

Media Business Ownership and Control in Ghana's democracy

1. **Wilberforce S. Dzisah¹**, Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA). Email: wdzisah@gimpa.edu.gh
ORCID: 0000-0002-8888-3615
2. **Africanus L. Diedong**, Simon Diedong Dombo University of Business and Integrated Development Studies. Email: adiedong@ubids.edu.gh
ORCID: 0000-0002-8888-3615
3. **James K. Asante**, University of Media, Arts and Communication (UniMAC-IJ), Accra-Ghana, formerly Ghana Institute of Journalism. Email: james.asante@gij.edu.gh
ORCID: 0009-0006-1243-1360
4. **Kofi Asare**, Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA). Email: kasare@gimpa.edu.gh
ORCID: 0000-0002-2991-2914

Abstract	<i>Journal of Policy and Development Studies (JPDS)</i>
<p><i>The paper examines the problem of media ownership, its control imperatives and the overarching partisanship in Ghana's democracy. It explicates the challenges posed by media concentration, manipulation, and interference by political actors on the health of Ghana's democracy. This is a conceptual paper and complemented by theoretical arguments with the findings drawn from analysis of secondary material. Media business ownership and control has a bearing on its operations in both liberal and illiberal democracies. Conceptual and theoretical arguments underlined the study from the standpoint of democratic theory, pluralist media and Marxist media ownership theories. These concepts and theories were engaged to address the state/public and private ownership imperatives in the Ghanaian media ecology. From the study, two findings emerged. First, media business ownership and control are promoting more partisanship and polarization of the citizenry. Secondly, evidence of state control, interference and manipulation in the Ghanaian media space have been reported in this paper. The study concludes that a deliberate policy is required about creating an enabling environment for more entrepreneurs to invest in the media rather than politicians in order to prevent unbridled partisanship and bias. It noted that all stakeholders strive for policy changes which will give true meaning to media independence.</i></p>	<p><i>Vol. 17 Issue 1 (2024)</i> <i>ISSN(p) 1597-9385</i> <i>ISSN (e) 2814-1091</i> <i>Home page:</i> https://www.ajol.info/index.php/jsda</p> <p>ARTICLE INFO: Keyword <i>Media, Ownership, Control, Democracy Pluralism, Information</i></p> <p>Article History Received: <i>15th October 2024</i> Accepted: <i>2nd December 2024</i> DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/jpds.v17i1.8</p>

¹ Corresponding author.

1. Introduction

Media ownership and control in Ghana dates back to the introduction of the press into the Gold Coast colony in the nineteenth century by the British, who colonised the territory for 113 years. The establishment and ownership paradigm were initially state-owned with the colonial Governor, the architect of the publication of a newspaper – *The Royal Gold Coast Gazette* and *The Commercial Intelligencer* (Dzisah, 2020). At the onset, the ownership and control of the press/media was tightly guarded as the publications were exclusively meant to inform and update most of their officers (Europeans) and a few local elites about happenings in the colony. However, buoyed by the libertarian guarantees, Britain, the coloniser started loosening its grip on the ownership and control of the press/media. This development opened the door for some Africans and Ghanaians to venture in the publication of newspapers and later radio stations. With increased agitation by the locals for greater say and the push for self-determination, more indigenes and other Africans started to own organs of mass communication. So much emphasis has been placed on private ownership and control of mass communications which is in tandem with the capitalist doctrine of free marketplace of ideas and self-righting process (Mill 1962; Milton 1644). Therefore, the Ghanaian media could be said to have developed along the lines of the British/Western capitalist economic model. Notwithstanding spells of authoritarianism in the ownership and control of the media in post-independence Ghana, Ghana's experiments with earlier models pointed to state-ownership and control.

The Ghanaian media is now largely libertarian, pluralist and a mixture of state and private ownership with social media believed to be deepening its democracy. It is prudent for this paper is to examine the underlying issues of media ownership, control and its impact on Ghana's democracy. The rationale for this is premised on the proliferation media outlets in the aftermath of Ghana's return to multiparty constitutional democracy in 1992. While Ghana's 1992 constitution makes provisions for state and private media to operate side-by-side, there has been growing concerns as to the manipulation of the state-owned media by the ruling governments. Alternatively, the counterpower provided for by the privately-owned media has also become problematic in terms of the source of ownership and control (Nyarko, 2023; MFWA and RSF 2017). Being largely desktop research, we embarked on a synthesis of literature review concerning media ownership, control and the extent of interference and concentration in the hands of the elite in a multiparty democracy. We have also drawn on practical lessons, experiences and the incidences of these practices and how they have impacted media practice in the Ghanaian media space. Subsequently, the study's objectives are:

- i) To examine the extent to which media ownership and control promote partisanship and polarization in Ghana's democracy.
- ii) To investigate media concentration and interference by government and private businesses on the health of Ghana's democracy.

2. Review of Related Literature

Media Pluralism and Diversity in a Liberal Democracy

In the context of liberalism and the broader neo liberal systems, capital mobilization within the private sector is mostly tenable in societies with an averagely modest income base and solid economic infrastructure. This, therefore, makes the private ownership argument of the media within a framework of liberalism a little suspect, as large areas of the modern world live in abject poverty. In such a situation, the argument in support of private ownership cannot wholly be tenable if the people are to be a part of information production

and dissemination, and for the multiplicity of opinions to be of value in a democracy. In the view of Okocha and Gupta (2018) and McChesney (2015) if the free market determines who should establish and operate media, then those who have the financial wherewithal and enormous capital resources will control the media. This in turn could be debilitating to the democratic process as it could be undermined by self-interest (Allam, 2023). While libertarian theorists argue for the exclusion of the state from ownership and control of organs of mass communication, Akaeze (2023) and Dzisah (2020) raised legitimate concerns regarding developing countries whose capital base is weak and therefore need state support to eradicate illiteracy and poverty. For McChesney (2015), in terms of control, then, there is only a shift in the locus of power from the political leadership, as in the authoritarian and communist systems to the financial elite in the private commercial arena. McChesney's (2015) position on this form of development is that liberalism and privileging capital accumulation and wealth would allow for control of the media by minorities in the democratic process. It is at their discretion to decide on the interests they wish to promote in the society, as it suits their political and financial agenda.

Whatever the enormous dividend private ownership and control offer the citizenry, McChesney (2015) identifies a theoretical lacuna in the libertarian postulation. He thus, advocates a more socially oriented media system capable of serving the interests of all. This position is shared by Rab and Sprague (2022) who argued for a balance by advocating for a non-profit and non-commercial media environment rather than those with sectarian and purely financial motives. For advocates of regulation such as McChesney (2015) the non-involvement of the state in the running of the media is an indirect marginalization of the majority of the population. In context, he considers the attempt to keep the majority of the people away from the operation of the media as decreasing the value of rational debate and argumentation. As Curran (2005; 2014) explained, this development could undermine a more critical and rational debate in the market-oriented media because it "tends to generate information that is simplified, personalised, decontextualized, with an emphasis on action rather than process" (2005 p. 130). From this standpoint, Mabweazara et al. (2023) seek to caution about the promotion of media-generating products that suit and perpetuate the dominant class's hold on a hapless majority. It is within the ambit of this argument and concern that scholars call for a reform of the media system. For McChesney, he proposes a radical overhaul of the private control and profit (commercial) imperative stating that "if we value democracy, it is imperative that we restructure the media system so that it reconnects with the mass of citizens who in fact comprise democracy" (2000: 3). And for Mabweazara et al. (2023) the debate surrounding the media must be situated within the ideas of right and responsibility. In their view it is difficult to detach an objective relationship between the media and the society from its normative or ideological leanings. As Nyarko (2023) has argued, the normative principle which ensures that the public interest is served, has become blurred because of the challenges posed by advertising revenue from political patrons and the strive for autonomy in the media space.

For Cagé and Mougin (2023), while the media is expected to be liberal and pluralist, its operations are becoming more shrouded in secrecy and the owners exhibiting authoritarian strains of control and manipulation. The profit motive coupled with the desire for political control to serve sectarian interests has vitiated the legitimate media imperative seek the

public interest (Nyarko, 2023). Discussing the Egyptian example, Allam (2023), negotiated the intricate relationships and practices of ownership and pluralism. Media control mechanisms, the urge for revenue from advertising and the expectations of quality of content are new challenges the media must contend with. There is, therefore, some degree of difficulty in safeguarding the true liberal ideal of media operations which ought to affirm its autonomy and independence. Clearly, there is an erosion of media autonomy and independence, partly attributable to the creeping partisanship, political ownership and control by the political class in their bid to cling to political power (Allam, 2023; Akaeze, 2023; Dzisah 2020).

3. Media Independence, Ownership and Control

With strides in multiparty constitutional democracy, there is an exponential increase in media operations in Ghana (Nyarko, 2023; Dzisah, 2020). The democracy dividend is accentuated by the expansion in the various media – print and electronic. According to Ghana’s National Communication Authority (NCA, 2023) as at the fourth quarter of 2023, Seven Hundred and Forty-Seven (747) radio and One Hundred and Seventy-Five (175) television frequencies were granted by the regulator. And out of these, 550 radio and 127 television stations are fully in operation. According to the National Media Commission (NMC, 2023), as at January 2023, it has registered Seventy newspapers, magazines and online news portals. This is a sharp decline from over One Thousand and Seventeen newspapers in circulation as reported by the NMC in 2004 (NMC 2004). However, the positive statistics in the area of electronic media must be good news for proponents of constitutional democracy and free media of expression. For a country like Ghana with an estimated population of 30.8 million (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021), the number of radio and television stations must be quite appreciable. The media-democracy synergy draws on the ideological considerations that underpin not only the private/state media dichotomy but also the broad framework of their organization, ownership and control within democratic theory. Mabweazara et al. (2023) make claims to perverted loyalty and media capture with patrimonial undertones in Africa. These developments undermine the free market-place principle, even to the extent of obfuscating the basis of media and democratic theories right of choice and consumption. As noted by Voltmer (2006), the media must be seen as a key component of democracy and arguably its livewire. Essentially, as Nyarko (2023), Akaeze (2023) reveal, the creeping signs of iron-fist control and political ownership strains in the media in Ghana and Nigeria for example, defies the logic of a libertarian principle which espouses an objective, fair and balanced media with emphasis on the quality of information disseminated to their target audience. This assertion, further indicates that the liberal idea and its fixation with media ownership, control and practice in the Global North should not be compared holistically with what pertains in other parts of the world. Rodny-Gumede et al. (2017) state: “With this in mind, normative models for the role of the media in democracy as transferred, and copied, from a western societal context are more and more being queried for their applicability to context other than the Global North’ (Rodny-Gumede et al., 2017 p. 2).

Chuma et al. (2017), express contrary views on the independence of the media and explain why the power of the media, as they align with the powerful elite, has compelled society to draw guidelines for the purpose of containing its excesses. The media play a key role in

enabling individuals to be informed, taught to seek information and, if effectively educated, to critically assess and appraise information. The media, as Chuma et al (2017) admit, has the capacity to transform information into knowledge and understanding for citizens to participate in democratic discussion and deliberation. Reid (2017) observes a gradual and open shift by the media towards the powerful in society, a move which undermines its purported independence. But commenting on media independence in a plural environment, Barnett and Gaber (2001) averred that even though there is an obvious canting towards the rich and powerful in media coverage due to its tilted ownership and control, there is still some glimmer of hope. Barnett and Gaber draw attention to the normative role of the media to provide information “the citizens require in order to make informed judgements about their political leaders and participate effectively in the proper functioning of the state” (Barnett and Gaber, 2001 p. 1).

On the ability of the media to serve the needs of all, Curran (2014) argues that the media are capable of helping to realize the objectives of society through agreement or compromise between conflicting interests. This is done by providing a platform for conflicting interests to argue their points of view and present all sides of the issue at stake. It does affirm media critical independence in the midst of disquiet regarding its ownership and control by governments, the private business moguls and the political elite. However, Curran’s (2014) argument reflects the dominant liberal ideology of freedom of expression as espoused by liberal thinkers such as Milton, Mill and Locke (Siebert et al. 1956). Jurgen Habermas (1989), in his normative ideal of the public sphere as a forum where citizens are free to discuss matters affecting their individual and general societal concerns. The media, which has become a critical organ of information dissemination in Habermas’ public sphere ideal is expected to generate and provide all sides of the issues of concern to the public in an unbiased manner (Dzisah, 2024; Habermas, 1989). However, Curran (1991) faults the media for ceding its independence and normative role to the powerful elite to satisfy their agenda, resulting in what he terms the *re-feudalization of society*. Curran asserts that the “media were an accessory to this ‘re-feudalisation’ of society. They functioned as manipulative agencies controlling mass opinion, in contrast to the early press which had facilitated the formation and expression of organic public opinion” (pp. 38-39).

Dissecting the erosion of media independence due to the mechanisms of ownership and control of this important organ, Cagé and Mougin (2023) attributed the decay to unbridled partisanship in democracy. They contend that party-tied media systems tend to produce a high degree of partisan content. According to Cagé and Mougin (2023), in situations where the media exercised its critical independence, it tends to generate fair and balanced information content for the consumption of the electorate. This reinforced the position of Blumler and Gurevitch who argue that the media “will consequently perform primarily “moderator” and “watchdog” functions which will tend to activate “liberal citizens”” (1995 p. 23). Clearly this appears to be the ideal rather than the practice.

4. Conceptual and Theoretical Debates

4.1 The Political Economy Theory of the Media

Two key political economy theories of the media have been engaged with in the bid to gain deeper insights into the essence of media business ownership and control in a democracy. The

Liberal Pluralist and the Marxist approaches provided the required foundation (Albarran, 2016; McChesney, 2015; Curran, 2014). Rab and Sprague (2022) assert the fundamental principle of free media being insulated from any vested interest or control in order to safeguard its independence. Like other scholars, the essence of media freedom is also to allow for unfettered access, free expression and to receive information from the media of their choice. It is within the ambit of this media freedom and independence that ownership and control of this critical resource is worth explicating. A crucial element of consideration in examining media ownership and control has been the toleration of all points of view in a democratic society. Another factor is a check by the media on the abuse of power and influence by the elite in society (Okocha & Gupta, 2018). There is a body of scholarly arguments against media concentration and ownership and control in a few hands. For Rab and Sprague (2022), media ownership and control in a few hands is dangerous due to the media's inherent power and influence in swaying public opinion.

4.2 Liberal Pluralist Theory of Media Ownership

Media pluralists hold the view that media content is largely influenced by the demand for the product by consumers. But it must be noted that content does not just happen by confluence of forces but rather shaped by media owners who are in competition in the marketplace (Schlosberg, 2016). Pluralism presupposes that the field is open to a variety of owners to display their products to the consumers who are at liberty to select what meets their taste and preferences. Therefore, in a multiparty democracy where there are divergent interests and values, pluralist media ownership and control are predicated on the logic of the market (Rab and Sprague, 2022). A media owner in a plural media setting is obliged to offer the buying public what they want. The freedom of choice as espoused in the libertarian theory by Siebert et al (1956) also imposes a certain standard on media professionals to also adhere to professional ethics. Another perspective offered by the pluralist theory of media ownership is the crucial role of journalistic ethics which provide the necessary checks and controls on the potential abuse of the media.

In the context of multiparty democracy, the theory clearly supports the position of a nexus between media and democracy. The media is an essential ingredient in a democracy providing a nourishment to the ideal (Koc-Michalska et al., 2023; Dzisah, 2020; Curran, 2014). In furtherance of this position, pluralists contend that the media in a democracy is the main conduit of information dissemination. It provides the required oxygen to the democratic process because the audience relies on it the various channels and outlets both print and electronic for information. Clearly, the media audiences wield enormous power in a plural pluralist environment because they have the latitude to buy or not to buy or consume a particular media product (Rab & Sprague, 2022). At the heart of the pluralist media theory is the libertarian guarantee of freedom of choice (Siebert et al., 1956). The media, therefore, supply what the audience wants rather than what the owner decides. In context, in a democratic society if some viewpoints have a substantial number of media representing them, this should not be equated to bias. Rather, it must be seen as a reflection of what the audience wants or views as important (Koc-Michalska et al., 2023; Curran, 2014).

Pluralists insist that the profit motive is an overriding consideration rather than elitist control and manipulation (Koc-Michalska et al., 2023; Curran, 2014). Clearly, most of the literature underlying the libertarian theory and pluralism is predicated on the private-sector led development, growth and ownership of the media (Siebert et al., 1956). While this has been lauded for promoting variety and diversity, it has also been suggested that public service

broadcasting (PSB) also feeds into the theory of pluralism, ownership and control due to the huge market share they command (Curran, 2014). Clearly, the concerns of private media ownership and control being manipulated by the elite for extreme profit-driven agenda is countered by public service broadcasting. As Dzisah (2020) argued, public service broadcasting provides a counter-power by its strict adherence to legal obligations, the duty to inform, educate and ensure diversity of programming. The added impetus is that pluralist theory holds the view that private ownership and control of the media guarantees citizens right to free expression, multiplicity of viewpoints and also act as a bulwark against tyranny of the state or government (Dzisah, 2020; Curran, 2014). Pluralists in the libertarian tradition also assume that journalists and media practitioners would act ethically and professionally by resisting interference in their work by media owners.

4.3 Marxist Theory of Media Ownership

While the liberal pluralist media theory has been hailed as the tonic for liberal democracy and to flourish, there is the antithesis of its invitation to elitist influence and control of the media product (Rab & Sprague, 2022; McChesney, 2015). Critics of the pluralist theory of media ownership contend that pluralism does not necessarily promote diversity (Dzisah, 2020; McChesney, 2015). What this reveals is that in a democracy there could be plural media ownership, but its operations could be promoting the same viewpoints to the detriment of other equally important viewpoints. It has been the contention of Marxist theorists that merely allowing for pluralism does not necessarily guarantee variety. For McChesney (2015), in a liberal democracy, there is the tendency for the powerful, wealthy elites with political agendas to crowd out dissenting viewpoints by flooding the media market with their products and deliberately use their financial muscle to suppress alternative viewpoints. He dismissed the economic rationality argument of the pluralist theory of media ownership being driven by the market forces of demand and supply and rather pointed to the illiberal tendencies of manipulation.

Unlike the liberal pluralist theorists, the Marxist theorists on media ownership are diametrically opposed to the capitalist-induced model. For Rab and Sprague (2022) and McChesney (2015), the threat to pluralism and diversity does not come only from government intervention but also by subjugation of media power and influence to unrestricted market forces. This capitalist accumulation and control of the media undermines its development, blurs the public sphere due to its profit imperative. Rab and Sprague (2022) contend that the free market under liberal pluralist theory encourages accumulation and media concentration thereby producing communication inequalities. As argued by Lee (2001), the liberal pluralist system “embodies the existing problems of incomplete emancipation, resource inequity and cultural distortions resulting from the economic dynamics of advanced capitalism” (p.5). For McChesney (2015), the media is an accessory to the promotion of inequality using cultural products such as education to disseminate class ideology which presents capitalism as a superior model for democracy. Rab and Sprague (2022) allude to the notion and conspiracy of Marxist theorists that media owners, and the political elite are united in some sort of ideological conspiracy to brainwash their global audience.

In spite of the apprehensions and stout defense from the protagonists, Curran (2014), holds a contrary view as to how both pluralists and Marxist theorists look at media ownership. First, he dismissed the pluralist view that media owners do not intervene in media content as being patently false. Curran (2005; 2014) points to interventions by media owners such as Rupert Murdoch which he claims went beyond mere suspicion. On the other hand, Curran also derided

the Marxist theorists' argument of a collective conspiracy of the elite owners to make more profit but rather attributed it to individualized drive to hold a greater market share.

4.4 Transparency, Ownership, Control, Manipulation and Partisanship

Conceptualizing freedom of communication is directly related to its ownership paradigm. Concerns have been raised about the degree of control exercised by those who own the media. While Article 162 of Ghana's 1992 Constitution is explicit and abhors any control and editorial interference, there still exists some degree of control. In this regard, the constitutionally mandated National Media Commission (NMC) cannot claim total independence and insulation when it comes to the appointment of Chief Executives of the State-Owned media. The brazen manner in which the immediate-past Director-General (D-G) of the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC), Dr Kwame Akuffo Anoff-Ntow was removed from office speaks volumes. The complicity and political manipulation resulting in his removal are traceable to the degree of control and the attempt to asphyxiate the public service role of the media. It also reinforces the maxim 'he who pays the piper calls the tune'. Dr Anoff-Ntow on 2 August 2019 writes:

In January of 2018, the Board of GBC which the NMC had 'inaugurated and charged to strengthen the Public Service mandate' of GBC, asked the Director General (D-G) of GBC to proceed on leave because he had elicited the support of the Chief Justice to set up 'special' TV licence courts to try defaulters as established by law. As direct consequence, the NMC directed the Board to get the D-G to step aside and proceed to investigate all relevant matters associated with the TV licence collection. Even before the decision was made known to the D-G, newspapers had carried it in their morning editions, and the Executive Secretary of the NMC was granting interviews on radio reinforcing the reasons for the D-G's leave, and the need to investigate the process.

By terminating the D-G's appointment and effectively stalling the TV licence collection, the NMC has not only done the bidding of its political masters. It has also exhibited traits of political capture, giving a lapdog role preference over its normative watchdog one against government interference. More importantly, their action has significantly erased gains media activists fought for and chalked. By extension, the possibility, even danger that the NMC could relapse into becoming a guard dog of government and special interests is existential (Dzisah, 2020).

Findings from The Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) and Reporters Without Borders (RSF) (MFWA and RSF 2017), concluded that there is lack of transparency and limited access to ownership information in the Ghanaian media industry. For example, the two institutions pointed to unreliable data on ownership, conflicts of interest between media owners and politicians and a palpable weak regulatory system that provides obvious threats to freedom of expression in the country. These are because of weaknesses in national policy coordination between the Registrar-General's Department (RGD) and the National Communication Authority. The findings reveal:

In those cases where data was available, it turned out to be incomplete, at times obviously outdated, with either changes in ownership not recorded, or inconsistent

with other public information e.g. from the National Communication Authority (NCA). In some cases, media outlets were registered to a certain company at the National Communication Authority but now operate under the umbrella of a media group by their own accounts. This made it difficult to assert the legal status of some media holdings, for example of the Multimedia Group Ltd., as well as their relations to subsidiaries. The low level of transparency disguises market powers and complicates or even inhibits meaningful regulation of media concentration (MFWA and RSF 2017).

The rippling effects of these anomalies are concerns that deserve the attention of policy makers. Disguised media ownership, concentration and covert and overt political alliances of the owners can impact on the diversity of news served to the unsuspecting audience. There is no doubt that the underpinning principle of liberal multiparty democracy and free media encourage pluralism, access, diversity and freedom of choice (Dzisah 2020). However, when the most impactful media in our societies that are to serve as the voice of reason and conscience are resolutely promoting partisan parochial interests, then it calls for concern. (Media Ownership Monitor – Ghana 2018). While the professionalism of journalists and media practitioners in Africa and Ghana in particular have gained some degree of credibility, there is a certain level of trepidation about the high incursion of politicians into the media industry. According to MFWA and RSF, in Ghana:

Out of the monitored media outlets, a third are either state-owned or have shareholders with political affiliations, amongst them high-level politicians. For example, the Chairman of the governing New Patriotic Party (NPP), Frederick Blay, is a majority shareowner of Western Publications Ltd., publisher of Daily Guide and News One newspapers. Dr. Kwabena Duffour, the listed shareowner of the Excellence in Broadcasting Group Ltd., was former Minister of Finance in the erstwhile National Democratic Congress government (MFWA and RSF 2017).

As revealed by Okocha and Gupta (2018), the degree of ownership in the Ghanaian media is opaque and the situation is exacerbated by the financial challenges the media continue to face. Due to these challenges, the Ghanaian media and journalists and other media professionals are on the cusp of surrendering their hard-won freedom to their perceived new owners – partisan politically exposed persons. A study by Okocha and Gupta published in 2018 revealed how media ownership is negatively impacting professionalism in the media (Okocha & Gupta, 2018). According to the authors, a survey of Ghanaian journalists on some key issues such as the extent of ownership influence on news content, objectivity and journalistic professionalism revealed that “the news is mostly slanted to meet the tastes and aspirations of the media moguls” (p. 148). The respondents claimed “it is not difficult to determine the political leaning of most media houses in Ghana ... media ownership is affecting news content and professionalism in Ghana” (Okocha & Gupta, 148). From the standpoint of pluralist media theory, there is nothing wrong with media owners deciding how to use their legally acquired media. It has been argued that the free market theory of demand and supply act as a check on the consumption of such media products. Indeed, the issue of ideological imperative which influences the political economy of the media cannot be wished away. In further reference to the ownership and control paradigm in the media in Ghana, Okocha and Gupta’s study provides more findings:

If you are not ready to sing to my tune, why should I hire you in the first place? There are instances when one's party affiliation is demanded by the media owners before one is put on air as a presenter or panelist. In the end, the ability to be objective is lost". Probing further, some interviewees added that there are occasions where media men have been refused coverage on a particular story because they are touted as belonging to a certain political party. Some other media houses tend to receive favour in terms of sponsorship from political parties because they promote their agenda (p. 147).

The deep-seated partisanship, manipulation of news content and the ever-evolving ownership and control in the Ghanaian media must be a source of concern. The media's independence is questionable not only as an institution but from the perspective of journalists who cannot be divorced from the ownership and control challenges. The manipulative and active partisan agenda one finds in the Ghanaian media space also raised issues of integrity. In 2004, the editor of the *National Democrat* newspaper, Ebenezer Josiah, at the height of the political electioneering campaign claimed in a 'confession' that the stories he published about J. A. Kufuor, the then incumbent president and presidential candidate of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) were false and concocted. He said they were written for him by key opposition politicians, which were then 'planted' in the newspaper. The 'revelation' made a banner headline in the largest circulation newspaper in the country, the *Daily Graphic* and other leading media outlets. It shook the foundation of Ghanaian journalism. However, in a counter-publication to discredit the 'confession', the editorial staff of the newspaper made damning allegations against Ebenezer Josiah. *The National Democrat* claimed their former editor had been induced by the Kufuor government with a postgraduate scholarship to study at Cardiff University. Instructively, the newspaper has not hidden its affiliation to the National Democratic Congress, a major political party which claims to subscribe to the left-of-centre ideology of social democracy (Dzisah, 2020).

Another journalist, the Ato Sam, editor of *New Punch* newspaper, in 2010 also 'confessed' to publishing fabricated stories on the then presidential candidate of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and later president, John Evans Atta Mills in 2008. He claimed stories he wrote ahead of the 2008 elections in regard to the then candidate's poor health was 'fabricated' to make him look less attractive to the electorate. Ato Sam's 'confession' in 2010, two years into the presidency of the late John Atta Mills came on the heels of his inclusion on a trip by the president to Trinidad and Tobago. His 'revelation' was branded opportunistic after he had returned from the tour. The partisan and manipulative part of the 'confession' had been his 'beef' with the then NPP Government (right-of-centre political party) who he claimed to have wholeheartedly supported and for which he wrote such scurrilous stories about Atta Mills (Dzisah 2020). Besides the so-called confessions and revelations, the partisanship, polarization and unprofessional conduct of journalists and media practitioners irritated some concerned professionals in the profession. For example, Andrew Edwin Arthur, a journalist was quoted by the *Ghanaian Chronicle* thus:

Ghana's media today have been polarised to the extreme, to the extent that, we have thrown professionalism and ethics to the wind. Journalists have allowed themselves to be manipulated and influenced by politicians such that, some of us have lost our sense of professional identities. Some journalists in this country have contributed to the sharp political divide and the seemingly atmosphere of insecurity in which we find ourselves today. It is sad to hear the kinds of

arguments some media personnel put across in defence of certain political ideologies (Arthur 2009).

A similar view was expressed by the President of the Ghana Journalist Association (GJA), Affail Monney. He avers,

Our attitude to each other especially those we perceive as our political enemies' stinks, to say the least, and the exceedingly bad political odour is reflected in the emotional overdrive with which issues are discussed and comments made on the airwaves and in the private newspapers (Dzisah 2020).

As McNair (2018) argued, an independent media which is clothed with journalistic integrity and professionalism is required to engender quality debate and discussion to expand the frontiers of democratic discourse and opinion formation. In the case of media ownership and control and Ghana's democratic development, the partisanship appears have taken a deeper root. The informational obligation imposed on the media by their own eternal verities presupposes that their democratic relevance is anchored on the need to facilitate the construction of debate in a balanced and fair manner. As McNair (2018) observed, the debate within the sphere through the information provided by the media could be enriching for democracy and participation because of its purported independence. Emphasis on liberalism in the ownership and control structures of the media has the tendency to engender democratic discourses which could give concrete manifestation to the deliberative and dialogic functions of the public sphere.

5. Discussion

Various arguments have been put forward to explain the merits and demerits of the media's role in a democracy, either under the free market or state ownership and control. Some scholars have raised particular concerns about the creeping undemocratic tendencies in the quest to enhance media pluralism (Allam, 2023; Curran, 2014; Rab & Sprague, McChesney, 2015). The key findings from this conceptual and theoretical paper lend themselves to critical discussion. It has been established in this paper that, media business ownership and control are promoting more partisanship and polarization of the citizenry.

It is evident that political ideology and in particular partisanship of the owners in Ghana's democracy has an influence on editorial policy and even leads to fabrication disinformation. Clearly, the free market or pluralism engendered by multiparty democracy has a bearing on the creeping intolerance and manipulation of media content to please the owners (Akaeze, 2023; McChesney, 2015, Okocha & Gupta, 2018). The evidential value of ownership manipulation, control and partisanship in a plural setting may not breach any constitutional provision in Ghana's democracy. However, it is scary if we draw experiences and lessons from other jurisdictions on how such ownership, control and extreme partisanship could threaten the peace. A reckless and hate speech on Radio Mille Colline led to the Rwandan genocide and must be seen as guide in analysing the extent of ownership, control and partisanship in a multiparty democracy

The second finding also affirms the second objective of subtle control, interference by both state actors and private business owners. This, undoubtedly affects the health of Ghana's democracy. From the arguments advanced in the literature it has emerged strongly that there is pervasive interference from political and business owners as well as government in the operations of the media. This has the tendency to dilute the quality of democratic governance (Koc-Michalska et al., 2023; Okocha & Gupta, 2018; Curran 2014). This evidence from empirical studies conducted by other researchers and critiqued in this paper is relevant. The finding goes beyond the traditional notion of media's own agenda setting and manipulative power to engender debates and for the construction of reality (Dzisah, 2020). It ought to be noted from the pluralist underpinning of liberalized media that its strength lies in the promotion of the anti-authoritarian strain and an antipathy towards government regulation (Mabweazara et al., 2023; Rab & Sprague, 2022; Siebert et al., 1956; Curran, 2014) Within the ambit of the emergence of media concentration or the shift towards oligopolies in the Ghanaian media, the democratic dividends of pluralism may not necessarily promote diversity and variety.

6. Conclusion

Whatever form of media ownership and control being experienced from state and private spectrum reflect the narrow prism through which multiparty democracy views pluralism in the media. And for a fledgling democracy such as Ghana, evidence of media concentration in the hands of private media businesses or what others prefer to call media moguls could impact the attempt to reduce poverty among the population. This springs from the premise established in this paper as to the relevance of the public sphere which is largely to ensure greater ventilation of citizens viewpoints and opinions in a democracy (Dzisah, 2024; Habermas, 1989). It has been established that media ownership and control per se does not constitute an erosion of democracy. What is of concern is the creeping interference in the work of media professionals by the elitist owners and the extreme partisanship which tends to negate toleration and dissent in a democracy (Nyarko, 2023; Allam, 2023; Chuma et al., 2017).

Media oligopolies not only perpetuate elitist tendencies and lead to alienation of the very people the media is to serve but also result in dearth of critical analysis. This occurs due to the dilution of the binary perspectives they ought to offer. The interactions of these two variables – ownership and elitist control factors – tend to create news production processes, transmission mechanisms and dissemination strategies, which in most cases affirm the notion of elitism, privilege and status. Consequently, the end game is the stifling of the viewpoints and opinions of the vulnerable majority even if it does not completely silence dissenting opinions that are central to robust public debates, discussions and the practice of democracy (Akaeze, 2023; Mabweazara et al., 2023; McNair, 2018; Koc-Michalska et al., 2023; Reid, 2017). Clearly, any form of control and ownership that does not reflect the will of the people is bad. None can lay claim to the protection and promotion of freedoms, values and aspirations of a given society due to inherent interests.

The paper concluded that the route out of the media ownership and control conundrum is for the operation of the state media, for example to be completely put under a Trust and to function independently as a public service. Secondly, in a liberal democratic setting, it is our contended view that a more nuanced entrepreneurial group of independents be encouraged to invest in the media with the view to reducing the deep and divisive partisanship which has come to dominate the ownership and control matrices in the Ghanaian media. Governments should be pressurized

through international bodies such as multilateral and United Nations agencies to commit more resources for the development and expansion of infrastructure in new digital technologies which are accessible by most citizens. In this way, the attempt at using financial muscle or elitist influence to control and interfere in the operations of the media could be minimised.

References

Akazeze, A. (2023). Media ownership, politics and propaganda in Nigerian. In W. Mano & L. El Mkaouar (eds) *Media Ownership in Africa in the Digital Age: Challenges, Continuity and Change*. London: Routledge, 119-142. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003111924>

Albarran, A. B. (2016). *The Media Economy*. Taylor & Francis.

Allam, R. (2023). Egyptian Media Ownership and Pluralism: Overview, Performance, and Challenges. In W. Mano & L. El Mkaouar (eds) *Media Ownership in Africa in the Digital Age: Challenges, Continuity and Change*. London: Routledge, 221-234. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003111924>

Arthur, E. (2009). Extreme Partisanship affecting Media Professionalism. *Chronicle*, June 4, p. 3.

Barnett, S. & Gaber, I. (2001). *Westminster Tales: The Twenty-First Century Crisis in British Political Journalism*. London: Continuum.

Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1995). *The Crisis of Public Communication*. London: Routledge.

Cagé, J., & Mougin, E. (2023). The African “Hidden Media Capture”. In W. Mano & L. El Mkaouar (eds) *Media Ownership in Africa in the Digital Age: Challenges, Continuity and Change*. London: Routledge, pp. 31-49. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003111924>

Chuma, W., Wasserman, H., Bosch, T., & Pointer, R. (2017). Questioning the Media-Democracy Link: South African Journalists’ Views. *African Journalism Studies*, 38:1, 104-128. DOI:10.1080/23743670.2017.1292703

Curran, J. (1991). Rethinking the Public Sphere. In P. Dahlgren and C. Sparks (eds) *Communication and Citizenship*. London: Routledge, 27–57.

Curran, J. (2005). Mediations of Democracy. In J. Curran and M. Gurevitch (eds) *Mass Media and Society*, 4th ed. London and New York: Hodder Arnold, 122–49.

Curran, J. (2014). Reinterpreting the Democratic Roles of the Media. *Brazilian Journalism Research*, 10:2, 28–53. <https://doi.org/10.25200/BJR.v3n1.2007.98>

Curran, J. (2014). Foreword. In J. Hardy (Ed.) *Critical Political Economy of the Media: An Introduction*. Routledge, pp. x–xx.

Dzisah, W.S., & Herzuah, P. (2024). Political Communication in an Emerging Democracy: A Framing Analysis of Presidential Inaugural Addresses in Ghana's Fourth Republic. In A. Ayee., S. Alidu., & L. Amoah (eds.) *Political Institutions, Party Politics, and Communication in Ghana: Three Decades of the Fourth Republic*. London: Palgrave, 199-220. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-54744-7>

Dzisah, W.S. (2020). *The Media-Democracy Paradox: Rethinking Political Communication in An African Context*. Bristol & Chicago: Intellect & The University of Chicago. ISBN 978-1-78938-236-5

Dzisah, W. S. (2008). *The News Media and Democracy in Ghana*. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis. University of Westminster: CAMRI.

Koc-Michalska, K., Lilleker, D., Baden, C., Guzek, D., Bene, M., & Doroshenko, L. (2023). Digital Media, Democracy and Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, Vol. 21 (1), pp. 1-5. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2023.2257012>

Habermas, J. (1989). *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Lee, Chin-Chuan (2001). Rethinking Political Economy: Implications for Media and Democracy in Greater China, *Javnost - The Public* 8(4), 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2001.11008787>

Mabweazara, M. H., Muneri, T. C., & Ndlovu, F. (2023). Perverted Loyalties Media Capture, Control and Patrimonialism in Sub-Saharan Africa. In W. Mano & L. El Mkaouar (eds) *Media Ownership in Africa in the Digital Age: Challenges, Continuity and Change*. London: Routledge, 50-68. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003111924>

McChesney, R. W. (2000). *Rich Media, Poor Democracy, Communication Politics in Dubious Times*. New York: The New Press.

McChesney, R. W. (2015). *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times*. New York: The New Press.

McNair, B. (2018). *An Introduction to Political Communication*, 6th ed. London and New York: Routledge.

McQuail, D. & Deuze, M. (2020). *McQuail's Media and Mass Communication Theory* (7th Edition). London: Sage. <https://doi.org/10.1515/commun-2021-0094>.

McQuail, D. (2005). *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*, 5th ed. London: Sage.

MFWA and RSF (2017). *Who Owns the Media in Ghana: Media Ownership Monitor in Ghana Project*. Accra: Ghana.

Mill, J. S. (1962). *Utilitarianism, Liberty and Representative Government*. London: J.M. Dent.

Milton, J. (1644). *Aeropagitica*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mutsvairo, B., Columbus, S. & Leijendekker, I. (2012). African Citizen Journalists Ethics and the Emerging Networked Public Sphere. Research.utwente, <https://online.journalism.utexas.edu/2012/papers/Mutsvairo.pdf>. Accessed 26 July 2024.

National Media Commission (2023). Programme-Based Budget Estimates for 2024. Accra: NMC.

National Media Commission (2004). *Annual Media Policy*. Accra: NMC.

Nyarko, J. (2023). Media Diversification: Redefining Reliance on Advertising Revenue and Autonomy Implications. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 9(1), 21933-82, doi: 10.1080/23311886.2023.2193382

Okocha, D. O., & Gupta, Y. K. (2018). Influence of Media Owners' Political Affiliations on Journalistic Professionalism in Ghana. *International Journal of Research in Engineering, IT and Social Sciences*, Vol. 8 (5), pp. 141-153.

Rab, S., & Sprague, A. (2022). *Media Ownership and Control: Law, Economics and Policy in an Indian and International Context*. Bloomsbury.

Reid, J. (2017). Counter-Mythologising Media Freedom: Including the Audience in Media Freedom Discourses and a New Normative Position for the Global South. *Communicatio*, 43:2, 74–92.

Rodny-Gumede, Y., Milton, V. C., & Mano, W. (2017). 'Rethinking the Link Between Media and Democracy in the Post-Colony: One Size Does Not Fit All'. *Communicatio*, 43:2, 1–9.

Schlosberg, Justin (2016). *Media Ownership and Agenda Control: The Hidden Limits of the Information Age* (1st Edition). London & New York: Routledge.

Siebert, F., Peterson, T., & Schramm, W. (1956). *Four Theories of the Press*. Chicago/Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Voltmer, K. (2006). The Mass Media and the Dynamics of Political Communication in Processes of Democratization: An Introduction. in K. Voltmer (ed.), *Mass Media and Political Communication in New Democracies*. Greenwich: JAI Press, 1– 20.

Online References/Resources

<https://www.nca.org.gh/authorisedradiostations> [Accessed 4 July, 2024]

<https://www.nca.org.gh/authorisedtvbroadcastingstations> [Accessed 4 July, 2024]

https://mofep.gov.gh/sites/default/files/pbb-estimates/2024/2024-PBB-NMC_.pdf [Accessed 4 July, 2024]