ISA Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (ISAJAHSS)

Homepage: https://isapublisher.com/isajahss/

Vol 3, Issue 5, Sept-Oct - 2026 ISSN: 3049-1827

Sponsored Content and the Displacement of Public Interest News: A Survey of Journalistic Perceptions in North Central Nigeria

Osamuyime Igbinadolor; Mercy Tartsea-Anshase (PhD) & Richard Okujeni (PhD)

Bingham University Karu

Received: 25.07.2026 | **Accepted:** 31.08.2026 | **Published:** 03.09.2026

***Corresponding Author:** Osamuyime Igbinadolor

DOI: *10.5281/zenodo.22274904*

Abstract **Original Research Article**

This study examined the prevalence of news commercialization among journalists in North Central Nigeria interrogating the question of whether the practice constitutes an occasional departure from professional norms or a normalized feature of everyday newsroom decision-making. Grounded on the political economy of the media theory and adopting a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, the study surveyed 372 journalists registered with the Nigeria Union of Journalists across the seven states (Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau, and the Federal Capital Territory) and conducted semi-structured interviews with 15 journalists possessing a minimum of ten years' professional experience. Survey results indicated moderate-to-high agreement on the prevalence of commercialized practice (aggregate mean = 3.31), with the strongest consensus (72.0%) around the displacement of stories of public importance by sponsored content. Qualitative data corroborated and deepened this picture: all 15 interview participants described commercialization as routine rather than exceptional. The findings suggest that news commercialization in North Central Nigeria has moved from being an ethical exception to an institutionalized feature of media practice, and the study recommends that government should take deliberate steps to stabilize the macroeconomic conditions and infrastructure that underlie the financial pressures identified in this study.

Keywords: News commercialization, Prevalence, Political Economy.

1. Introduction

Journalism's democratic function rests on the basic premise that the selection and presentation of news is guided by public significance rather than by the ability of a subject, advertiser, or sponsor to pay for coverage (Carlson, 20). In much of the literature on the Nigerian media, however, that premise has been treated more as aspirational rather than descriptive. Studies of the Nigerian press point to a media environment shaped by declining advertising revenue, weak institutional funding, and an economic climate in which media organizations are compelled to treat news space as a commodity (Awofadeju, 2022; Apuke, 2016). What remains less settled in the literature is how widespread this practice actually is, and whether it is best understood as an occasional lapse in editorial judgment or as an entrenched feature of everyday newsroom practice.

This question is important because from a North Central Nigerian perspective, states in the region which are Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, and Plateau States, along with the Federal Capital Territory have a media landscape that reflects both the pressures common to Nigerian journalism generally and conditions specific to its political economy with a large concentration of media houses and journalists in Abuja, (poverty levels) uneven infrastructure across the remaining states, a media market that competes for a shrinking advertising base and 42.6% of North Central residents living in multidimensional poverty (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Journalists in these states earn as little as ₦30,000 ($20) monthly, making them susceptible to bribes (Media Foundation for West Africa, 2022). A report documented that 51% of journalists nationwide faced pressure to accept bribes, with rates higher in conflict zones like Benue, Plateau and Nasarawa (Wole Soyinka Centre for Investigative Journalism, 2022). This economic vulnerability Obateru (2022) warns is compounded by weak regulatory enforcement.

Despite this, empirical evidence on the prevalence of commercialized news practice in the region, drawn directly from working journalists rather than from anecdotal or editorial commentary, has been limited, and this paper addresses that gap. Drawing on a survey of 372 journalists registered with the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) across the seven states of North Central Nigeria, supported by qualitative interviews with 15 experienced practitioners, the paper examines the extent to which news commercialization is perceived as a routine feature of journalism practice in the region. In doing so, it moves beyond the question of whether commercialization occurs, which existing literature has already established, to the more specific question of how normalized the practice has become among practitioners themselves.

2. Research Questions

This paper is guided by the following research questions:

1. How prevalent is news commercialization among media outlets in North Central Nigeria, as perceived by practicing journalists?
2. Which forms of news commercialization (e.g., sponsored content displacing public interest stories, advertiser influence on editorial decisions) are most commonly reported?
3. To what extent do journalists' qualitative accounts of commercialization corroborate the patterns observed in the survey data?

3. Methodology

The study adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods design in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently, analyzed separately, and then integrated at the interpretation stage. This design was selected to allow the breadth of a large-sample survey to be read alongside the interpretive depth of practitioner interviews, without subordinating one form of data to the other (Gray, 2014).

Population and Sample. The study population comprised journalists registered with the NUJ across the seven states of North Central Nigeria. Membership in the NUJ is a critical inclusion criterion, as it ensures respondents are formally recognized professionals bound by the union’s ethical codes, thereby enhancing the credibility and relevance of data on commercialization practices (Wilk, 2019). A quantitative sample of 372 journalists was drawn using a combination of proportionate stratification by state and simple random selection within strata, ensuring representation across print, broadcast, and online platforms. For the qualitative strand, 15 journalists with a minimum of ten years of professional experience were purposively selected to provide reflective, experience-based accounts; participants were distributed across all seven states, with a concentration in Plateau State reflecting the researcher's insider positionality and consequent depth of access.

Instrumentation. Quantitative data were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising Likert-scale items measuring the perceived prevalence and forms of news commercialization. The instrument's internal consistency was confirmed using R (version 4.6.0) and the *psych* statistical package. The analysis yielded a raw alpha coefficient of 0.89, with 95% confidence boundaries ranging from 0.87 to 0.90 which falls within the high to excellent reliability range (Hinton et al., 2004) and its factor structure was established through Exploratory Factor Analysis with a KMO of .90. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted face-to-face and by telephone, using an interview guide developed to allow open-ended elaboration on experiences of commercialized practice.

Data Collection Procedure. Quantitative data collection combined personal administration by the researcher at NUJ press centers in the Federal Capital Territory and Plateau State with deployment of trained research assistants in the remaining five states. Interviews were conducted individually, audio-recorded with participant consent, and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data Analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics with means, standard deviations and frequency distributions to establish the prevalence and perceived intensity of commercialization. Qualitative data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase Reflexive Thematic Analysis, supported by NVivo, with trustworthiness assessed against Lincoln and Guba's criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents and interview participants. Anonymity was assured through the use of coded identifiers in place of participant names, and all data were stored securely and used solely for the purposes of this research.

4. Literature Review

4.1 Conceptual Review

Scholarship on news commercialization converges on a common starting point which is the erosion of the traditional wall separating editorial and commercial functions in journalism. Coddington (2015) traces this boundary to a nineteenth-century shift from politically funded newspapers to an advertising-dependent model, in which news organizations structurally separated editorial and business departments to protect journalistic autonomy. Hanitzsch et al. (2019) argue that this wall, while historically foundational to journalistic credibility, has become increasingly porous under growing economic pressure, with commercial influence now felt both at the organizational level and in journalists' daily routines. McManus (2009) identifies the sale of editorial space and the blurring of boundaries between news and advertisements as defining features of commercialized news, while Sjøvaag and Ohlsson (2019) locate the profit motive as the central explanatory factor, describing commercialization as the shaping of stories to suit advertisers and owners. Amos and Joseph (2023) similarly report that journalistic autonomy in commercialized media environments is frequently constrained by corporate control, with owners' profit-driven demands pushing news toward market-driven content at the expense of professional standards.

4.2 Review of Related Empirical Studies

A growing body of empirical research, spanning Nigeria and comparable media systems, provides direct evidence on the prevalence of news commercialization. In a study titled commodification of news and audience patronage of broadcast stations in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, Nkana and Nkana (2019) sought to determine the extent to which broadcast stations in Akwa Ibom State commodify their news, identify the motivations behind this practice, find out what kinds of news attract audience patronage, examine how news commodification affects news selection and gatekeeping, assess audience reactions, and to document the strategies stations use for commodification. The results showed that the extent of news commodification is very high, with political news being the most commodified and the biggest attractor of audience patronage, followed by religious, business, and social news. The major motivation for commodification was to generate revenue for station overheads, though audience members reacted mostly negatively, with 48% feeling very bad about the practice. The study found that commodification determines and affects news selection and gatekeeping to a very large extent, as news is no longer chosen based on traditional news values such as timeliness, proximity, or consequence, but rather on commercial considerations and how much has been paid. The study concluded that commodification has negative implications for news values, professionalism, and society, though it does provide much needed revenue for stations.

In another study, Eke et al. (2023) examined news commercialization in radio stations in Rivers State, Southern Nigeria and its implications for journalism practice. Specifically, the objectives of the study were to determine the extent to which news is commercialized in radio stations in Rivers State, and to examine radio journalists' views on news commercialization with respect to the ethics of their profession. The study found that news commercialization is prevalent in radio stations in Rivers State to a high extent. Journalists also confirmed that individuals, communities, enterprises, and even government institutions often pay for news coverage with statements like "news in my station is becoming what money can buy" receiving a high WMS of 3.44. The findings revealed that news commercialization negates journalism ethics as a significant portion of journalists (92%) agreed that charging for news coverage contradicts professional standards. The study also highlighted concerns that journalistic objectivity, balance, and social responsibility are undermined when media houses prioritize paid content over newsworthiness.

Awofadeju et al. (2022) set out to assess the perceptions of journalists regarding news commercialization, examine the extent to which news commercialization influences journalists' news judgments, determine journalists' views on the reasons behind news commercialization, evaluate whether news commercialization is considered ethical by journalists and investigate if news commercialization can be eradicated in the media industry. The study found that majority of journalists perceive news commercialization negatively, viewing it as a deviation from professional ethics. However, they justify the practice, arguing that it is a necessary response to poor funding and low wages in the industry.

In another study, Iheanacho et al. (2021) examined journalists' perceptions of the challenges posed by news commercialization and its impact on news as a public good. According to the authors, "it is imperatively becoming a norm to pay journalists to cover events by public figures." (p. 200). The study also found that news commercialization undermines core principles such as objectivity, fairness, balance, and truth, as financial influence dictates coverage. Another finding was that financial struggles compel journalists and media houses to accept payments for news coverage to sustain operations. The primary reason journalists engage in news commercialization, the study discovered was Poor remuneration of Journalists according to 67.4% of the respondents.

These studies, while establishing that commercialization is a recognized and reasonably well-documented phenomenon, share two limitations this paper seeks to address. First, several rely on single-city or single-state samples (Nkana and Nkana 2019; Eke et al. 2023), limiting generalizability even within their own national contexts. Second, none report qualitative data alongside survey findings with equal analytical depth, restricting insight into how practitioners themselves characterize the normalization of the practice. This paper extends the geographic scope and methodological depth of the existing empirical record.

5. Theoretical Framework: Political Economy of the Media

This paper is anchored in the Political Economy of the Media theory, which examines how economic and political structures shape media systems, content, and practice (Mosco, 2009). The theory positions media organizations not as neutral conduits of information but as institutions shaped by ownership interests, profit imperatives, and market pressure. Central to the theory is the assumption that media content is shaped to maximize profit, often prioritizing material that attracts advertisers over public interest journalism (Pickard, 2020), and that reliance on advertising revenue reduces the volume of critical, investigative reporting (Mosco, 2009). Winseck and Jin (2011) extend this argument by describing a structural "media in crisis" dynamic, in which declining advertising revenue and market disruption compel cost-cutting and content strategies favorable to paying clients.

The theory has attracted criticism for privileging economic structures over human agency and cultural nuance (Hesmondhalgh, 2008; Fiske, 2010), and for rejecting the crisis in journalism as a matter of "bad apples" but rather attributing it to systemic causes (Pickard, 2023). These criticisms are informative for the present study, precisely because the prevalence data reported below speaks directly to this tension, the near-universal description of commercialization as routine practice, rather than as the conduct of a few compromised individuals, supports the theory's core contention that the phenomenon is structural rather than idiosyncratic.

For this paper specifically, the Political Economy framework provides the analytical basis for treating high reported prevalence not as evidence of widespread individual ethical failure, but as evidence of a media system in which ownership structures and profit imperatives have become deeply embedded in everyday editorial routine. This framing shapes how the results below are interpreted. Prevalence is read as an indicator of institutionalization rather than of isolated misconduct.

6. Results

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Demographic Variable	**Category**	**Frequency (n)**	**Percentage (%)**
Gender	Male	257	69.1
	Female	115	30.9
	Total	372	100.0
Age	18 – 25	16	4.3
	26 – 35	61	16.4
	36 – 45	158	42.5
	46 – 55	98	26.3
	56 and above	39	10.5
	Total	372	100.0
Years of Experience	0 – 5 years	48	12.9
	6 – 10 years	55	14.8
	11 – 15 years	135	36.3
	16 years and above	134	36.0

	Total	372	100.0
Type of Media Organization	Print	86	23.1
	Broadcast	254	68.3
	Online	31	8.3
	Others	1	0.3
	Total	372	100.0
Media Organization Ownership	Private	137	36.8
	Public	234	62.9
	Others	1	0.3
	Total	372	100.0
State	Benue	30	8.1
	Kogi	22	5.9
	Kwara	28	7.5
	Nasarawa	29	7.8
	Niger	29	7.8
	Plateau	26	7.0
	FCT	208	55.9
	Total	372	100.0
NUJ Membership	Yes	372	100.0
	No	0	0
	Total	372	100.0

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the 372 journalists who participated in the quantitative survey. The data shows a male-dominated field, with 69.1% of respondents being male and 30.9% female. The majority of journalists (42.5%) fall within the 36-45 age bracket, and most are highly experienced, with 72.3% having over 11 years in the profession meaning the data reflects the views of predominantly experienced, established journalists rather than early career practitioners. Broadcast media (68.3%) constitutes the largest category of media organizations, and a majority of respondents (62.9%) work in government owned media. Geographically, over half of the respondents (55.9%) are based in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), reflecting its status as a major media hub in the region. All 372 respondents are registered members of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ).

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for the Prevalence of News Commercialization

S/N	Statement	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)	Mean	Std. Dev	Interpretation
B1	News commercialization is a common practice in media organizations in North Central Nigeria	83 (22.3%)	74 (19.9%)	24 (6.5%)	133 (35.8%)	58 (15.6%)	3.02	1.44	Moderate Agreement
B2	Paid news influences the selection of stories the media cover	24 (6.5%)	85 (22.8%)	37 (9.9%)	153 (41.1%)	73 (19.6%)	3.45	1.22	High Agreement
B3	Media organizations in North Central Nigeria prioritize profit over journalistic standards	55 (14.8%)	96 (25.8%)	43 (11.6%)	130 (34.9%)	48 (12.9%)	3.05	1.31	Moderate Agreement
B4	Stories of public importance are sometimes sidelined in favor of those sponsored by powerful interests	11 (3.0%)	57 (15.3%)	36 (9.7%)	192 (51.6%)	76 (20.4%)	3.71	1.05	High Agreement
	Aggregate Mean						**3.31**		**Moderate Agreement**

Source: Field survey, 2026

Note. SD = Strongly Disagree; D = Disagree; N = Neutral; A = Agree; SA = Strongly Agree. Interpretation is based on a 5-point Likert scale: 1.00–1.80 = Very Low Agreement; 1.81–2.60 = Low Agreement; 2.61–3.40 = Moderate Agreement; 3.41–4.20 = High Agreement; 4.21–5.00 = Very High Agreement. n = 372.

Analysis of Quantitative Findings

The aggregate mean score for Section B is 3.31, indicating a moderate to high perceived prevalence of news commercialization. This suggests that while news commercialization is widely acknowledged, its intensity may vary across different media organizations and contexts. Statement B4 recorded the highest mean (3.71 and SD=1.05), with a combined 72.0% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that "stories of public importance are sometimes sidelined in favor of those sponsored by powerful interests". This represents the strongest consensus in this section and indicates that the displacement of public interest content by sponsored material is the most visible and widely acknowledged manifestation of news commercialization. The relatively low standard deviation (1.05) suggests a stronger consensus among respondents. Statement B1 had the highest standard deviation (1.44) and a mean of 3.02 (Moderate Agreement), indicating more divergent views among respondents on whether commercialization is a "common practice". This variation may reflect differences across media types, ownership structures or individual organizational cultures. Item B2 "Paid news influences the selection of stories the media cover" recorded a mean of 3.45 (SD=1.22), with 60.7 % of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing. This confirms that commercial considerations actively shape editorial decisions rather than merely coexisting with them. The mean of 3.45 places this item in the "High Agreement" range, though the higher standard deviation (1.22) indicates somewhat more variation in responses than B4.

Statement B3 "Media organizations in North Central Nigeria prioritize profit over journalistic standards" recorded a mean of 3.05 (Moderate Agreement) with a notable 40.6% of respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. This suggests that while news commercialization is prevalent, many journalists still perceive their organizations as maintaining some commitment to professional standards, or they may be reluctant to characterize their employers as prioritizing profit over ethics. The relatively high standard deviation (1.31) again may indicate variation in experiences across different organizations.

The qualitative data was obtained through semi-structured interviews with journalists selected purposely from North Central Nigeria prioritizing journalists with over ten years of experience and diverse roles to ensure rich, informed perspectives on the topic. The interviewees included experienced reporters, editors and media managers with experience ranging from 10 - 36 years in the field. To ensure anonymity, codes were assigned to each participant as Journalist 1 (J1) through Journalist 15 (J15).

Table 3: Profile of Interview Participants

Code	Years of Experience	Media Type	Role
J1	31	Print	Editor
J2	19	Online	Manager
J3	22	Broadcast	News Manager
J4	30	Print	Editor
J5	16	Broadcast	Reporter
J6	15	News Agency	Reporter
J7	13	Print	Reporter

Code	Years of Experience	Media Type	Role
J8	21	Broadcast	Manager
J9	10	Broadcast	Reporter
J10	15	Print	Editor
J11	25	Print	Reporter
J12	25	Broadcast	Reporter
J13	35	Print	Editor
J14	10	Broadcast	Editor
J15	36	Print	Editor

Source: Field survey, 2026

Following Braun and Clarke's Reflexive Thematic Analysis framework, two themes emerged from the analysis of responses to RQ1.

Theme 1: Commercialization as Institutionalized Practice

Theme Name	Commercialization as Institutionalized Practice
Definition	This theme captures the normalization of news commercialization as the taken-for-granted, standard way of operating within media organizations in North Central Nigeria. It refers to the extent to which the practice of exchanging news coverage for payment has become embedded in daily routines, organizational policies, and professional expectations, to the point where it is no longer seen as exceptional or problematic by many practitioners
Scope	Includes descriptions of commercialization as "standard practice," accounts of its pervasiveness across all media types, and reflections on how it has become the expected norm rather than an exception
Core Essence	Normalization-commercialization has moved from being an occasional lapse to being the expected, routine way of doing journalism.

Narrative Summary for Theme 1:

Across all 15 interviews, there was a consensus that news commercialization is no longer a marginal or exceptional practice in North Central Nigeria; it is the practice. Participants spoke of commercialization with a matter-of-fact resignation, describing it in terms that reflected its pervasiveness. J7 stated emphatically: "That is just the practice. Pay for the news." This simple statement captures the essence of normalization, that is, commercialization is not something that happens sometimes; it is what journalism is. J9 reinforced this view with even greater emphasis: "It is very common, very, very common. In fact, most, if not all, of the TV stations are guilty of this. In fact, it is standard practice." The repetition ("very, very common") and the characterization as "standard practice" underscore how deeply embedded news commercialization has become.

While a majority of respondents initially suggested that commercialization was predominantly a broadcast phenomenon, reasoning that television is a highly commercialized medium, others with broader experience across media types firmly corrected this assumption. J15, an editor with 36 years of experience across print and other media, clarified: "Yeah, it's not only radio or TV. The newspapers are also doing it. And I will explain it in detail. It's something I know in and out. It's something I do myself. So it's not hearsay. It's something I have experience in. "This testimony is particularly powerful because J15 speaks from direct personal involvement ("it's something I do myself"), removing any doubt that the observation is based on hearsay or external criticism. The practice is so normalized that even experienced editors participate in it while acknowledging it openly. J4 provided a broader contextual analysis that situates Nigerian media within a comparative framework: "I don't know what happens in Kenya. I don't know what happens in South Africa. But as far as the media environment in Nigeria is concerned, news commercialization is real. Not only with the broadcast media. The corruption has already affected even the print media. "The phrase "the corruption has already affected even the print media" suggests a perception that news commercialization represents a form of corruption that has spread from one media sector to another, implying a deterioration over time.

Theme 2: Commercial Value Superseding News Value

Theme Name	**Commercial Value Superseding News Value**
Definition	This theme captures the systematic subordination of traditional journalistic criteria for newsworthiness to commercial considerations. It refers to instances where the decision to cover or prioritize a story is determined primarily by whether it generates revenue rather than by its importance to the public.
Scope	Includes accounts of paid content displacing regular news, journalists being required to seek payment before covering events, and the expectation that sources must pay to have their stories told.
Core Essence	Subordination- commercial logic has come to dominate editorial logic in determining what becomes news.

Narrative Summary for Theme 2:

The interview guide further probed respondents to describe specific instances where paid content influenced their editorial decisions. The responses revealed that the subordination of news value to commercial value is not merely a theoretical concern but a daily reality. J12 explained the practice in government media with clarity: "If the government has a program... it will take the space for the news. Sometimes we have to apologize to the public that because of this program, we are unable to bring you our news." This statement reveals a triumph of commercial/political imperatives over public service: audiences are explicitly told that their access to news is being sacrificed because of a paid or government program. The apology to the public acknowledges that the media organization recognizes it is failing in its duty, yet the practice continues because the imperative to accommodate the paying client overrides all else. J3 acknowledged the inevitable influence of payment on editorial decisions with honesty: "We just have to tell ourselves the truth. There is no way you say X, Y, Z pay for news or you were invited for an event and you told him to cover your event that you need to pay 50,000 or you need to pay 30,000 or you need to pay 10,000 or 5,000 that it will not influence. But of course, he paid for you to tell his own side of the story. And his own side of the story, definitely, we do that. So yes, it will impact." This candid admission is significant for several reasons. First, it acknowledges that payment creates an obligation to present the payer's perspective ("tell his own side of the story"). Second, it reveals the transactional nature of the relationship, that is, the source pays, and the journalist delivers coverage of that source's version of events. Third, it explicitly states that this practice "will impact" the journalism, confirming that news commercialization fundamentally alters what is reported and how it is framed. J4 shared his experience of ownership influence, providing an illustration of how far commercial pressures can go: "...Because after I signed the production and left the office, the publisher came and changed the story to meet an advertiser's interest. I saw it the next day after I signed and I knew that is what I did not approve. I had to resign before some directors came to intervene and we continued before I was eventually sacked from the place because we could not continue the way he was operating. "This account reveals several layers of the problem: the publisher's willingness to unilaterally alter content after editorial approval, the editor's principled response (resignation), the temporary intervention of directors, and ultimately the editor being "sacked" because he could not accept the publisher's commercialized approach. The story illustrates the high personal cost of resisting commercialization and explains why many journalists eventually comply; the alternative is losing one's job. J11 described pressure from editors in equally troubling terms: "...And again, influence of your editor, our editor in the head office, you package your story and send it to the head office, somebody will be calling you and asking how much did the man give you in this story? You say he didn't give me anything, and my boss say no, tell him to bring this or forget about it. "This account reveals that the pressure does not always come from external sources; it is often internalized within the editorial chain. The editor's question "how much did the man give you?" assumes that payment is the norm. When the journalist reports that no payment was received, the instruction is to demand payment or "forget about it" (meaning the story will not run). This transforms the journalist from a seeker of truth into a collector of fees. J6's observation, while not personal, was particularly telling about ownership attitudes: "Well, I know a former minister that owns a radio station in Jos. And all he's after is what comes to his own pocket. So he sits every time the news are being casted to listen. And by the time he finishes listening, he sits down and counts, okay, this story has gone, this one has gone, this one has, so where is the money? He begins to question the accounts and all of that. "This portrait of an owner listening to news not to assess its quality or public value but to calculate how much money each story should have generated is a powerful metaphor for the commercialization of journalism.

The news is evaluated not by its truth or importance but by its revenue potential.

4.2.1.3 Integration of Findings

Quantitative Finding	**Qualitative Finding**	**Integration Outcome**
Aggregate mean = 3.31 (Moderate Agreement)	All 15 respondents affirmed news commercialization is "common," "standard practice," "very, very common"	The qualitative data explains the "moderate" quantitative score, that is prevalence is normalized but varies across contexts. The quantitative mean reflects this variation, while the qualitative data reveals that where commercialization exists, it is deeply embedded.
72.0% agreed public interest stories are sidelined (B4, M=3.71)	"If the government has a program... it will take the space for the news" (J12); stories of the poor are "buried" (J2)	Strong convergence: Both datasets identify the displacement of public interest content as the most visible and widely acknowledged manifestation of commercialization.
60.7% agreed paid news influences story selection (B2, M=3.44)	"There is no way you pay for news... that it will not influence" (J3); editors ask "how much did the man give you?" (J11)	Convergence: Both datasets confirm that payment actively shapes editorial decisions, not just organizational policies.
Highest standard deviation on B1 (1.43) indicates variation in experience	Commercialization transcends media type but manifests differently across organizations; some journalists resist while others fully comply	Complementarity: The qualitative data explains why the quantitative responses vary. Journalists work in different organizational contexts with different levels of commercial pressure and different degrees of resistance.

Summary

The integrated findings for demonstrate that news commercialization is prevalent in North Central Nigeria, with both datasets confirming its widespread nature. The quantitative data provide a measured assessment (moderate agreement overall), while the qualitative data reveal the depth of normalization, that is, commercialization is not just common but has become the "standard practice" that journalists expect and navigate daily. The strongest point of convergence is the displacement of public interest stories by paid content, identified by 72.0% of survey respondents and illustrated in multiple interview accounts. The variation in quantitative responses is explained by the qualitative finding that commercialization, while pervasive, manifests differently across organizations and is experienced differently by individual journalists depending on their role, seniority, and organizational context.

7. Discussion

RQ1: How prevalent is news commercialization among media outlets in North Central Nigeria, as perceived by practicing journalists? The aggregate mean of 3.31 across Table 1, combined with the qualitative theme of Commercialization as Institutionalized Practice, in which all 15 interview participants, including a senior editor with 36 years of experience who admitted direct personal involvement, described the practice as routine rather than exceptional, directly answers this question: commercialization is not a marginal or occasional occurrence in North Central Nigeria but a moderately-to-highly prevalent, normalized feature of everyday journalism practice. This finding extends Apuke's (2016) Jalingo-based study, in which a majority of respondents identified payment-for-publication as the primary form of commercialization, to a broader, seven-state sample.

RQ2: Which forms of news commercialization are most commonly reported? Table 1 answers this question directly through item-level comparison. The displacement of public interest stories by sponsored content (Item B4, M = 3.71, 72.0% agreement) was the most consistently recognized manifestation, ahead of paid news influencing story selection (Item B2, M = 3.45) and the general characterization of organizations as profit-prioritizing (Item B3, M = 3.05). The qualitative theme of Commercial Value Superseding News Value, illustrated by J12's account of news being displaced by sponsored programming, corroborates this ranking with a concrete, observable instance of the same pattern. The gap between the general item (B1, "commercialization is common practice") and the specific item (B4) suggests journalists are more willing to identify specific, observable manifestations of commercial influence than to endorse a general characterization of their organizations as commercialized, consistent with Sjøvaag and Ohlsson's (2019) observation that commercialism operates through the shaping of individual stories rather than through organizational self-description.

RQ3: To what extent do journalists' qualitative accounts of commercialization corroborate the patterns observed in the survey data? The correspondence between the quantitative and qualitative strands was strong. The survey's moderate-to-high aggregate agreement (RQ1) was corroborated, and given texture, by unanimous qualitative testimony describing the practice as standard across all 15 interviews; the survey's item-level ranking (RQ2) was corroborated by specific, named instances of sponsored content displacing news coverage. Read through Political Economy of the Media theory, this convergence, including a senior editor's direct admission of participation, supports the theory's contention that commercialized practice reflects structural conditions rather than the ethical failure of a minority of practitioners. If commercialization were confined to a small number of compromised individuals, the consistency observed across 15 independently interviewed practitioners spanning print, broadcast, online, and news agency backgrounds would be difficult to explain.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study set out to determine how prevalent news commercialization is among media outlets in North Central Nigeria, as perceived by practicing journalists. The evidence, drawn from both a 372-respondent survey and 15 in-depth interviews, indicates that commercialization is a normalized and institutionalized feature of journalism practice in the region, most visibly manifested in the displacement of public interest stories by sponsored content.

Based on these findings, the study recommends that

Government should take deliberate steps to stabilize the macroeconomic conditions and infrastructure that underlie the financial pressures identified in this study.

Government should also consider establishing funding mechanisms for public interest journalism. Media professional bodies, including the Nigeria Union of Journalists, should develop clear, enforceable guidelines distinguishing sponsored from editorial content.

Because the present analysis could not confirm whether prevalence varies systematically by platform or state, future research should disaggregate prevalence data by platform type and state and apply inferential tests (e.g., ANOVA) to determine whether, for example, print and broadcast outlets, or state-owned and privately owned organizations, differ significantly in reported commercialization. Future research should also examine whether audiences themselves are able to detect the distinction between sponsored and editorial content, and whether such detection affects audience trust in the outlets concerned.

References

Amos, V., & Joseph, A. B. (2023). Media ownership and news coverage: A critical appraisal of private media organization. *Journal of Media, Culture and Communication, 3*(5), 32–40. https://doi.org/10.55529/jmcc.35.32.40

Apuke, O. D. (2016). Journalists’ perception of news commercialization and its implication on media credibility in Nigeria. *World Scientific News, 55*, 63–76.

Awofadeju, P. O., Aiyesimoju, A., & Ilesanmi, A. R. (2022). Quantitative analysis of Ondo journalists’ perceptions of news commercialization. *International Journal of Management, Social Sciences, Peace and Conflict Studies, 5*(3), 353–365.

Coddington, M. (2015). The wall becomes a curtain. In M. Carlson & S. C. Lewis (Eds.), *Boundaries of journalism* (pp. 67–82). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315727684-5

Eke, C., Adeyemi, M. O., & Ochor, R. U. (2023). Radio stations news commercialization and journalism practice in Rivers State. *Imo State University Journal of Communication Studies, 7*(1), 20–28. https://www.imsujcs.com/Journals/2023/03.

Fiske, J. (2010). *Understanding popular culture* (2nd ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203837177

Hanitzsch, T., Hanusch, F., Ramaprasad, J., & de Beer, A. S. (Eds.). (2019). *Worlds of journalism: Journalistic cultures around the globe*. Columbia University Press. https://doi.org/10.7312/hani18642

Hesmondhalgh, D. (2008). Neoliberalism, imperialism and the media. In D. Hesmondhalgh & J. Toynbee (Eds.), *The media and social theory* (pp. 95–111). Routledge.

Iheanacho, C. O., Okala, F., & Ukpong, E. N. (2021). Journalists’ perception of the challenges of news commercialization and news as public good. *IMSU Journal of Communication Studies, 5*(1), 192–204.

Mosco, V. (2009). *The political economy of communication* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Nkana, N. S., & Nkana, E. N. (2019). Commodification of news and audience patronage of broadcast stations in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. *Remote Journal of Mass Communication and Information Technology, 5*(1), 1–17.

Obateru, T. C. (2022). *Brown envelope and news media practice in Nigeria*. University of Jos Press.

Pickard, V. (2020). *Democracy without journalism? Confronting the misinformation society*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190946753.001.0001

Pickard, V. (2023, December). The news industry finally reckons with the political economy of journalism. *Nieman Lab*. https://www.niemanlab.org/2023/12/the-news-industry-finally-reckons-with-the-political-economy-of-journalism/

Sjøvaag, H., & J. Ohlsson. (2019). Media ownership and journalism. In *Oxford research encyclopedia of communication*. Oxford

University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.839

Winseck, D. R., & Jin, D. Y. (Eds.). (2011). *The political economies of media: The transformation of the global media industries*. Bloomsbury Academic. https://doi.org/10.5040/9781849664264