is one of several forces that may shape the structure, availability and range of messages in the media (McAllister & Proffitt, 2009).

Whether public or private news media, the news producers routinely receive orders from their publishers or media owners concerning what is to be covered, what is to be reported, and how it should be reported. For instance, in a study by Donohew (2001), in Kentucky, to investigate what forces influenced the decisions by media gatekeepers to run certain news stories and not others, findings show that publisher attitude is an important force in the news channel. The prevalence of proprietorial interference has raised some ethical questions as to who really controls the media gate: the news producers, who are tagged 'traditional pipers', or the proprietors, who actually pay the pipers? Epstein, cited by McManus (2005), categorised within the organisational level of news forces analysis, the ownership

influence or the self-interest of the organisation. He applied organisational analysis to network news production that negated the "simple notion that news 'mirrored' reality" (p. 302). He therefore, concluded that organisational self-interest "selects and distorts social reality" that the mass media are expected to transmit. As McAllister and Proffitt (2009) contend, the issue of corporate media ownership and its influence on media content is ultimately a structural issue that always has implications for composition of media content. Obviously, imposition of a policy or organisational self-interest about what news items should be selected negates journalistic principle of objectivity and fairness, and may prevent the journalist from being ethical while performing his duty as the agent of truth.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Media gatekeeping theory was selected to form the theoretical anchor for this study. A lot of events happen daily, and these usually compete for space in the news media, but only a fraction of them get to the audience through the media (Paul & Elder, 2006). The success of the potential news items is always determined by the individuals at the media region. In turn, the decisions of these media actors as to what items are selected as news are frequently influenced by diverse forces attached to the various gate sections in the news media organisations (e.g., Shoemaker, Eichholz, Kim & Wrigley, 2001). Ownership control is one of the forces (Watson, 2003). The foregoing submissions, which capture the thrust of this study, fall in the ambits of gatekeeping theory.

### **Gatekeeping Theory**

Within the framework of communication, gatekeeping is simply conceptualised as the process by which competing news items are sieved, shaped, and reduced into those few that are eventually transmitted to the audience (Barzinlai-Nahon, 2005, Barzinlai-Nahon, 2008; Clayman & Reisner, 1998; Shoemaker, 2006). It stipulates that in a media organisation, there are individuals who control the flow of information, language and knowledge (Donohew, 2001). McKain (2005) describes gatekeeping as a process of deciding what events would be allowed to go into broadcast; "process of deciding what news is or what will become news" (p. 416). Wesley and Maclean (as cited in Shoemaker, et al., 2001); present a metaphorical model to explain Lewin's concept of gatekeeping in the context of mass communication. According to them, the channels are the gates controlled by Cs, who in different ways, manipulate messages. They describe "Cs" as the individuals or organisations in the communication process (that is, the reporters and editors, or the media outlets they work for), who select items that are communicated to the audience, especially when such items are not

within the immediate reach of the audience. This simple model describes the elements in the gatekeeping process through which information travels from discovery to transmission.

David Manning White was the first scholar to really apply Lewin's gatekeeping concept to mass communication when, in 1950, he conducted a case study in the news selection process. He tried to investigate the reason why 'Mr Gate', a telegraph wire editor on an American non-metropolitan newspaper—*Peoria Star*, a morning newspaper—selected some stories and discarded others (Sang, 2008; Watson, 2003).

The assessment of the gatekeeping process occurs at five stages of analysis. These levels are (1) **the individual level**, (2) **the routines level**, (3) **the organisational level**, (4) **the institutional level**, and (5) **the societal level** (e.g., Barzinlai-Nahon, 2008; Shoemaker et al., 2001; Shoemaker, 2006). The individual level refers to the extent to which individuals—reporters and news editors—are responsible for the gatekeeping business, that is, how the individuals' experiences, backgrounds, interpretations of events or issues, decision making, roles conception and values affect the gatekeeping process. The routines level has to do with structural elements such as patterned, repeated, internalised activities that usually guide journalists in their daily assignments. The organisational level comprises those internal values or variables that shape organisational operation, and these vary by organisations, and sometimes, groups' decision-making patterns. The institutional level refers to the external characteristics of media organisations and their external representatives that affect their gatekeeping business. These factors may include political alliances, market forces, influence of competitor, and other social institutions. The social level looks at those normative factors such as the impact of ideology and culture on media gatekeeping process. Citing Shoemaker and Reese, McManus (2005) explains that the five stages of analysis are interdependent as what happens at one level affects the structure of the next level, and this may produce a chain effect across the five stages. The foregoing five-layer assessment criteria also apply to secondary gatekeeping as practised by radio stations in Oyo State. Therefore, the gatekeeping theory is considered appropriate to drive this study.

## **Method**

### **Research Designs**

In-depth interviews and content analysis were employed to answer the research question constructed for this study. The two research designs were combined to complement each other as mere quantitative data might be inadequate to explore the dialectics of ethical responsibility and commitment.

to organisational policy in the construction of the secondary news contents of the select radio stations.

### **Study Population**

The study had two broad sets of population (human population and non-human population). The human population comprised news-decision makers—the news editors and producers—of radio stations in Oyo State, Nigeria. The non-human population comprised the radio stations in the state and the contents of news review programmes by the radio stations. The titles and schedules of the reviews by the selected radio stations, as at the time of this study, were as follows: Premier FM: Day-Break Gist (6:30-7:00 am) and *Gbe-e si Mi Leti* (8:00-8:30 am); Radio O-Y-O (BCOS): News Update (6:45-7:00 am) and *Koko Iroyin* (8:45-9:00 am); Splash FM: Top-Stories (7:30-8:00 am) and *Tifun-Tedo* (9:00-9:30 am).

### **Sampling and Sample**

The purposive sampling technique was used to select the radio stations that were studied because, as at the time of the study, the selected radio stations performed the secondary gatekeeping function (they still perform), and reflected divergent ownership patterns, which constituted the core variable in this study. A Simple random balloting (without replacement) technique was used to select the days of the news review broadcasts that were content analysed. The 2010 almanac was used as the sampling frame. The simple random sampling method was used because it allowed the researcher to achieve the principle of *Equal Probability of Selection Method (EPSEM)*, where bias and subjectivity were reasonably minimised, and all members of the population were given an equal chance of being chosen for the study (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011).

Three radio stations—*Premier FM*, *Radio O-Y-O*, and *Splash FM*—were selected for the study. *Premier FM* is a Federal radio station; *Radio O-Y-O* is a State radio station, while *Splash FM* is a privately-owned radio station. This diversity of ownership pattern qualified the three radio stations for this study.

Six (6) days in a month (excluding weekends) for each of the radio stations were randomly selected (through balloting) across the eleven months (February—December, 2010, making a total of 240 working days) that constituted the study period. This made sixty-six (66) days for each of the three radio stations. The recorded news reviews that fell on the randomly selected days were, therefore, selected and content analysed for the study. This was done separately for each of the three radio stations—*Splash FM*, *Premier FM*, and *Radio O-Y-O*—that were chosen for the study. Consequently, a total of 198 news review broadcasts were content analysed.

From each of the radio stations, two news editors/news producers were purposively selected and interviewed. The interview was conducted in 2012. The reason for their selection for the interview was that these categories of personnel were those that were said to be usually involved in the primary and secondary gatekeeping activities of the radio stations.

### **Research Instruments**

Two instruments were constructed and used for this study. The instruments were in-depth interview guide and coding sheet (content categories). The in-depth interview guide contained seventeen (17) open-ended questions that were used to elicit information from the news editors of the select radio stations.

### **Findings and Discussion**

This study attempted to establish how the conflict between ethical responsibility and organisational allegiance was likely to affect news content decision by the select radio stations. To achieve this objective, we analysed the qualitative data from the in-depth interviews and sorted the responses to reflect the predominant themes that reflect the views of the interviewees. The qualitative data were complemented with content analysis of the secondary news content of the radio stations. The findings are presented as follows:

#### ***Who Pays the Piper Dictates the Tune***

Actually, all the news personnel interviewed confirmed that in most cases, interest of the proprietors or owners of the stations overrode other criteria. According to them, they were at times helpless and had to give in. However, ownership influence seemed to be more pronounced in Radio O-Y-O, the radio station owned by the State Government than in other radio stations. Mr Bimbo Akanbi is a producer of news review, Radio O-Y-O. His experiences really painted the picture. He recounted:

Yes, interest of organisation's ownership does influence our news selection decisions some times. We might have read a news story in our news bulletin earlier at 6:30 am, and the same story would still come up in our news review at 6:45 am if such story is in-house and affects the interest of the management or the State Government. Our Chairman may just call: 'Bimbo, make sure you use this story in your news review.' If I try to explain that we had just used the story at 6:30 am, he would scream at me and say: 'That is what I want, use the story.' At this point, I just have to use the story. We

(editorial team) don't have any option, if that is what the management wants.

In his effort to justify the phenomenon, Mr Bimbo Akanbi painted a comparison between situations in government and private radio stations. He continued:

I just want people to know that a government-run station is different from private station. In state-owned stations, we are working for the Government, and we have to do their wishes. When Lam Adesina (former Governor of the State) was there, we shouted *Lam, Lam*; when Ladoja became the Governor, we shouted his name. When Bola Ige was there, the same thing happened. Alao Akala is there now (April, 2011, when this interview was conducted), we are shouting *Akala*. Even, at NTA (*Nigerian Television Authority*) and FRCN (*Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria*), the first name they always mention is Jonathan. That is sure! But Splash FM too cannot say anything negative about Chief Akande. It is not possible. It is the same thing everywhere.

Ironically, the privately-owned station appeared to enjoy a relatively higher degree of freedom, though they are not absolutely independent of the owner's interest. Mr Kunle Thomas, News Editor, Splash FM, had this to say:

I must be honest; the Proprietor of this station does not interfere in our job. He has left everything to us the professional to determine what goes in as news. And the Management too has not been really disturbing us. Although, you know, we cannot run away from the realities of organisational policy and ownership. There are usually some times that our Chairman would call us and say: 'You see that man is my friend. If you use that story once, it is enough; just leave the man alone.' No matter how significant or newsworthy the story is, we just have to obey the Chairman and kill the story after we must have used it once. But, honestly, this is not that kind of censorship that would not allow you to use the story at all.

Speaking from the perspective of the federal government-owned radio station, Mr Olaolu Fawole, sub-editor and presenter of news reviews, Premier FM, confirmed that editorial decisions of the radio station in most cases were influenced by the interest of their employers—the Federal Government. He said that it would be unthinkable if editors approve for



broadcast any report that could be considered anti-government. "He who pays the piper dictates the tune", he concluded.

### ***The Stations Need Money to Survive***

In addition, the news personnel interviewed did not deny the fact that money also played some roles in determining what they considered as news. Even government-owned stations would jump at any opportunity to run commercials in the reviews. After all, the interviewees claimed, there is nothing bad in making money for the stations to survive. "Of course, we can run the programme without money. Our aim is to serve the people. But if we have sponsors, we will not mind. With commercials, we are making money for the station. That is what we call commercialisation," Mr Bimbo Akanbi of Radio O-Y-O clarified. Supporting the opinion of his colleague, Mr Yemi Ogunyemi, also of Radio O-Y-O, explained as follows:

This is a government station. Radio broadcast should be for community service. That's what gives people satisfaction. When we started, there were programmes that were basically community-based. But, you see, in Nigeria today, every other thing has been commercialised. Government itself would tell us to go and source for fund to subsidise the station's survival. So I will not blame any station that decides to sell their airtime. Generally, in an ideal situation, there are some things that should be done as service to community.

Also speaking from the perspective of government-owned media enterprise, Mr Olaolu Fawole of FRCN admitted that some commercials would enhance the station's financial profile: "If we have commercials on the programme, everything is okay. After all, FRCN is to generate revenue for the Federal Government. I don't see anything bad in that since everything has been commercialised," he added.

To ensure perpetual survival, private radio stations are more likely to lean on proceeds from commercials than government stations are. The position of Mr Kunle Thomas confirms the assumption that commercial interest is a stronger force in private radio stations. He confessed:

Of course, we carry stories that are not sponsored, but we enjoy it when people come to sponsor stories. Ours is a private and commercial radio station. We enjoy patronage from advertisers and members of the communities generally. For example, if the people of a community approach our station that the road in

their area is bad and they want to appeal to government to repair it, as long as they pay for an advertorial, we will write the story for them and run it in our news review or other relevant programmes. Some radio stations, which are of course government-owned, may not collect money for some types of advertisement, but here, we would take some money and run the story. We must make money to service the station.

The single largest influence on the media gatekeepers' decisions is probably that of money, Whitney, Sumpter & McQuail (2004) have argued. Similarly, McManus (2005) posits that journalism in America is drifting towards serving the marketplace. The situation in Nigeria, as presented in the finding above, shows that money is no less a significant force in secondary gatekeeping of the selected radio stations. Although the interviewees did not put the issue of commercials first, it is evident from their responses that the stations still consider money as an imperative factor for the stations to survive.

The foregoing findings have shown that one of the fundamental rationales for secondary gatekeeping by the selected radio stations, as confirmed by the interviewees, is to gain more audience (listeners) for the stations and make more money. As observed by Ojebode (2009), the profit-driven economy triggered by government's neo-liberal ideology has increased competition and stiffened the market. Any news organisation that really wants to survive in the present media and communication industries in Nigeria must devise further means of winning more audience and increasing its profit margin.

### ***Ownership also Plays Significant Roles***

As shown above, the study has further confirmed that influence of ownership is an invasive circumstance in media organisations. It is present in every media outfit, either public or private. The degree of this influence may, however vary according to socio-political contexts or ownership types as stated in the foregoing finding. For instance, news about the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) frequently featured in the news review broadcast of *Radio O-Y-O*. The following headlines from the station's news review of Tuesday, April 20, 2010 are instances of such pro-ruling party political news: (1) **How PDP Presidential Candidate Will Emerge**; (2) **Aide Condemns Defacement of Governor Akala's Poster**. Part of the content of the latter headline contained the following excerpts:

No matter how the oppositions try, the roads in Oke-Ogun;  
the structures in Ogbomoso Land; the face lift in Ibadan

Land; and the rehabilitation in Oyo Town and Ibarapa cannot be erased away (*Radio O-Y-O, Ibadan, [News Update] April 10, 2010*).

The content analysis shows that stories of this nature really dominated the contents of news reviews by the radio Station. The explicit objective of editorial approval of stories like this is to give information, but the implicit goal is to project the image of the ruling party and protect the interest of the State Government. This is understandable. The station is owned by the State Government, and it is bound to serve the interest of its owner.

To further establish the relationship between organisational forces in the radio stations—especially in terms of ownership types—and patterns of their secondary news contents, we content-analysed some randomly selected news reviews by the radio stations. As presented in table 1, ownership factor apparently influenced the extent of attention given to political news in the news reviews by editorial personnel of the radio stations. Out of the total news items relating to politics (n=1307; 35.4%), Radio O-Y-O, which is owned by the Oyo State Government, allowed more passage of news (n=209; 18.6%) related to the ruling People’s Democratic Party (PDP) in the state at the time of the study than news related to the opposition parties (n=43; 3.8%). Also, Radio O-Y-O, Premier FM, a station owned by the Federal Government, also reviewed more contents about the ruling party—PDP—(n=147; 12.1%) than the opposition parties (n=69; 5.7%). However, Splash FM, a private radio station, approved passage of contents about non-partisan matters (n=292; 21.7%) more than it did about the ruling party (n=100; 7.4%). The trend shows that government owned radio stations were favourably disposed to reporting more political news about the government in power which “pays the piper”. Conversely, the private radio station demonstrated some level of neutrality in reporting news about politics.

**Table 1: Association between Ownership and Themes Reported in the News Reviews by the Radio Stations**

SUB-CATEGORIES	THEMES	RADIO STATIONS			TOTAL	
		Splash FM, Ibadan	Premier FM, Ibadan	Radio O.Y.O, Ibadan	Overall Total	Sub-total
OTHERS	Religion	36 (2.7)	42 (3.5)	3 (.3)	81 (2.2)	2382 (64.6%)
	Crime	153 (11.4)	139 (11.4)	189 (16.8)	481 (13.0)	

	<b>Development-centred news</b>	87 (6.5)	135 (11.1)	211 (18.8)	<b>433 (11.7)</b>	
	<b>Disaster</b>	100 (7.4)	66 (5.4)	40 (3.6)	<b>206 (5.6)</b>	
	<b>Crisis</b>	215 (15.9)	177 (14.5)	46 (4.1)	<b>438 (11.9)</b>	
	<b>Sports</b>	211 (15.7)	188 (15.4)	254 (22.6)	<b>653 (17.70)</b>	
	<b>Society</b>	39 (2.9)	43 (3.5)	8 (.7)	<b>90 (2.4)</b>	
<b>POLITICS</b>	<b>Ruling party</b>	100 (7.4)	147 (12.1)	209 (18.6)	<b>456 (12.4)</b>	<b>1307 (35.4%)</b>
	<b>Opposition party</b>	115 (8.5)	69 (5.7)	43 (3.8)	<b>227 (6.2)</b>	
	<b>Neutral</b>	292 (21.7)	211 (17.3)	121 (10.8)	<b>624 (16.9)</b>	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1348 (100.0)</b>	<b>1217 (100.0)</b>	<b>1124 (100.0)</b>	<b>3689 (100.0)</b>	<b>3689 (100.0)</b>

Note: percentage within frequency of themes in brackets

Source: Author's Fieldwork

Examples of such news about the opposition parties and non-partisan political issues by Splash FM are evident in the following headlines of its news reviews:

\*Action Congress Calls for Probe of Alleged Failed Kidnap (opposition)

Attempt on Journalists in Oyo State (non-partisan)

\*Fresh Crisis over New Constitution (non-partisan)

\*EFCC Raids House of Reps again (opposition)

The pattern here presents a Nigerian scenario similar to the findings of a study by Donohew (2001) in Kentucky, which show that publisher attitude is an important force in the news channel. Proprietor or ownership factor is a significant force that determines what the editors consider as news. Since the government-owned stations are directly responsible to their respective owners (State or Federal Government), they are naturally expected to report

political news that support the ruling party. On the other hand, Splash FM is naturally expected to be pro-opposition or remain neutral in reporting political issues since it is not answerable to the government of the day.

The foregoing pattern of coverage by both Radio O-Y-O and Premier FM suggests media bias and dereliction of ethical responsibility. As already established in literature, Levasseur (2008) identifies two types of media bias—*structural bias* and *partisan bias*. The structure of coverage by these radio stations as established by this current study is *partisan bias*—a situation whereby a media content favourably projects one political party at the expense of other political parties. The principles of objectivity, balance and fairness as prescribed by the code of ethics for Nigerian journalist (*Nigerian Press Organisation*, 2009) have been violated. Journalists are expected to be socially responsible to the public instead of showing allegiance to the government in power. We can attempt an explanation for this phenomenon by applying one of the five-level analyses of news forces in gatekeeping theory as identified by scholars (Barzinlai-Nahon, 2008; McManus, 1995; Shoemaker, Eichholz, Kim & Wrigley, 2001). The relevant levels here are the organisational and the institutional levels which refer to the internal forces (e.g. organisational policy and publisher's interest) and external characteristics of media organisations and their external ties (political alliances, market forces, and other social institutions) that affect their news selection decisions. The radio stations, like all other media organisations, are organic parts of the social system; therefore, they cannot function independent of these diverse internal and external forces that have implications for their corporate operations and survival. Evidently, these forces—especially ownership factor and commercial interest— always exert significant influence on, and shape the patterns of the news contents of these radio stations.

### **Conclusion**

As evident in the foregoing findings, organisational forces are dominating in the struggle between ethical responsibility and allegiance to organisational interest. Ownership factor and commercial interest, as confirmed in this study, are dominant forces that shape how the radio stations selected secondary news content. Findings here show that there exists a remarkably significant variation in the ideological perspectives of the three radio stations in terms of their thematic sentiments. What accounts for this variation is the fact that the radio stations reflect ownership interest and influence in their news content decisions. Doyle (2002) has warned that media ownership has significant impact on the overall operations of a nation's media system as it can generate over-representation of certain political opinions or forms of

cultural output—those favoured by powerful media owners—at the expense of others. The implication of the findings in this study is that what the media gatekeepers (editors) give the public as news may not always be true mirror of social reality after all, but a distorted picture as dictated by various organisational forces such as ownership factor and commercial gains. Consequently, journalistic principle of objectivity may remain a mirage, to a large extent, as long as the news media proprietors continue to wield their influence and sentiments, and media organisations are drifting towards serving the marketplace at the expense of ethical obligation and social responsibility in the news selection business. This phenomenon where organisational forces are rapidly eclipsing ethical responsibility, as confirmed by findings of this study, poses a great risk for democracy and for socio-cultural dynamism and cohesion especially in a country like Nigeria whose democracy is relatively young with myriads of political, social, religious and ethnic challenges.

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