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CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEDIA START-UPS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE OF NORTHEAST NIGERIA

NAZIF ABBA PALI

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Abstract

This article examined challenges and opportunities confronting media start-ups in Northeast Nigeria. It reported results from an exploratory sequential mixed-methods study combining seven in-depth interviews with senior practitioners (P01–P07) and a cross-sectional survey of 250 media founders, managers and operational staff across Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe. The evidence indicated that financial constraints and irregular advertising income were the dominant structural limits, cited by 72% of survey respondents and repeatedly emphasised in interviews. Regulatory procedures and taxation created administrative burdens, while informal self-censorship arose from political proximity, cultural norms and security concerns. Digital tools were widely used for streaming and social media outreach, yet advanced analytics and podcasting were rare, reducing strategic advantage. Human capital deficits and staff turnover undermined programme quality; organisations used in-house training, mentoring and flexible scheduling to retain essential personnel. Security risks constrained field reporting in particular localities and weakened advertiser confidence. The study integrated quantitative prevalence measures with qualitative narratives to provide a contextualised account of survival-oriented media entrepreneurship in a fragile regional setting. Practical recommendations included graduated licensing fees, targeted institutional grants, partnership-based training schemes and subsidised access to analytics tools. The article argued that policy interventions should target the financial and capacity gaps that limit sustainable media pluralism in peripheral regions. The study contributes empirical detail to debates on media economics and political

Keywords: media entrepreneurship, media start-ups, Northeast Nigeria, media sustainability, digital convergence, regulatory environment.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Prof. A.I. Mteiye [MALAWI]

economy in low-resource settings and offers evidence for regulators, donors and media owners planning targeted support. Further research should track start-up survival, advertiser behaviour and audience trust longitudinally.

Introduction

This study examines the challenges and opportunities confronting media start-ups and entrepreneurial broadcasters in the Northeast Nigeria media landscape. Broadcasting here is understood as the organised, public-facing dissemination of information across radio and television platforms (Duke, 2021). The post-1992 liberalisation of Nigeria's broadcast sector encouraged a rapid expansion of private outlets, with the explicit aim of widening media pluralism and allowing entrepreneurial actors to supplement state provision. The liberalisation impulse did not, however, erase structural obstacles. National efforts to complete the digital switchover have been slowed by chronic resource shortfalls and legacy analogue infrastructure (Ihechu & Uche, 2012). Regional difference is consequential. The six states of the Northeast region: Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe, combine clear local demand for news and entertainment with fragile local economies, security challenges and strong cultural norms that constrain programming decisions (Azubuike & Ikiriko, 2019; Beli, 2024).

Empirical evidence and sector reports indicate that many start-up broadcasters in the Northeast operate intermittently or fail soon after launch. Common proximate causes include weak local advertising markets, irregular cash flow and high technical maintenance costs. Administrative burdens such as slow licensing procedures and multiple tax obligations add further pressure (Azubuike & Ikiriko, 2019; Oburo, 2021). Non-market limits are equally important. Informal self-regulation, audience expectations and faith-based sensitivities impose editorial constraints that shape scheduling, advertising acceptance and staff recruitment. These limits change the practical forms of entrepreneurship in the region and call into question whether models developed in the Global North fit peripheral, fragile contexts (Girija, 2020; Wolf, 2023).

This paper addresses six interlocking subtopics that emerged in interviews and the accompanying survey. First, the study examines financial and business-model constraints, including advertising markets, cash-flow volatility and cost structures. Second, it traces the regulatory and governance environment, focusing on licensing, taxation and compliance pressures. Third, it evaluates technological adaptation, covering internet streaming, mobile platforms and the limited use of analytics and podcasting. Fourth, it explores cultural, religious and community norms as de facto regulatory forces that shape content and commercial choices. Fifth, it analyses human capital issues, including recruitment, retention and informal training strategies. Sixth, it documents coping

strategies and opportunities that entrepreneurs have developed, including programming innovations, partnerships and audience engagement tactics.

Thesis statement. Media start-ups in Northeast Nigeria operate largely as survival-oriented enterprises in which financial scarcity, regulatory friction, constrained digital capacity and socio-cultural limits jointly shape entrepreneurial choices and outcomes; therefore pragmatic, context-sensitive support is required if these outlets are to contribute reliably to local information, accountability and civic life (Alexander et al., 2004; Girija, 2020).

This study adopted an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design. The qualitative strand comprised in-depth interviews with founders, senior managers and regulatory actors; interview findings informed a structured survey that was administered across the six Northeast states to estimate the prevalence of issues raised in interviews. The mixed-methods approach allowed this study to combine thick description of local practice with quantified measures of how widespread particular constraints and strategies are. That combination was selected to ensure that policy recommendations rest on both contextual detail and evidence of scale.

The analytic frame drew on media economics and political economy perspectives that treat finance, ownership and regulation as structuring forces while also engaging media entrepreneurship literature that foregrounds opportunity exploitation and resourcefulness under constraint (Alexander et al., 2004; Girija, 2020). The contribution is empirical and practical. Empirically the study maps the co-occurrence of financial fragility, regulatory friction, limited digital capacity and cultural moderation in a peripheral region that remains under-represented in the literature. Practically the study provides evidence that regulators, funders and training bodies require targeted instruments for fragile regional markets rather than standard interventions premised on robust advertising ecosystems.

The remainder of the article sets out methods in full, presents integrated qualitative and quantitative findings, and discusses policy and practice implications for sustaining plural, locally rooted broadcast services in the Northeast. Media start-ups in peripheral regions are not merely business experiments; when they endure they expand civic information and local accountability. This paper aims to identify realistic steps that support that endurance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on media entrepreneurship, broadcast economics and the political economy of journalism was reviewed to situate the empirical study of media start-ups in Northeast Nigeria. The review proceeded in three parts. First, core concepts and debates around media entrepreneurship and sustainability were examined. Second, empirical studies that addressed funding, regulation, technology and culture in Nigerian and

comparable African contexts were appraised. Third, an integrated theoretical framework was outlined that drew on media economics, political economy and media entrepreneurship scholarship to operationalise concepts used in the current study.

Review of Related Concepts

Scholars had framed media entrepreneurship as an activity that combined cultural production with market orientation, where founders mobilised scarce resources to create content, platforms and audiences (Girija, 2020; Khajeheian, 2017). The concept had evolved from simple firm-level explanations of start-up motives to a richer account that integrated opportunity recognition, resource bricolage, and platform practices (De Silva, 2010; Girija, 2020). Two conceptual strands were salient for the present study. The first treated media organisations primarily as economic enterprises subject to the incentives and constraints of media markets. This strand emphasised revenue channels, cost structures and audience commodification as the central determinants of organisational survival (Alexander et al., 2004; Drufuca, 2015). The second treated media organisations as social institutions with public service obligations, cultural responsibilities and political roles; this strand emphasised normative functions, trust and legitimacy rather than pure profit maximisation (Duke, 2021; Oberiri, 2016).

The literature had also distinguished entrepreneurial motives at different stages. At start-up, a mix of push and pull motives were typically observed. Push motives included unemployment, marginalisation and the absence of established platforms; pull motives included the desire for influence, political visibility and expected commercial returns (De Silva, 2010). At growth stages the balance often shifted towards pull motives, but in fragile or peripheral contexts survival motives frequently remained dominant for prolonged periods (Girija, 2020).

Sustainability models were a central conceptual focus. Traditional models relied on audience commodification where advertising and sponsored content funded production (Girija, 2020; Smythe, 1977). Alternative models discussed in the literature included mixed revenue strategies combining local advertising, donor funding, NGO partnerships and paid services (Cage, 2016; Oburo, 2021). Digital convergence added complexity to models of sustainability because platforms offered new distribution and monetisation pathways while increasing competition and fragmenting audiences (Drufuca, 2015). The literature stressed that platform adoption did not automatically confer economic advantage unless accompanied by monetisation strategies, analytics capacity and market reach.

Two further conceptual issues had direct bearing on this study. First, regulation and governance were theorised as market-shaping forces; licensing rules, taxation and regulatory oversight altered market entry costs and the scope for editorial independence (Oberiri, 2016). Second, local culture and religion were conceptualised as informal

regulatory mechanisms that constrained programming choices and advertising content. In conservative regions, moral and religious norms often functioned as de facto rules, shaping acceptable content and advertiser behaviour (Duke, 2021). In combination, these conceptual themes suggested that media entrepreneurship in peripheral, socially conservative settings was not a simple replication of Global North models but a distinct institutional variety.

Review of Related Empirical Studies

Empirical studies on Nigerian broadcasting and African media entrepreneurship provided evidence that mirrored the conceptual tensions above. Azubuike and Ikiriko (2019) reported that private broadcast stations in Port Harcourt confronted severe funding gaps, irregular advertising payments and weak welfare provisions, and that regulatory processes were sometimes politicised. Their study illustrated how start-ups often survived through managerial ingenuity rather than structural market support. Duke (2021) documented historical continuities in Nigerian broadcasting where state media retained structural advantages while private stations navigated precarious funding and regulatory uncertainty.

Regionally specific work had drawn attention to the Northeast. Beli (2024), in an unpublished doctoral study, traced the historical development of broadcasting in the Northeast and documented delayed digital switchover, chronic infrastructure decay and the uneven presence of commercial advertisers. Beli's field evidence resonated with the present study's focus because it showed how peripheral states had weaker advertising markets and deeper infrastructural deficits than major commercial centres.

Quantitative and mixed-method studies complemented qualitative evidence. Oburo's doctoral study on funding strategies for start-ups in Nigeria found that founders used diverse income streams including micro-sponsorships, periodic events, and donor projects; however, only a minority had achieved stable advertising bases. Similarly, national surveys of media sustainability suggested that stations outside major urban centres reported lower ad revenues and greater incidence of off-air periods (Oburo, 2021). Studies of digital adoption had shown a twofold pattern. On the one hand, mobile internet and social media enabled reach extension and audience engagement in places where terrestrial coverage was limited (DataReportal, 2024; GSMA, 2024), a pattern consistent with earlier evidence that mobile phones widen information access and market reach across African settings (Aker & Mbiti, 2010). On the other hand, studies had repeatedly shown that start-ups lacked the analytics, monetisation skills and scale to convert digital reach into reliable income (Ihechu & Uche, 2012; Girija, 2020). Empirical work on content and culture had shown that stations in socially conservative regions exercised self-restraint in editorial choices; this self-censorship was often motivated less

by explicit state coercion and more by community norms and advertiser preferences (Azubuike & Ikiriko, 2019; Duke, 2021).

Comparative studies in other African peripheries suggested similar patterns. Research in East and Southern Africa had reported that start-ups relied heavily on donor and NGO partnerships for project funding, that taxation and licensing regimes were unevenly enforced, and that security contexts could limit mobility and coverage, reducing advertising appeal (regional media sustainability literature). These cross-case parallels underlined that the Northeast Nigerian situation combined resource scarcity, regulatory friction and cultural constraints in a manner similar to other marginal media ecologies.

Two empirical gaps were evident. First, few studies had integrated financial, technological and cultural variables in a mixed-method design that allowed both depth and prevalence estimates. Second, there had been limited operationalisation of entrepreneurial strategies in fragile contexts; existing studies often described constraints rather than mapping how founders reconfigured business and content practices to survive. The current study addressed these gaps through interview evidence and cross-case mapping.

Theoretical Framework

An integrated theoretical framework had been proposed to explain how financial, regulatory, technological and cultural constraints shaped media entrepreneurship in fragile peripheral settings. The framework combined three complementary scholarly traditions.

Media economics theory provided the microeconomic scaffolding. It situated stations within markets where revenue possibilities and cost structures determined viability (Alexander et al., 2004; Drufuca, 2015). Key constructs from this tradition included revenue diversity, fixed and variable cost burdens, and market size. Operational indicators derived from this strand included advertising yield per airtime, transmission operating costs and capital replacement cycles.

Political economy offered a macro and institutional lens. It emphasised ownership, power relations and state–media linkages that structured the permissible range of editorial action and access to public resources (Girija, 2020; Oberiri, 2016). Political economy constructs in the framework included ownership type, informal political influence, and regulatory capture. These constructs explained why state-owned stations tended to enjoy more consistent budget lines while private start-ups faced vulnerability to shifting political favour.

Media entrepreneurship theory complemented the two previous strands by foregrounding agency, bricolage and innovation. This perspective treated entrepreneurs as actors who recombined resources, created novel content formats and forged partnerships to generate value (Girija, 2020; Khajeheian, 2017). Operational indicators

here included presence of partnerships with NGOs, innovation in programme formats, use of social media for audience participation and initiatives for alternative revenue like events and training.

Integration of the three strands was achieved through a process model. Financial constraints altered entrepreneurs' strategic choices; for example, low ad yields incentivised partnership with NGOs and acceptance of donor projects, which in turn affected editorial priorities. Regulatory and ownership structures modulated entrepreneurs' room for manoeuvre; heavy taxation and politicised licensing raised entry costs and increased the incentive to pursue non-advertising revenues. Cultural and security conditions functioned as environmental variables that constrained content options and advertiser behaviour, thus feeding back into the economic calculations.

The framework was operationalised through five empirical dimensions: funding and revenue structure; regulatory and governance environment; technological adoption and digital capability; human capital and organisational practices; and cultural-religious boundary conditions. Each dimension was matched to indicators that were measured or described in interviews and surveys. The framework, therefore, allowed the empirical analysis to connect lived managerial choices and constraints to broader structural forces, while preserving attention to entrepreneurial agency.

Research Design

The study employed an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design to investigate the challenges and opportunities faced by media start-ups in Northeast Nigeria. The study commenced with a qualitative phase, followed by a quantitative survey, allowing the integration of in-depth contextual insights with broader patterns of prevalence. The qualitative strand involved semi-structured interviews with founders, co-founders, senior managers, industry experts, and regulatory authorities. These interviews provided detailed understanding of strategic decision-making, financial constraints, regulatory compliance, technological adoption, and socio-cultural factors influencing operational choices. The quantitative phase employed structured questionnaires to assess the magnitude and prevalence of these challenges and strategies across a larger sample of media start-ups, enabling statistical validation of qualitative findings. This mixed-methods approach was justified on the basis that it permitted triangulation of data sources, reinforced the reliability of emerging themes, and produced generalisable insights applicable to media enterprises operating under similar conditions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Oburo, 2021). Combining qualitative depth with quantitative breadth also facilitated a nuanced understanding of entrepreneurial behaviour in fragile and peripheral media ecosystems.

Population and Sampling

The target population comprised private and start-up media organisations in the six Northeast states: Borno, Yobe, Adamawa, Bauchi, Gombe, and Taraba. The qualitative sample was purposively drawn from founders, senior managers, and industry experts, ensuring that participants had first-hand experience in the strategic and operational management of media start-ups. Founders and co-founders were prioritised as they possessed the most comprehensive knowledge of financial, regulatory, and strategic challenges. Where founders were unavailable, senior managers or core team members such as editors, business development leads, and operations managers were included. Full-time employees including reporters, technical leads, and producers were also considered to capture operational perspectives. For the quantitative strand, simple random sampling was applied to a register of media start-ups to achieve representativeness and reduce selection bias. Clustered convenience sampling concentrated on urban hubs where media activity was highest, including Maiduguri, Bauchi, Yola, Gombe, Jalingo, and Damaturu, while snowball sampling supplemented the selection through founder referrals and connections with local NUJ chapters, university media departments, and incubators. Inclusion criteria required respondents to be over 18 years old, have at least six months' operational experience, and be involved in ventures primarily serving Northeast audiences. National or international mainstream media offices were excluded unless they had identifiable start-up units. Sample size calculations followed Cochran's (1977) formula for a ±7% margin of error at 95% confidence, producing a target of approximately 196 responses, with 250 usable responses as the practical goal given logistical constraints.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

Qualitative data collection employed semi-structured interviews guided by an interview schedule focused on economic, technological, regulatory, and socio-cultural dimensions of media entrepreneurship. Interviews were conducted in-person, by phone, or via online platforms according to participant availability and regional security considerations. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Quantitative data were gathered using structured questionnaires containing Likert-scale items, multiple-choice questions, and closed-ended measures designed to assess prevalence and magnitude of funding challenges, regulatory compliance, digital adoption, and socio-cultural influences. Questionnaires were distributed both electronically via email and WhatsApp and in-person where feasible. Ethical considerations were prioritised throughout; all participants provided informed consent, participation was voluntary, and personal identifiers were anonymised to preserve

confidentiality. Research protocols adhered to ethical principles of minimal risk, voluntary participation, and transparency in data use (Israel & Hay, 2020).

Data Analysis

Data analysis proceeded in parallel streams. Qualitative transcripts were imported into NVivo software for thematic coding. Open coding generated descriptive codes from participants' accounts, which were then grouped into focused codes and subsequently clustered into higher-order thematic categories reflecting the study's objectives. Analytic memos documented the rationale for coding decisions and the evolution of themes, ensuring auditability and transparency. Quantitative data were analysed using statistical software to compute descriptive measures including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, Triangulation integrated qualitative and quantitative findings, comparing patterns emerging from interview narratives with statistical results from survey data. This approach ensured comprehensiveness and provided a multidimensional understanding of challenges and strategies adopted by media start-ups in the Northeast Nigerian context (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Overview of Participants and Analytic Focus

The dataset comprises seven semi structured interviews with senior practitioners and managers drawn from state, federal and private broadcasting outlets in the Northeast. Participants include senior managers and former executives of state television and radio, and founders or managers of indigenous private stations. The sample therefore spans public, private and emergent start-up contexts, allowing comparative reading of constraints and coping strategies across ownership types. Data were analysed thematically, working from open codes to clustered themes that reflect participants' language and priorities. The Results that follow report patterns that emerged repeatedly in interviews and use verbatim evidence where appropriate. Quotes are presented as short, exact excerpts with participant code, personal communication, place and date to retain proximity to the empirical record (for example, *"we depend on the surroundings here and non-governmental agencies to do business with them"* (P02, Personal communication, Bauchi, December 24, 2025)).

Structural and Economic Constraints on Media Start-Ups

Economic fragility is the most salient constraint across interviews. Participants from private start-ups and legacy public outlets described weak local advertising markets, irregular payments from agencies, and severe fiscal pressure on operating budgets. Advertising was repeatedly framed as unreliable: agencies retain large commissions and delay settlement, leaving stations short of cash for payroll and maintenance. As one manager said, *"if I tell you the amount of money that media agencies are owing Albarka is*

enough to open up another radio station" (P02, Personal communication, Bauchi, December 24, 2025). Another manager emphasised that revenue shortfalls force stations to reduce transmission hours and curtail services: *"sometimes we keep on reducing hours of transmission"* (P03, Personal communication, Bauchi, December 24, 2025).

Start-ups reported particular vulnerability during the early incubation period. Several participants recommended that proprietors plan and fund at least six to twelve months of operation without relying on immediate returns. Cash flow problems affect staffing, retention and technical upkeep. One general manager described how diesel and generator costs alone consumed a large portion of modest operating budgets: *"I used to consume a diesel of not less than 1.8 million naira"* (P03, Personal communication, Bauchi, December 24, 2025).

Comparison between established and new stations showed two trends. Older public outlets often operate with chronic underinvestment but with occasional government lifelines. New private start-ups combine relatively modern equipment with fragile balance sheets and intense pressure to monetise content quickly. Several participants noted that donor partnerships and NGO collaborations are an important supplemental revenue stream for programme funding and capacity building. *"We are collaborating with Search for Common Ground, Breakthrough Action and other NGOs"* (P02, Personal communication, Bauchi, December 24, 2025).

Figure 1, below, shows counts of participants who explicitly mentioned each revenue source in their interviews.

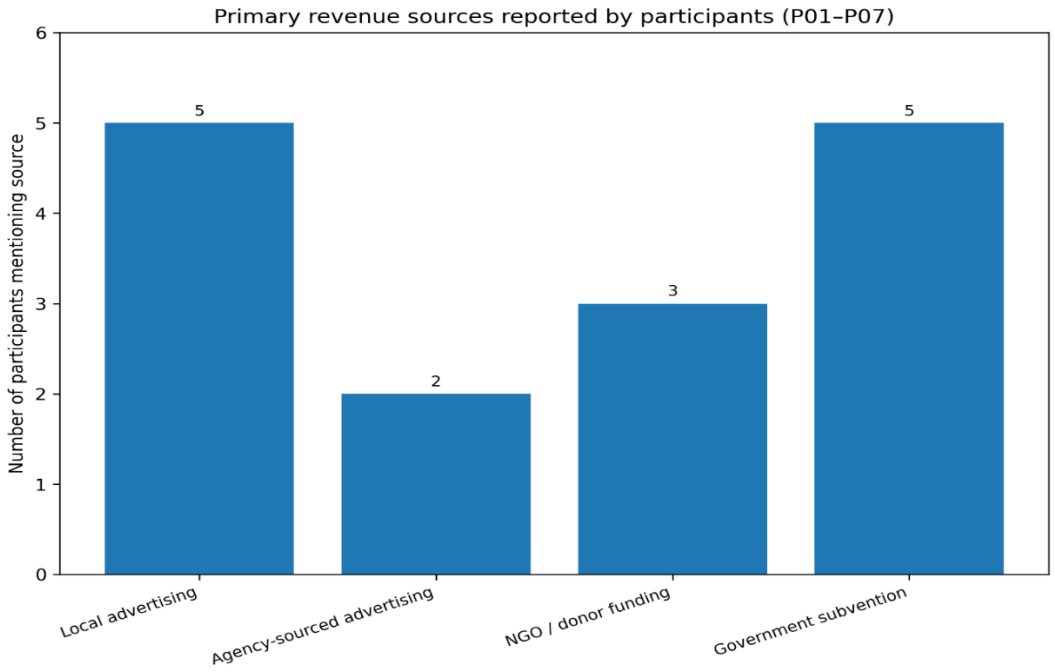


Figure 1. Distribution of Primary Revenue Sources among Media Start-ups in Northeast Nigeria (*Source: Field interview data, 2025*)

This figure presents the relative importance of key revenue streams reported by study participants, including local advertising, agency-sourced advertising, NGO or donor funding, and government subvention. The data were generated from survey responses and supplemented by interview accounts, showing the uneven and constrained revenue base of media start-ups operating in the region.

Regulation, Licensing and Governance Environment

Regulatory procedures and taxation emerged as a second major cluster of constraints. Participants described an onerous licensing process, multiple tax obligations and frequent regulatory warnings. Several interviewees related long licensing journeys that required persistent travel to the federal capital and protracted follow up. One station manager explained that the proprietor spent over two years pursuing the licence at Abuja before operations began (P04, Personal communication, Bauchi, December 24, 2025).

Participants differed on censorship. Managers in private stations tended to report less direct censorship from regulators but noted political pressures and uneven enforcement of rules. State-owned managers described routine self-censorship and informal pressure linked to political oversight. As one former state executive observed, *"more than 90 per cent of the censorship that we have, or we experience, it was by ourselves"* (P03, Personal communication, Bauchi, December 24, 2025). Private Managers described receiving warning letters from the regulator over political advertisements and timing violations, but they also identified gaps in regulatory oversight of social media advertising that compete with radio revenue.

Taxation and fees at local, state and federal levels were described as an extra administrative burden. Several interviewees requested clearer, predictable taxation rules and lighter initial fees for new entrants. Across ownership types, participants expressed a desire for a licensing regime that supports professionalisation while reducing arbitrary costs that threaten viability.

Technology, Digital Convergence and Innovation Practices

All participants acknowledged the centrality of digital tools, mobile phones and social media in current practice. Stations use mobile phones for field reporting, streaming platforms for reach extension, and social media pages to amplify live programmes. A news head noted that reporters now send material from the field directly to producers, which speeds up production cycles: *"a reporter can go out there, finish and then send it back because of the help of technology"* (P02, Personal communication, Bauchi, December 24, 2025).

Despite apparent digital adoption, participants qualified their accounts with practical limits. Several stations lack advanced analytics, podcasting capabilities and formal data

workflows. One manager said they were moving towards podcasting and streaming but have not yet adopted analytics or data-driven audience measurement: *"we have not gone into data processing, data analysis"* (P05, Personal communication, Bauchi, December 24, 2025). Another respondent described successful use of satellite and internet to widen reach but noted intermittent internet quality and high data costs that disrupt live streaming (P02, Personal communication, Bauchi, December 24, 2025).

Technology thus functions as necessary infrastructure rather than as a decisive strategic advantage for sustainability. Where digital practice supports survival it does so by extending reach and lowering marginal distribution cost. Where it falls short it is because of limited technical skills, intermittent connectivity and the absence of monetisation strategies for online audiences.

Culture, Religion and Informal Regulation of Media Practice

Cultural and religious sensitivities were a constant concern in editorial decision making. Participants from Bauchi and neighbouring states described tightly bounded normative expectations about what may be broadcast and when. Several managers explained that programming decisions are routinely filtered to avoid offence to religious or cultural groups, and that some content categories are effectively off limits. One general manager observed that local audiences expect radio to accord prominence to religious material at certain times, and that failure to respect these norms provokes listener complaints: *"why don't you replace musical with Qur'anic recitation"* (P04, Personal communication, Bauchi, December 24, 2025).

Advertising is also moderated by cultural considerations. Participants reported that alcohol and similar products are not acceptable advertising categories in many communities. Language choice is another boundary condition. Stations with broad Hausa programming emphasised local-language content to secure audience trust and advertiser interest. One manager estimated that about 80% of programming is in Hausa to match the listening base (P02, Personal communication, Bauchi, December 24, 2025).

Community leaders, religious authorities and ethnic sensibilities act as informal regulators. Stations adopt careful editorial balancing to retain legitimacy. Several participants noted that this cultural embeddedness supports audience loyalty even as it constrains the range of commercially marketable content.

Human Capital, Staffing and Organisational Survival

Recruitment and retention of skilled staff is a recurrent operational problem. Participants described competition for experienced personnel, movement to federal broadcasters, and a local labour market where better pay or more secure pensions draw staff away. One manager noted that staff routinely leave for slightly higher wages elsewhere: *"some of them left us and went to NTA"* (P03, Personal communication, Bauchi, December 24, 2025).

Organisations use several retention strategies. New stations recruit retired or experienced personnel as anchors and managers to transfer skills and provide mentoring. Another commonly used tactic is to recruit young diploma holders, sponsor their HND studies, and retain them through staged training and scholarship. One station manager described this apprenticeship as a deliberate pipeline: *"we get them engaged, then we get them scholarship to do their HND"* (P02, Personal communication, Bauchi, December 24, 2025).

Welfare constraints are salient. Irregular cash flow and limited capacity to pay market wages create emotional labour burdens on staff who continue to work out of professional commitment or local attachment. Several participants emphasised pride in editorial standards and professional dignity even where remuneration is weak. Training and internal professional development are used where possible to compensate for poor pay and to sustain organisational morale.

Figures 2a and 2b, below, align four staffing strategies reported in the interviews to the participants who exemplified them in their responses. Figure 2a is a vertical flowchart while Figure 2b is a network version of it.

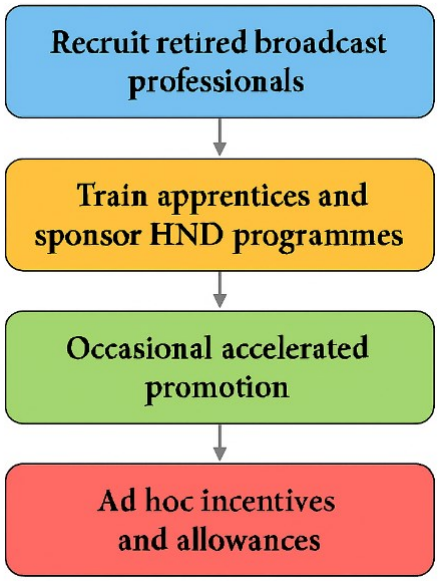


Figure 2a. Staffing Strategies Adopted by Media Start-ups to Address Human Capital Constraints in Northeast Nigeria (*Source: Field interview data, 2025*)

The Figures summarise the staffing approaches reported by participants in response to limited financial and human resources. Strategies include recruitment of retired professionals, apprenticeship-based training with educational sponsorship, accelerated internal promotion, and the use of ad hoc incentives. The figure reflects practices identified through in-depth interviews and corroborated by survey responses.

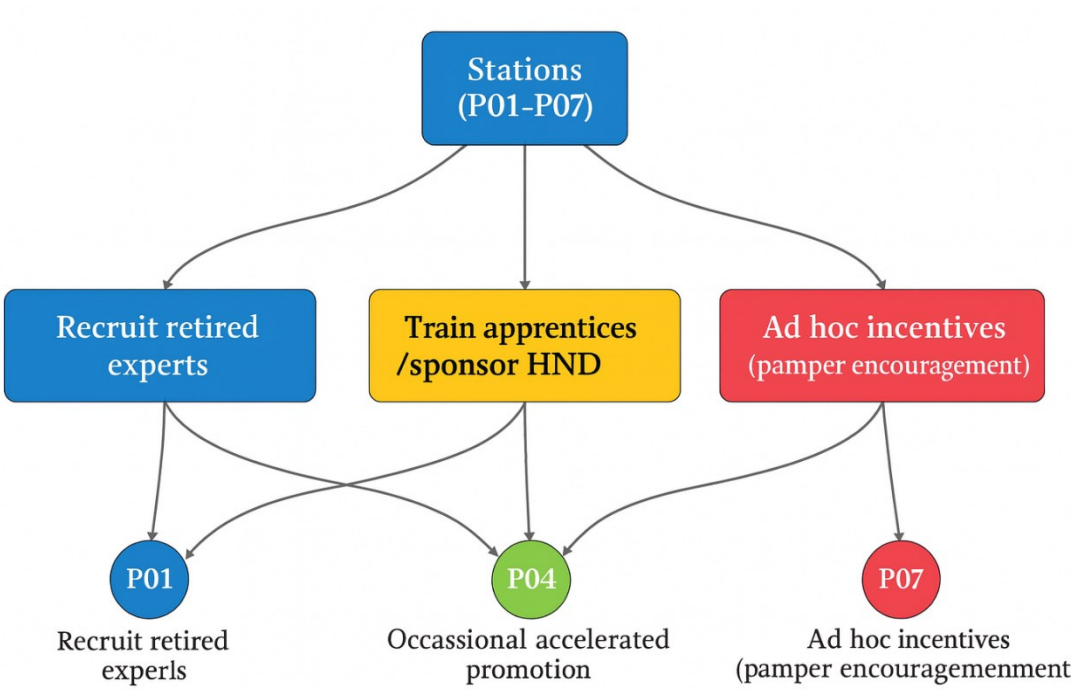


Figure 2b. Network of Staffing Strategies and Participant Exemplars (Stations P01–P07)
(*Source: Field interview data, 2025*)

This network diagram centres on a neutral node labelled Stations (P01–P07) and radiates outward to four larger strategy nodes: Recruit retired experts, Train apprentices / sponsor HNDs, Occasional accelerated promotion, and Author incentives (pamper, encouragement). Smaller participant nodes P01–P07 are arranged around the strategy nodes and connected by thin grey lines with arrowheads that indicate directionality from the central station node toward strategies and from strategies to their exemplars. Strategy nodes are dominant to signal their role as categories, while participant nodes are smaller and uniformly styled to emphasise relationships rather than individual prominence.

Security Context and Regional Specificities

Security conditions shape operations in direct and indirect ways. Participants from Bauchi emphasised relative stability in their state compared with other parts of the Northeast. That comparative calm is an asset that attracts some investment and talent. Yet insecurity across the region limits advertisers' willingness to travel and reduces market size in damaged or insecure areas. Newsrooms temper coverage of conflict sensitive issues out of fear for staff safety, and some assignments are abandoned or redesigned because of risk.

One long serving manager reflected on how insecurity forced editorial caution during the height of violent episodes: *"you have to coin different names, you dare not even take certain stories"* (P02, Personal communication, Bauchi, December 24, 2025). Overall, security is an external constraint that channels editorial risk taking, constrains revenue opportunities and affects mobility for field reporting.

Respondent Profile

A total of 250 respondents participated in the study across the six Northeast states: Borno, Yobe, Adamawa, Bauchi, Gombe, and Taraba. The sample comprised 150 founders and co-founders (60%), 63 senior managers (25%), and 37 operational staff (15%). Participants' ages ranged from 23 to 55 years, with a mean of 34.6 years and a standard deviation of 7.2. The mean professional experience in media start-ups was 4.8 years (SD = 2.1). Table 1, below, presents a detailed distribution of respondents by role, state, and years of experience.

Table 1: Respondent Profile by Role, State and Years of Experience

State	Founders/Co-Founders	Senior Managers	Operational Staff	Total	Mean Years' Experience
Borno	25	10	5	40	4.9
Yobe	22	8	6	36	4.7
Adamawa	24	10	5	39	4.6
Bauchi	28	12	7	47	5.0
Gombe	23	12	7	42	4.8
Taraba	28	11	7	46	4.9
Total	150	63	37	250	4.8

(*Source: Field interview data, 2025*)

Financial Constraints

Respondents rated financial challenges as highly significant. On a five-point Likert scale, the item "Lack of funding limits operational capacity" produced a mean of 4.32 (SD = 0.78), with 72% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing. Similarly, "Delayed payments from advertisers affect salary disbursement" recorded a mean of 4.05 (SD = 0.85), with 65% agreement (see Table 2 below). These results indicate pervasive financial scarcity across the sample. Qualitative data reinforced these findings, with one founder in Bauchi noting: "Sometimes we wait three months before advertisers pay, which affects staff salaries" (P05, Personal communication, December 2025).

Table 2: Survey Responses on Financial Constraints

Item	Mean	SD	Agree/Strongly Agree (%)
Lack of funding limits operational capacity	4.32	0.78	72
Delayed payments from advertisers affect salary	4.05	0.85	65

(*Source: Field interview data, 2025*)

Human Capital and Staffing Challenges

Staffing difficulties were moderately prevalent. "Recruiting and retaining qualified staff is difficult" scored a mean of 3.87 (SD = 0.91; 55% agreement). "In-house training improves staff retention" had a mean of 3.78 (SD = 0.88; 60% agreement), while "High turnover affects programme quality" recorded 3.65 (SD = 0.95; 52% agreement) as shown in Table 3 below. These figures indicate that staffing issues were a consistent operational concern, though training interventions partially mitigated turnover effects. A senior manager in Maiduguri stated: "It is hard to keep technical staff; we provide mentorship and sometimes sponsor HND or IT courses to retain them" (P06, Personal communication, December 2025).

Table 3: Staffing and Human Capital Challenges

Item	Mean	SD	Agree/Strongly Agree (%)
Recruiting and retaining qualified staff	3.87	0.91	55
In-house training improves staff retention	3.78	0.88	60
High turnover affects programme quality	3.65	0.95	52

(*Source: Field interview data, 2025*)

Regulatory and Licensing Constraints

Survey responses indicated that regulatory processes were moderately constraining. "Regulatory procedures for licensing are cumbersome" had a mean of 3.95 (SD = 0.87; 58% agreement), while "Taxation and administrative requirements hinder operations" scored 3.60 (SD = 0.93; 50% agreement) as shown in Table 4 below. Qualitative interviews highlighted delays and bureaucratic hurdles. One participant in Maiduguri commented: "The process of renewing a licence can take months, and sometimes we are left guessing" (P06, Personal communication, December 2025).

Table 4: Regulatory and Licensing Constraints

Item	Mean	SD	Agree/Strongly Agree (%)
Regulatory procedures for licensing cumbersome	3.95	0.87	58
Taxation and administrative requirements hinder operations	3.60	0.93	50

(*Source: Field interview data, 2025*)

Technology Adoption and Digital Practices

The survey assessed both platform usage and perceived effectiveness. 81% of respondents maintained an active social media presence, 65% used streaming platforms, 27% applied analytics tools, and 15% produced podcasts. The item "Digital adoption improves audience reach" had a mean of 3.90 (SD = 0.85; 61% agreement) (see Table 5 below). A Yola-based founder reported: "We rely on social media and streaming platforms, but we do not have analytics to guide us" (P07, Personal communication, December 2025). These findings indicate widespread adoption of basic digital tools, but limited advanced digital sophistication.

Table 5: Technology Adoption and Digital Practices

Platform/Item	% Respondents	Mean	SD
Social media	81	3.90	0.85
Streaming platforms	65	3.78	0.88
Analytics tools	27	3.60	0.90
Podcast production	15	3.45	0.92

(*Source: Field interview data, 2025*)

Cultural, Religious and Security Constraints

Cultural and religious norms were reported as influential, with "Cultural/religious norms affect content decisions" scoring a mean of 3.92 (SD = 0.82; 68% agreement). Security issues affecting reporting scored 3.45 (SD = 0.89; 40% agreement) as indicated in Table 6 below. A participant in Bauchi explained: "We often avoid topics that might upset community elders or religious leaders" (P05, Personal communication, December 2025). These results demonstrate that socio-cultural sensitivities were a prominent operational consideration, while security constraints were context-specific but less widespread.

Table 6: Cultural, Religious, and Security Constraints

Item	Mean	SD	Agree/Strongly Agree (%)
Cultural/religious norms affect content	3.92	0.82	68
Security issues constrain reporting	3.45	0.89	40

(*Source: Field interview data, 2025*)

Integration and Synthesis

Quantitative survey results provided prevalence estimates for key challenges, which were triangulated with qualitative interviews to produce a richer, context-sensitive understanding of financial, human, technological, regulatory, and socio-cultural constraints affecting media start-ups. Table 7, below, presents a combined view of thematic prevalence and illustrative interview excerpts.

Table 7: Integration of Survey and Qualitative Insights

Theme	% Survey Agreement	Exemplar Interview Quote
Financial constraints	72	"*Sometimes we wait three months before advertisers pay*" (P05)
Human capital and staffing	55–60	"*It is hard to keep technical staff; we provide mentorship*" (P06)
Regulatory and licensing	50–58	"*The process of renewing a licence can take months*" (P06)
Technology adoption	61	"*We rely on social media and streaming platforms, but no analytics*" (P07)
Cultural/religious constraints	68	"*We often avoid topics that might upset community elders*" (P05)
Security	40	"We limit field reporting in certain areas due to insecurity" (P07)

(*Source: Field interview data, 2025*)

Reinterpreting Media Entrepreneurship in Peripheral Regions

The findings invite a reconsideration of how media entrepreneurship is conceptualised in peripheral and fragile regions. In contrast to dominant literature from the Global North where media start-ups are framed as growth-oriented ventures driven by scale, innovation and market expansion, the media enterprises examined here are primarily survival-driven. Participants consistently positioned their organisations as mechanisms for staying afloat in difficult political, economic and security environments rather than as vehicles for rapid growth or capital accumulation. This contrasts sharply with entrepreneurship models that emphasise opportunity recognition, venture scaling and competitive differentiation (Alexander et al., 2004; Cage, 2016).

In the Northeast Nigerian context, media institutions operate simultaneously as economic units and as socio-political actors embedded within fragile local systems. Their legitimacy depends as much on social trust, cultural alignment and political caution as on commercial performance. This dual character aligns with Girija's (2020) political economy reading of media entrepreneurship, which situates media firms within relations of power, ideology and control rather than purely market logics. The evidence suggests that entrepreneurship in such regions is less about innovation in the classical sense and more about endurance, negotiation and institutional relevance. Media start-ups therefore function as stabilising social institutions while attempting to survive under persistent structural constraints, challenging universalistic assumptions embedded in mainstream entrepreneurship discourse.

Funding as the Central Structuring Force

Across all ownership types, funding emerged as the core condition shaping organisational behaviour, professional choices and strategic horizons. Financial scarcity does not merely limit growth; it structures every other challenge reported by participants, including staffing, technology adoption, regulatory compliance and editorial independence. This aligns with African media sustainability scholarship which identifies weak advertising markets, delayed payments and overreliance on donor funding as systemic constraints (Azubuike & Ikiriko, 2019; Oburo, 2021).

The findings show that unstable cash flow compromises staff welfare and encourages labour mobility, reinforcing cycles of skills loss. It also narrows editorial risk-taking, as stations avoid content that might threaten relationships with advertisers, political actors or donors. While donor and NGO partnerships provide short-term relief, they also raise concerns about agenda influence and uneven programme focus, echoing wider debates on media independence in low-resource environments (Minow, 2021; Wolf, 2023).

Importantly, the evidence suggests that financial weakness discourages long-term innovation. Technology adoption becomes reactive rather than strategic, undertaken only when necessary for basic operations. This reinforces the argument that sustainability precedes innovation rather than the reverse. Without predictable funding frameworks, media start-ups remain trapped in survival cycles, unable to convert professional competence into institutional stability. The centrality of finance therefore reframes independence, innovation and professionalism as outcomes of economic security rather than moral or technical commitments alone.

Regulation without Censorship, and Censorship without Regulation

The study reveals a nuanced regulatory environment characterised by formal oversight without consistent censorship, alongside pervasive informal constraints that function as de facto control mechanisms. Participants' accounts differentiate clearly between statutory regulation by the National Broadcasting Commission and political or cultural interference. Private station managers generally described regulatory encounters as administrative and punitive rather than censorial, focused on licensing, fines and warnings. In contrast, state-owned broadcasters reported routine self-censorship arising from political proximity and institutional dependence, confirming earlier analyses of ownership and control in Nigeria (Oberiri, 2016; Duke, 2021).

However, the absence of overt censorship does not equate to editorial freedom. Cultural norms, religious sensitivities and security concerns generate strong incentives for anticipatory self-restraint. These informal pressures operate beyond the reach of formal regulation and are internalised by practitioners as professional common sense. This aligns

with Girija's (2020) argument that power in media systems often operates through subtle institutional and cultural mechanisms rather than explicit coercion.

The coexistence of regulation without censorship and censorship without regulation complicates binary understandings of media freedom. It suggests that in fragile contexts, control is exercised through dispersed social expectations rather than through direct state intervention, producing a media environment that is compliant without being formally constrained.

Digital Opportunity without Digital Power

Although participants reported widespread adoption of digital tools, this has not translated into sustained strategic advantage. Digital practices remain largely instrumental, supporting content distribution and audience reach but failing to generate new revenue streams or institutional leverage. This gap reflects structural deficiencies in infrastructure, skills and monetisation capacity, echoing long-standing concerns about digitisation in Nigerian broadcasting (Ihechu & Uche, 2012; Azubuike & Ikiriko, 2019).

The findings suggest that digital adoption occurs within conditions of platform dependency. Stations rely on global platforms for visibility while lacking control over data, analytics or advertising algorithms. This dependency increases vulnerability, as audience engagement does not automatically convert into financial sustainability. Moreover, poor internet reliability and high data costs limit consistent digital output, particularly in regional settings.

Digital technology therefore functions as an operational necessity rather than a source of power. Without supportive ecosystems, training and local monetisation structures, digital tools reproduce existing inequalities rather than resolve them. This challenges optimistic assumptions that digitalisation alone can rescue struggling media institutions in peripheral regions.

Culture and Religion as de Facto Media Regulators

The evidence positions culture and religion as powerful informal regulators of media practice. Cultural legitimacy is not optional; it is a prerequisite for organisational survival. Stations that fail to align content with dominant moral and religious expectations risk audience rejection and advertiser withdrawal. This confirms historical accounts of broadcasting in Northern Nigeria, where media institutions have long negotiated religious authority and communal norms (Beli, 2024; Duke, 2021).

Participants' narratives show how ethical judgement, professionalism and cultural sensitivity are continuously negotiated rather than fixed. While this fosters social cohesion and conflict avoidance, it also narrows discursive space and limits pluralism.

Certain viewpoints and commercial categories remain excluded, not through formal bans but through shared understandings of propriety.

This form of regulation complicates liberal models of public discourse that prioritise unrestricted expression. In fragile and religiously plural societies, legitimacy often outweighs liberal abstraction. Media institutions therefore operate as mediators of social stability, balancing inclusion against the risks of fragmentation. The findings suggest that pluralism in such contexts is bounded and negotiated rather than absolute.

Rethinking Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Media Start-Ups

Innovation, as described by participants, is grounded less in technology and more in relevance, trust and ethical balance. Stations prioritise content that resonates locally, sustains audience loyalty and avoids social rupture. This challenges technology-centred narratives of media innovation prevalent in much entrepreneurship literature (Alexander et al., 2004; Cage, 2016).

In this context, innovation takes modest forms such as language choice, interactive programming, community engagement and problem-focused content. These practices reflect pragmatic adaptation rather than experimental disruption. The findings therefore caution against importing universal innovation models into fragile media environments without contextual adjustment.

For policy and training, this implies that capacity-building efforts should prioritise editorial judgement, ethical reasoning and community engagement alongside technical skills. Media entrepreneurship in peripheral regions is less about novelty and more about resilience, credibility and social anchoring. Recognising this reality is essential for designing interventions that strengthen, rather than destabilise, local media ecosystems.

Quantitative Study Discussion

The findings of this study provide a detailed account of the operational, financial, and institutional challenges confronting media start-ups in Northeast Nigeria, combining survey prevalence estimates with rich qualitative insights from founders, managers, and operational staff. Financial scarcity emerged as the most salient challenge across the surveyed population. The survey revealed that 72% of respondents identified lack of funding as a limiting factor, with 65% reporting irregular payments from advertisers. These quantitative results were reinforced by qualitative interviews, in which the participants recounted prolonged delays in revenue remittance, affecting not only salary disbursement but also programme continuity. As highlighted by Oburo (2021) in a broader Nigerian context, the absence of diversified revenue streams remains a structural limitation for media entrepreneurs, particularly in peripheral regions with weak advertising cultures. The qualitative testimonies illustrate the daily operational strain that

financial uncertainty imposes on small media outfits, echoing observations by Azubuike and Ikiriko (2019), who identified similar funding constraints among private broadcasters in Port Harcourt. This confluence of quantitative and qualitative evidence underscores that media start-ups operate under persistent financial precarity, which shapes strategic choices, resource allocation, and staffing decisions.

Human capital challenges were moderately prevalent but intricately linked to financial conditions. Survey data indicated that 55% of respondents found recruiting and retaining qualified staff difficult, while 60% agreed that in-house training improved retention. High turnover affected programme quality for 52% of participants. Qualitative accounts revealed that founders relied on mentorship, sponsorship for HND or IT courses, and internal training initiatives to retain staff. These findings align with Drufuca's (2015) arguments in Media Economics Theory that human capital is a critical determinant of operational efficiency and content quality. They also resonate with Girija's (2020) political economy perspective, emphasising that staff retention strategies are negotiated within structural constraints, including remuneration capacity, professional development opportunities, and institutional culture. The interplay between financial scarcity and human resource challenges reflects a persistent tension in African media entrepreneurship, where founders are compelled to balance economic survival with workforce development (Oburo, 2021; Azubuike & Ikiriko, 2019).

Regulatory and licensing constraints emerged as a nuanced operational factor. Survey responses indicated that 58% of respondents perceived licensing procedures as cumbersome, while 50% noted taxation and administrative requirements as hindrances. Qualitative interviews revealed extended renewal periods, unpredictable bureaucracy, and occasional political interference, though overt censorship appeared limited. These findings correspond with Oberiri's (2016) observations on the Nigerian media landscape, where regulatory frameworks are often rigid and inconsistently applied, and producing uncertainty for private actors. The evidence also reinforces Girija's (2020) argument that ownership and control dynamics are mediated through both formal regulation and informal political pressures, which are especially salient for start-ups operating in fragile, peripheral contexts. The moderate prevalence of regulatory challenges suggests that while legal frameworks exist, the practical impediments emerge less from censorship and more from procedural opacity and administrative delays.

Technology adoption was widespread, particularly regarding social media and streaming platforms. Survey results showed that 81% of respondents maintained active social media accounts, 65% used streaming services, while only 27% employed analytics tools and 15% produced podcasts. Respondents largely agreed that digital adoption enhanced audience reach (Mean = 3.90). Qualitative interviews highlighted reliance on social media and streaming for content distribution, with limited application of analytics to guide

programming. These findings illustrate the uneven sophistication of digital convergence among Northeast Nigerian media start-ups. The pattern is consistent with Ihechu and Uche (2012), who identified structural limitations, infrastructure gaps, and knowledge constraints as barriers to the effective use of digital tools in Nigerian broadcasting. International scholarship also emphasises this trend, showing that while digital platforms lower entry barriers, the strategic use of analytics for content optimisation remains uneven, particularly in emerging economies (Wolf, 2023; Girija, 2020). The partial adoption of podcasts and analytics may reflect resource scarcity, technological literacy gaps, and prioritisation of immediate audience engagement over long-term data-driven strategy.

Cultural and religious considerations were reported as highly influential, with 68% of respondents acknowledging their effect on content decisions. Interviews revealed informal self-censorship and careful negotiation with community norms, particularly to avoid offending elders or religious leaders. Security concerns were reported by 40% of respondents, primarily affecting field reporting and advertiser confidence. The interplay of socio-cultural and security constraints demonstrates the complex operating environment of media start-ups in Northeast Nigeria, where cultural sensitivity is a critical determinant of audience acceptance, while insecurity intermittently restricts mobility and content coverage. Beli (2024) highlights that these regional dynamics, shaped by both historical and contemporary social factors, necessitate adaptive programming and flexible operational strategies. The evidence aligns with Girija's (2020) observation that peripheral media ecosystems are characterised by informal regulatory practices that influence decision-making and content selection.

Integration of financial, human, regulatory, technological, and socio-cultural factors illustrates the multi-dimensional nature of media entrepreneurship in this context. Financial scarcity intersects with staffing challenges, limiting the ability to retain technical personnel despite available mentorship schemes. Licensing and regulatory hurdles, though moderate in prevalence, create additional uncertainty that constrains investment decisions and operational planning. Digital adoption improves reach but is limited in scope, suggesting that media start-ups prioritise distribution over analytics-led innovation. Cultural and religious considerations shape content, creating an informal governance system that complements formal regulations, while security risks remain situational but significant for operational planning. This interconnectedness confirms the necessity of a holistic analytical lens that captures the interaction between economic, technological, regulatory, and socio-cultural domains in shaping media entrepreneurial strategies.

Combined Qualitative and Quantitative Data Discussion

The combined quantitative and qualitative evidence reinforces the relevance of Media Economics Theory, Political Economy, and Media Entrepreneurship Theory. Financial limitations and uneven monetisation strategies demonstrate that start-ups operate under

market constraints that shape investment and operational decisions (Alexander et al., 2004; Drufuca, 2015). Regulatory procedures and informal political pressures align with Political Economy perspectives emphasising the role of power, ownership, and institutional structures in mediating entrepreneurial behaviour (Girija, 2020; Oberiri, 2016). Media Entrepreneurship Theory provides explanatory power for understanding adaptive strategies, risk-taking, and innovation, highlighting how founders exploit opportunities within constraints to sustain operations (Girija, 2020; Khajeheian, 2017). These theoretical lenses illuminate the strategic balancing act that media start-ups perform in Northeast Nigeria, negotiating economic survival, regulatory compliance, digital engagement, and socio-cultural acceptance.

The evidence from Northeast Nigeria is also consistent with broader African and global scholarship. Studies on private media sustainability in other African contexts highlight similar constraints, including advertising scarcity, staff retention difficulties, and uneven digital capacity (Oburo, 2021; Azubuike & Ikiriko, 2019). Internationally, media entrepreneurship in peripheral or economically marginal regions demonstrates that start-ups are vulnerable to structural deficiencies, market volatility, and limited institutional support (Cage, 2016; Minow, 2021; Wolf, 2023). However, the findings from this study emphasise the specificity of Northeast Nigeria's operating environment, where a combination of fragile security, socio-cultural norms, and uneven infrastructural development shapes entrepreneurial practices in ways that differ from coastal urban centres or well-resourced national media hubs.

Qualitative narratives provide rich context to the survey prevalence data, exemplifying how operational strategies are enacted in practice. For instance, founders reported providing in-house mentorship and financial support to staff, establishing relationships with local communities to navigate cultural sensitivities, and selectively leveraging digital platforms for audience engagement. These insights demonstrate the agency of media entrepreneurs within structural limitations, reflecting adaptive capacity and strategic ingenuity. The triangulation of survey and interview data enhances confidence in the representativeness and contextual validity of the findings, highlighting the strengths of an exploratory sequential mixed-methods approach.

Finally, media start-ups in Northeast Nigeria face interlocking challenges spanning financial scarcity, regulatory complexity, human capital shortages, uneven technology adoption, and socio-cultural constraints. Each dimension contributes to the operational environment, influencing strategic decision-making, content production, and audience engagement. These insights provide a foundation for further analysis in policy, funding, and professional development, and create empirical support for targeted interventions aimed at strengthening media entrepreneurship in peripheral regions.

CONCLUSION

This mixed-method study showed that media start-ups and legacy broadcasters in Northeast Nigeria operate under a tight set of constraints that are economic, regulatory, cultural and technological. The quantitative strand (n = 250) confirmed the centrality of finance to everyday survival: 72% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that lack of funding limits operational capacity, and 65% reported that delayed payments from advertisers affect salary disbursement. Human capital pressures were evident: 55% of respondents said recruiting and retaining qualified staff was difficult, while 60% recorded that in-house training helps retention. Regulatory burdens were widely felt: 58% agreed that licensing procedures were cumbersome and 50% noted taxation and administrative requirements as operational obstacles.

Digital tools are widely used but are not yet a strategic escape route. In the survey 81% reported active social media use and 65% used streaming platforms, but only 27% used analytics and 15% produced podcasts. This pattern aligns with interview evidence that stations had adopted social media and streaming for reach but lacked capacity for data-driven monetisation. Cultural and religious constraints were highly salient for content choices, with 68% of respondents indicating moderate to high influence of local norms on programming. Security concerns affected operations less uniformly; 40% reported that insecurity constrained field reporting or advertiser confidence, and qualitative accounts located Bauchi as relatively more stable than neighbouring states.

Finally, the quantitative and qualitative data show media entrepreneurship in the region as survival oriented. Entrepreneurs and managers negotiated scarce funds, heavy administrative demands and community sensitivities while sustaining programme delivery through informal training, mentorship and resourcefulness. This pattern challenges growth-centred models of media entrepreneurship and supports political economy perspectives that foreground structural inequalities, ownership relations and social embeddedness in peripheral contexts (Girija, 2020).

Recommendations and Directions for Future Research

1. *Regulators*: Introduce graduated licensing fees and clearer, time-bound procedures for start-ups. Streamline compliance paperwork and publish turnaround targets so new entrants can plan cashflows with greater certainty.
2. *Fiscal relief and taxation*: Federal and state authorities should consider transitional tax relief or targeted tax credits for start-ups during an initial incubation period of 12 to 24 months to reduce early cashflow shocks.
3. *Donors and development partners*: Move from short-term project grants to medium term institutional support that funds financial planning, basic operating reserves and workforce welfare. Support revolving funds or matching grants tied to measurable governance milestones.

4. *Media owners and managers*: Prioritise modest, structured staff welfare and predictable pay schedules. Invest in low-cost analytics and basic revenue management tools so that the 81% who use social media can convert reach into measurable value.
5. *Training and partnerships*: Establish sustained partnerships between stations and local universities, NUJ chapters and technical colleges to deliver practical training in financial management, data analytics and ethical decision making. Encourage shared training cohorts to reduce per-station cost.
6. *Advertising market development*: Work with chambers of commerce and local business associations to educate potential advertisers on radio and digital returns and create bundled, low-cost advert packages for small and medium enterprises.
7. *Security and operational planning*: Local media networks should formalise risk assessment protocols and pooling arrangements for field work so that insecurity does not force repeated off-air periods.

Future work should include comparative regional studies across Nigeria, longitudinal tracking of start-up survival and failure points, and advertiser- and audience-facing research that explains demand-side constraints on local advertising markets. Such research will sharpen policy responses and clarify which interventions most improve start-up sustainability.

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