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Research Paper

Taraba journalists' perception of factors influencing media content production in nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Background: Media content production is influenced by various organizational, technological, institutional, and political factors that shape journalistic practices and professional independence. This study investigated journalists' perceptions of the factors affecting media content production in Taraba State, Nigeria.
Methods: The study adopted a survey research design guided by the Gatekeeping Theory. Data were collected using structured questionnaires administered to 96 registered journalists affiliated with the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Taraba State Chapter. Of the 96 questionnaires distributed, 87 were retrieved and analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions and mean scores, with a benchmark mean of 3.0.
Results: The findings revealed that organizational factors, particularly editorial controls, ownership influences, and newsroom policies, significantly influenced media content production. Technological factors, including digital tools, internet facilities, and social media platforms, facilitated news gathering and content production but raised concerns regarding information accuracy and verifiability. Institutional and governmental pressures were also found to constrain journalists' professional independence.
Conclusion: Media content production in Taraba State is substantially influenced by organizational structures and external pressures, limiting the professional autonomy of journalists. The study recommends strengthening editorial independence within media organizations and establishing a safe and supportive working environment for journalists through appropriate government policies and institutional measures.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Over the years, media content production in Nigeria has evolved and journalists work in a competitive and hectic environment, producing media content on TV, radio, on-line and on social media. There are various issues at play in deciding what content gets produced and presented-newsroom policies, ownership influence, audience pressure, technology, and experience among others. Journalistic practice in Taraba State, where journalists have to deal with sensitive issues such as conflicts, politics, development and other issues, can also be seen in relation to how they are placed and pressurized during such reporting [1]. Thus, content production goes beyond skill, but also the environment it takes place in.

Moreover, media content production is institutionally and socially defined. Journalists do not exist in a vacuum, they respond to editorial pressure, organizational requirements, and public opinion, for instance investigative journalism as a mechanism for accountability must be enabled by the institution, and by safety standards [2], [3] Taraba journalists see the importance of investigative journalism in combating corruption, although structure impede its effectiveness. In addition to the internal dynamics of the newsroom, the perceptions of the audience are also key factors influencing media content production. Journalists often know what will elicit a reaction from the audience, and shape their news stories accordingly in tone, framing and emphasis, for instance sensitive stories in conflict situations may be carefully managed in order not to escalate tension or have bias [4]. [5] discovered that if audiences have confidence in media organizations, they will trust the information that is provided. Journalists are part of the feedback mechanism that makes media practice in the state an ever-evolving cycle where this belief influences the way they report news.

Further, Taraba State is a society that looks forward to developmental and social responsibilities of media, media is used not only to disseminate information but also as tool of development and advocacy, at some point, media production that serves rural development purpose, peace building and social consciousness are often produced, therefore, [6] posits that advocacy journalism has great potential toward facilitating rural development in Taraba State, that means journalism is not just about reporting events but the act of intervention in the society, again conflict sensitive reporting is very important as sheers are affected by the pastoralist-herder's clash that affect some parts of the state, [7] said media framing of the issue determines what the public views, the journalists have a dual role in making his work to be informative and socially responsive.

Even with all this, journalists are still exposed to numerous influences in the profession. The forces include but are not limited to, political influence, ownership influence, financial constraints, security issues, and audience demand which may directly affect what they do, what is reported and how it is reported as well as how content takes its final form. It is, therefore, not clear how these influences shape journalists' thought process concerning media content production in Taraba State and Nigeria, for this study however, Taraba Journalists' perceptions of media content production in Nigeria are explored. The purpose of this study was to evaluate Taraba Journalists' perception of the factors that determine media content production in Nigeria. Specific objectives of this study were: to determine the organizational, technological, professional and environment factors that affect content production by journalists in Nigeria.

2. RELATED WORK

2.1. Journalism Practice and Factors Influencing Media Content Production

Media content production is the practice that constitutes journalism. The preparation and presentation of news information to the masses through selected sources constitutes this practice. Nigerian practice however is not value-free. It is influenced by a number of internal and external factors; newsroom

environment, resources available, ethics of professional practice, as well as external factors. [8] argue that broadcasting organizations like Taraba State Broadcasting Service have operational challenges due to the inadequate funding of stations, lack of equipment, operational difficulties etc. All these factors do have an impact on the quality, depth and consistency of production of news material. They also compel journalists to file their stories on time under pressure and thus limit the in-depth aspect of the story.

Again, [9] contend that personal and social realities of the practicing journalist significantly influence journalism practice. It was concluded that journalists, particularly women, contend with professional responsibility against responsibility at home which invariably limit their attention and thereby reducing productivity. Additionally, journalism practice in Nigeria is also influenced by institutional expectations and editorial control [10].

In many media organizations, journalists are not totally independent of what they produce. Organizational interests and editorial priorities largely determine what to write, when to write and even how to present it. Training and capacity of a journalist is also a significant factor that shapes the content produced. Most of the practitioners operate in organizations where formal training is not sustained due to many factors. The impact of such training constraint is that journalists will lack capacity to cope with the adoption of new technologies, standards and even tools that the modern media landscape offers to the practitioners [11].

This is evident from the current importance of digital technologies and multimedia reporting to journalism as a practice and how training can have a positive influence on the production of news in modern Nigeria journalism not only in external influence but also by capacity limitations of the practicing journalism.

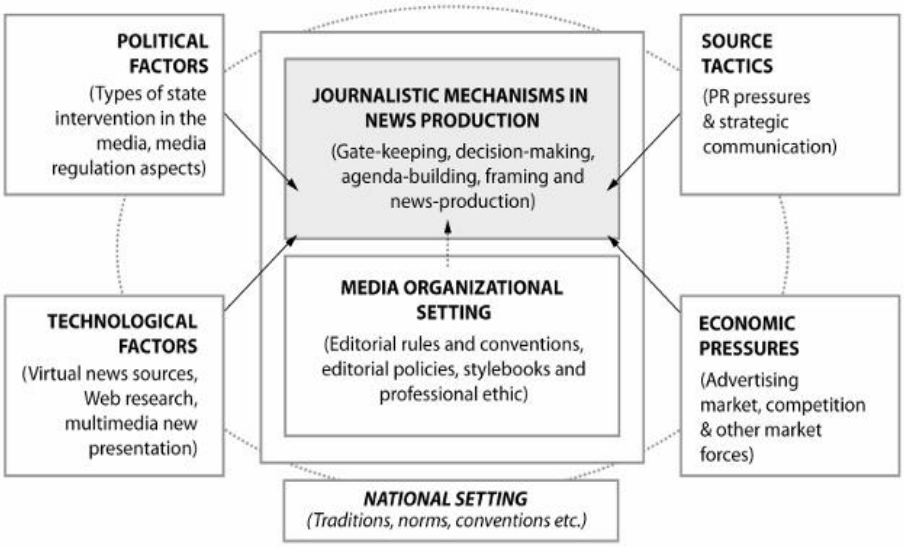


Figure 1. Factors Affecting News Flow - Adapted from Mcnair (2000)

Figure 1 represents that the way in which news is made is determined by the working practices of the journalists and the rules of their media organization that are also affected by political, economic, source, technological and national factors.

2.2. Media Ownership, Political Influence, and Editorial Control in Content Production

Media ownership has also shaped the way journalism practices and content is produced. In Nigeria, majority of media outlets are either state owned or privately owned. These ownership patterns also have a way of impacting on the editorial autonomy and this, according to [12] "ownership greatly impacts how social movements are portrayed". Most news organizations tend to represent the views and interests of their owners thereby leading to selective coverage, slanted framing and omission of the views and issues of other actors.

The study of [13] is in tandem with this assertion as ownership affiliations and political links play a role in influencing how issues, particularly political news are framed and broadcast. This means that while practicing the profession, journalists are subjected to, whether consciously or unconsciously, the influences that could steer the story to the expected direction in line with the organization and the political affiliations. This thus compromises the level of independence the journalist would want to exercise, raising questions as to how credible and unbiased the story could be and how the journalist becomes 'gatekeepers under instruction' than objective viewers.

This has long-term consequences to the creditability of media houses, where readers might view all reporting as bias leading to the distrust of the institution and consequently weakening the role of journalists as watchdog of the society [14]. Other hierarchies ccan also shape media contet production as seen in Figure 2.

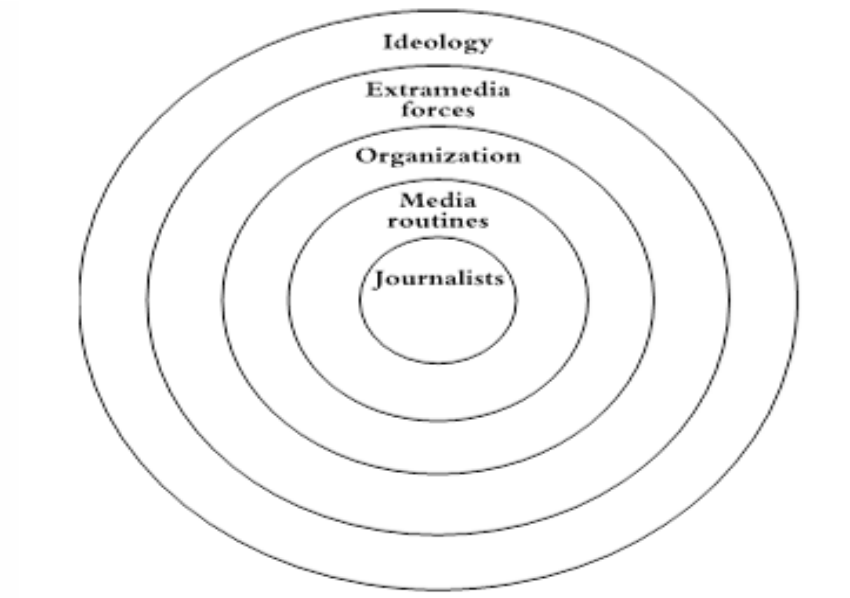


Figure 2. Hierarchical Model of Influences Shaping Media Content

2.3. Conflict Reporting, Social Media Influence, and Environmental Pressures on Journalism Practice

One of the areas of sensitive reporting for journalists in Nigeria is conflict reportage, this is more particularly prevalent in areas such as Taraba State where journalists cover events on ethno-religious conflicts and instability as well as the farmer/herder conflicts in Nigeria. According to [15] "the discourse and ideological frames of a particular society largely shape reporting of conflicts in that particular context." In other words, journalists unconsciously adopt certain frameworks that influence how events are reported.

The study by [16] argue that social media have become central in combating insecurity challenges in Taraba State. They go further to add that even though social media offers access to immediate information it encourages spread of unverified news hence journalists are under pressure to confirm such reports before publicizing. Speed and veracity are conundrums in such instances; and there are often conflicting situations with time. Also, [17] asserts that Stakeholders use social media for managing ethno-religious conflicts while the role of journalists continues to be that of verification and explanation. The citizen journalist adds to this complexity; thus, information producers are both professionals and novices competing for credibility. As shown in Figure 3, six components of a journalist's capital (skills, connections, knowledge, reputation, money and tools) have a direct influence on news production because they determine what news a journalist can access, how a journalist reports on that story, and the level of impact that story can have.



Figure 3. Elements of Journalistic Capital

Similarly, journalism practice is comeeplicated further by audience expectations driven by social media; for a continuous, up to the moment and emotion-filled news item, which places the responsibility of a ccuracy and balance on speed [18]. In addition, the Nigerian context also plays an important role in influencing how conflict is reported.

2.4. Theoretical Framework

This research is based on the Gatekeeping theory proposed by Kurt Lewin in 1947. The theory explains the way information passes through 'gates' controlled by the individual or institution before reaching the audience. In journalism, gatekeepers are editors, reporters, producers and media managers that control the selection, shaping and distribution of news; some information may even be neglected entirely. The basic premise of gatekeeping is that while every event could theoretically become news, only a selection is made, as media professionals "filter, select, and transmit information" based on factors such as organizational policy, professional judgment, reader interest and outside pressure.

As noted by [19], gatekeeping is now more than a sole person decision making process; the decisions are influenced by human beings as well as technological devices especially in the new digital media environment. The Gatekeeping theory offers a theoretical background to this study that looks into Taraba journalists' perception on issues shaping media content production in Nigeria. Taraba State Broadcasting Service and other media houses function as the gatekeepers, as it is in these institutions that journalists decide what is to be done with a story. As indicated by [19], in the developing media context, the gate-keeping processes are significantly impacted by structural factors, such as influence of ownership and political sensitivity which would lead to what finally reach out to the audiences.

The theory is also applicable because it addresses the mechanism with which journalists at Taraba treat sensitives issues like report on conflict, political discourse and development- related stories. Further explanation from Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda Model in 1988 shows that media content is filtered through various mechanisms and levels including owners, political/ governmental pressures etc. Here at Taraba State, it's possible that journalists may alter or suspend stories as a result of security challenges or policies within their organization. It aligns with the works of [20], who maintain that editorial decisions are now affected more and more by organizational control and pressures from audience in today's media landscape.

The study on new media and new pattern of content production will add to the existing gatekeeping studies, that today, gatekeeping doesn't end with the journalists at newsroom; journalists at Taraba consider trends of news items at social media, audience responses and interaction before publishing stories. This is explained by [21] in their explanation of "multi-level gatekeeping"; "individual reporters, news routines, organizational factors, and the social environment will act on news judgments at all levels of the media industry simultaneously." For this research, it will be important to know how these influencing factors at various levels are interpreted and responded by the Taraba journalists in production processes, and in that way help understand how the filtering mechanism works, thus affecting what becomes public news.

3. METHODOLOGY

The research adopted the survey research design, in which the questionnaire served as the primary method of data collection. The survey research design was chosen for the study because of the fact that it helps the researcher to get data from a large sample population of the respondents and to assess them systematically. Because the research is about the perception of journalists to issues that determine production of media content in Taraba State, the survey method was most convenient for the opinion, experience and judgment of journalist spread across different media organization in Taraba State. The study was carried out on all the 433 registered journalists of the Nigerian Union of Journalist (NUJ), Taraba State Chapter. These journalists belong to various media organizations and chapels which include Taraba State Broadcasting Service Chapel, Nigerian Television Authority Chapel, Correspondent Chapel, Taraba Television Corporation Chapel, Taraba News Chapel and the Ministry of Information Chapel in broadcast and print media like the NTA Jalingo, TSBS stations located in Jalingo, Mararaba and Serti, Rock FM Jalingo, Haske FM/TV, Kwararafa TV, Sunrise Newspaper, Taraba News Newspaper among others. This population was suitable because the people within this category are professional journalists who produce media content in Taraba State. The sample size used in the study was determined by Yamane (1967) formula of sample size, given the population size of 433 and the 9% margin of error the size of the sample is approximately 96 respondents. The formula states n = N/ (1 + N(e)) where 'n' represents the size of the sample and 'N' represents the population size, and 'e' represents the error margin, so n = 433/ (1 + 433(0.09)) which yielded 96 respondents.

The questionnaire was phrased in clear and understandable language. The respondents were made to respond to questions on the five-point likert scale, which ranges from strongly agree to strongly disagree. This instrument was vetted by knowledgeable mass communication scholars before administration and pre-tested among a small number of journalists in other states outside Taraba.

Out of the 96 copies of the questionnaire administered, only 87 were retrieved for analysis. The data retrieved was analyzed using descriptive statistics in the form of frequency count and means. The decisions were made by adopting a decision rule, where a mean score of 3.0 or above implies respondents agree and a mean score less than 3.0 implies respondents disagree.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Results

Table 1. Taraba Journalists' Perceptions of Organisational Factors Influencing Media Content Production (N = 96)

Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	SD	Decision
Organizational policies strongly influence the type of news content I produce.	34 (35.4%)	38 (39.6%)	6 (6.3%)	12 (12.5%)	6 (6.3%)	3.85	1.12	Accepted
Editorial control affects the selection of news stories in my newsroom.	31 (32.3%)	40 (41.7%)	7 (7.3%)	11 (11.5%)	7 (7.3%)	3.79	1.13	Accepted
Management ownership of media houses influences content direction.	36 (37.5%)	37 (38.5%)	5 (5.2%)	10 (10.4%)	8 (8.3%)	3.87	1.15	Accepted
Availability of resources affects the quality of content I produce.	33 (34.4%)	39 (40.6%)	6 (6.3%)	11 (11.5%)	7 (7.3%)	3.82	1.11	Accepted

Time pressure from newsroom routines influences content production decisions.	35 (36.5%)	38 (39.6%)	6 (6.3%)	10 (10.4%)	7 (7.3%)	3.84	1.10	Accepted
Aggregate Mean						3.83	1.12	Accepted

From Table 1, it is evident that most journalists in Taraba State concur that organizational variables significantly affect the content that the media produces. The majority reported that newsroom policies, ownership control, editorial control, resources, and deadlines significantly affect what kind of news story they cover. Agreement on the highest point of ownership control and organizational policies implies that journalists sometimes operate within restrictive frameworks and their reporting isn't entirely unhindered. Most reporters also concur that limited resources have significant effects on the scope and depth of news coverage and the constraints of deadline affect news choices and production process.

Table 2. Technological Factors Influencing Media Content Production in Taraba State (N = 96)

Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	SD	Decision
Access to digital tools improves my content production process.	37 (38.5%)	40 (41.7%)	5 (5.2%)	9 (9.4%)	5 (5.2%)	3.99	1.09	Accepted
Internet connectivity affects my ability to gather news.	36 (37.5%)	39 (40.6%)	6 (6.3%)	10 (10.4%)	5 (5.2%)	3.95	1.10	Accepted
Mobile phones and digital devices are essential for my reporting.	42 (43.8%)	35 (36.5%)	4 (4.2%)	9 (9.4%)	6 (6.3%)	4.02	1.08	Accepted
Digital editing tools improve the quality of my news production.	34 (35.4%)	41 (42.7%)	6 (6.3%)	9 (9.4%)	6 (6.3%)	3.92	1.11	Accepted
Social media platforms influence my news gathering process.	38 (39.6%)	37 (38.5%)	5 (5.2%)	9 (9.4%)	7 (7.3%)	3.90	1.12	Accepted
Aggregate Mean						3.96	1.10	Accepted

From Table 2, it can be clearly observed that technology is an extremely strong determining factor in media content production among the Taraba State journalists. It was found out that a vast majority of the respondents indicated that the use of technology is a necessity in their profession. Digital technology, like cell phones, editing applications and the Internet are key ingredients in media content production. Many journalists expressed that the usage of technology increases speed and quality of production of news contents. Some critics, however, observed that it is often problematic in terms of the effectiveness of the production due to inefficient network connections, particularly at remote places. Use of social media was also identified as an important news source strategy.

Table 3. Institutional and Professional Factors Influencing Media Content Production (N = 96)

Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	SD	Decision
Professional ethics guide my content production decisions.	40 (41.7%)	36 (37.5%)	5 (5.2%)	9 (9.4%)	6 (6.3%)	4.00	1.07	Accepted

Training and professional development affect my reporting skills.	35 (36.5%)	38 (39.6%)	6 (6.3%)	10 (10.4%)	7 (7.3%)	3.85	1.12	Accepted
Journalistic experience influences the type of content I produce.	39 (40.6%)	37 (38.5%)	5 (5.2%)	9 (9.4%)	6 (6.3%)	3.98	1.09	Accepted
Peer influence in the newsroom affects content production decisions.	33 (34.4%)	40 (41.7%)	6 (6.3%)	10 (10.4%)	7 (7.3%)	3.82	1.11	Accepted
Institutional guidelines shape how I report news stories.	37 (38.5%)	39 (40.6%)	5 (5.2%)	9 (9.4%)	6 (6.3%)	3.94	1.10	Accepted
Aggregate Mean						3.92	1.10	Accepted

From Table 3, it is observed that institution and professional factors have much to play in the content production by journalists in Taraba State. A vast majority of the respondents affirmed that experience, ethics, training, newsroom standards among other professional variables shape their decisions when they produce news. The respondents further observed that through training and continuing professional education, their abilities to be able to tell accurate and objective stories become more evident. It was further discovered that journalists are also influenced by their colleagues in the newsroom when producing news. The results showed that professional and institution factors shape the reporting process of journalists in Taraba State.

Table 4. External Environmental Factors Influencing Media Content Production (N = 96)

Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	SD	Decision
Political environment influences the type of stories I report.	38 (39.6%)	37 (38.5%)	6 (6.3%)	9 (9.4%)	6 (6.3%)	3.92	1.11	Accepted
Security challenges affect news gathering and reporting.	41 (42.7%)	35 (36.5%)	5 (5.2%)	9 (9.4%)	6 (6.3%)	4.00	1.09	Accepted
Audience expectations influence my content production decisions.	36 (37.5%)	38 (39.6%)	6 (6.3%)	10 (10.4%)	6 (6.3%)	3.88	1.10	Accepted
Government policies affect media freedom in reporting.	40 (41.7%)	36 (37.5%)	5 (5.2%)	9 (9.4%)	6 (6.3%)	3.97	1.08	Accepted
Community pressure influences how I frame news stories.	34 (35.4%)	39 (40.6%)	6 (6.3%)	11 (11.5%)	6 (6.3%)	3.84	1.12	Accepted
Aggregate Mean						3.92	1.10	Accepted

Table 4 indicates the influence external environmental forces had on media content production in Taraba State. This agrees with respondents on how political situations, government policy, security challenges, audience expectations and community pressures affect the production and framing of news stories by journalists. In fact, many respondents cited security challenges that hindered the movement of

journalists and their access to sources. This further reveals the dominance of politics in how journalist's cover stories while audience expectations also play a crucial role in how stories are packaged.

4.2. Discussion

The study found that media practitioners in Taraba State were subject to a confluence of organizational, technological, professional, and environmental constraints. When analyzed closely, however, these factors, as revealed in this study, are not evenly distributed; instead, the organizational and environmental factors exert more pressure than individual professional control, a feature indicative of the general structural constraints influencing Nigerian journalism practices where individual autonomy is increasingly limited by the institution's structure. [8] posit that the operation of broadcast media in Taraba State are hindered by various institutional constraints including ownership interference, low financing, and operational pressures, an observation that is similar to the finding in this study with organizational policies and owners' concerns highly determining the nature of media production. It was the extent to which journalists said they were dictated to by their employers, newsroom politics and owners of media establishments that was remarkable and clearly stated in this study. This implies a loss of individual autonomy in the production process by journalists working in Taraba State and that journalists' reports and content are controlled by the institutional setting in which they operate. This aligns with the views of [13] that owners' ideologies and institutional affiliation significantly affect news framing in Nigeria especially when the media content is likely to have political implications; journalists in such scenarios are likely to avoid writing content that does not go down well with their superiors or owners.

Another key finding is the strong presence of technological aspects especially digital tools and social media in the practice of journalism, this aspect shows media evolution; however, it poses new problems. These journalists rely much on the mobile phone, internet platforms and social media for news gathering and dissemination, and [22], [23] note that social media have now become paramount in the transmission of information in Taraba State, particularly during security concerns and for public awareness. This also makes journalism susceptible to the verification of data and precision, because there are tendencies to broadcast unverified and uncomplete news information if a journalist relies too much on digital technology. Thus, while digital technology has enabled rapid dissemination of information, it has also become susceptible to manipulation.

Professional and institutional variables such as professional ethics, training and experience appear to have an effect on media output but this variable seems less potent than organizational and technological factors; this tends to infer that even though these journalists have been adequately trained and are supposed to be working within ethical boundaries, external forces sometimes compel them not to do so optimally. [24], [25] state that journalists are often caught between professionalism and organizational/personal demands as well as difficulties arising from work constraints particularly when operating in critical contexts and this may also help to explain why professional ethics and training do not yield sufficiently strong professional independence.

The study finally concludes that political, security and audience expectations/governmental influences have a significant impact on the practice of journalism in Taraba State. This is the most revealing aspect of the study as it reveals how practice is shaped by external influences. This observation confirms the idea that journalism practice can be influenced by external factors where journalists make news decision influenced by the sensitivity of the political environment and security situation of the place, the community influence on reporting, etc. [26], [27] write that media reporting of the subject of conflicts in some conflict affected areas is heavily influenced by ideology and society that determine the way the subject is reported. So also, it was reported in Taraba State that the practice of investigative reporting by journalists is to a very large extent influenced by the threat to security and politics, the findings confirm the conclusion that journalism in the State has so much to do with external factors than the normal ethical requirements for news reportage.

5. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the nature of media content production by Taraba State journalists is a result of the complex interplay of organizational, technological, professional and environmental influences. The study reveals that while journalists generally possess both the skills and the professional expertise to function effectively as reporters, newsroom operations, media ownership, and external forces including politics, security situations, and audience demands strongly influence the reporting process. Digital media have enabled quicker production and easier access to news yet pose difficulties in terms of accuracy and fact checking. The study further indicates that while professional values and training remain significant to journalists' role as communicators, they often appear to have been eroded by constraints posed by the system and the environment. It thus offers the following recommendations:

1. Organizations in Taraba State should provide media practitioners with maximum editorial freedom and less intervention by owners/management in content production to allow them to utilize their skills.
2. Media practitioners in Taraba State should be regularly retrained on usage of digital technologies and methods of verification to ensure they do not undermine credibility by rapid reportage.
3. Relevant institutions and stakeholders (government included) should make the environment much more secure and conductive for journalists' reporting activities and guarantee press freedom in the interest of balanced and free reporting, free from fear and undue pressures.

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Author Contribution Statement

Name of Author	C	M	So	Va	Fo	I	R	D	O	E	Vi	Su	P	Fu
Dr. Sharifatu Gago Ja'afaru	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Dr. Livinus Jesse Ayih			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	

C: **C**onceptualization
M: **M**ethodology
So: **So**ftware
Va: **Va**lidation
Fo: **Fo**rmal analysis
I: **I**nvestigation
R: **R**esources
D: **D**ata Curation
O: Writing - **O**riginal Draft
E: Writing - Review & **E**diting
Vi: **Vi**sualization
Su: **Su**pervision
P: **P**roject administration
Fu: **Fu**nding acquisition

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this study. The authors state there is no conflict of interest.

Informed Consent

The Taraba State journalists involved in this study gave informed consent. They participated in responding to the research questions that were presented in form of questionnaire and accepted that their opinions be written.

Ethical Approval

The research on Taraba journalists' perception was conducted with all the appropriate general regulations and established guidelines in line with the principles of the Helsinki Declaration and has been approved by scholars in the media and communication field during the face and content validity test of the instrument. The validity test confirmed that items in the instrument were appropriate to study Taraba journalists' perception of factors influencing media content production in Nigeria.

Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author, Dr. SGJ. The data, which contain information that could compromise the privacy of research participants, is not publicly available due to certain restrictions.

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