

JOURNALISM PRACTICE AND ETHICAL CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Every field of endeavour comes with its peculiar challenges, and a lot of them bordering on ethics, hence this work, Journalism Practice and Ethical Challenges in Nigeria, x-rays some of the overt ethical limitations currently bedeviling the practices of journalism in the Nigeria media sector, which according to this study includes job gratifications, favouritisms, source disclosure, plagiarism, just to mention, but a few. It also illuminated the obvious benefits of the Nigerian Code of Ethics, which was designed to guide the practitioner aright, during the course of discharging his/her duties. Finally, this study concluded that actually there are presence of prevailing ethical challenges in the Nigeria media sector and thus recommended that the tenets of the Nigeria ethical codes for journalism should be strictly adhered to, among others.

Keywords: *Journalism, ethics, challenges, practice and Nigerian press.*

INTRODUCTION

Journalism entails the entire process involved in the acquisition, processing and distribution of the reports of current events through radio, television, newspaper, magazine, or even the Internet. According to Ureed (2020), "the history of journalism can be traced back to 59BC, when the practice of journalism made its first appearance in Rome". The practice of journalism is an avid offshoot of the great umbrella, known as "communication" or "human communication". However, journalism specifically, comes under a unique branch of communication that is referred to as "mass communication", which is a branch of human communication that has been defined by a litany of experts as a peculiar communication,

packaged by the media and purveyed to an audience, that is not just heterogeneous, but diversely scattered all over, yet, gets the contents or messages being pushed at them simultaneously.

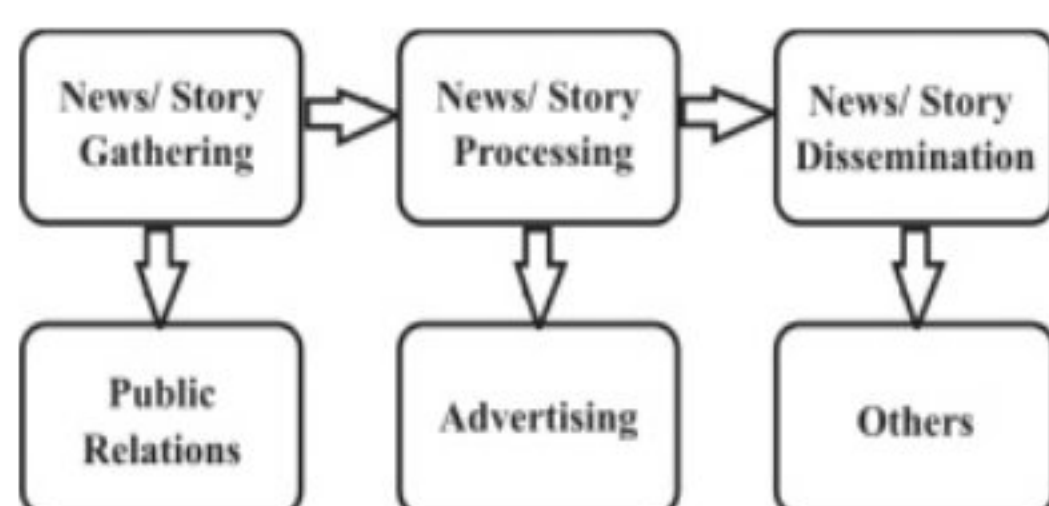
All activities and practices of journalism undoubtedly, must emanate from the vehicle known as the mass media, which connotes a diverse array of media technologies that is targeted to reach and influence a large audience existing within a defined geographical enclave, according the strength of the emanating transmitter. The channels through which the practices of journalism operate include a variety of outlets that are categorized as: print media (newspaper and magazine), broadcast or electronic media (radio and television) and

lately, the Internet. Dominick, 2002, p. 13, succinctly surmises mass communication as the process by which a complex organization with the aid of one or more machines produces and transmits public messages that are directed to a large and heterogeneous audience.

The activities of journalism is a complex system-culminative process that includes the following:

- a. News/ story gathering, by the journalist or reporter,
- b. News/ story processing, which include writing, editing and packaging,
- c. News/ story dissemination, by the media house with the intent of reaching the mass audience.

Other activities of journalism also include public relations, advertisement, and a host of other activities. The above practices of journalism is illustrated below:



API (2021), corroborates the above practices/ activities of journalism thus:

The activities of journalism are distinguished from other communication activities by certain identifiable characteristics, which include, but not limited to story coverage, processing and purveyance. These elements

are what separate journalism from other forms of communication (p. 14).

Journalism does not thrive in a vacuum; it exists within societies. As such, the interest of such a society needs to be protected, preserved and revered by the mass media. This assertion is in tandem with the tenets of the social responsibility theory of the press, as propounded in 1956 by the trio of Siebert, Peterson and Schramm, which stipulates that the press must be responsible to the society where in they exist. Other assumptions of social responsibility theory of the press, according to Obioha, Uwakwe&Egbue (2023, p. 123) include the following:

- a. Media have to accept and maintain their obligations to the society,
- b. Media ownership is private, but on public trust,
- c. News media should be truthful, accurate, fair, objective and relevant,
- d. Media should be free, but self-regulatory,
- e. Media should adhere to the established codes or media ethics, and;
- f. There should be enhanced standard of journalism with responsibility.

Finally, the practices and activities of journalism, all over the world, include news gathering, processing and dissemination. They also include public relations, advertising, and many others. These journalism activities begin with the media and ends with the audience. During the course of discharging these activities, challenges are expected to occur, at

any level in the process of journalism practices, but when it comes to issues of ethics in the profession, the practitioner is expected to live above boards and be guided by the ethical tenets of the industry.

Conceptualizations Framework

Ethics

Ethics is the moral principles that govern one's behaviour. Ethics is concerned with what is morally good or bad, and morally right or wrong. Raseman (2021) defines it as:

The branch of philosophy that deals with concepts of what is right or wrong. It defines principles of decent human conduct in life and in various professions and endeavors. It can serve as a guide for dealing with difficult moral issues and conflicts.

Bartneck, Lutge, Wagner & Welsh (2021, pp. 1-10) trace the etymology of ethics back to the ancient Greece, where the word was originally referred to as "ethos", meaning habit, custom or convention. It was Cicero in 44BC that translated the Greek term into Latin word, known as "mores", meaning ethos or customs, from which the modern concept of morality is derived (Obioha and Udeh, 2022, pp. 81-84). They also listed types of ethics as: Normative, descriptive, deontological, teleological, etc. According to Singer (2021) "Questions of morality and ethics can be found at all levels of society. Ethical behaviour is equally important in the work place as it is in our personal lives". Therefore, ethics is what actually guides that

activities and practices of journalism anywhere in the world.

Ethical Challenges

As aforesaid, ethical challenges exist in journalism as they are in other professions. They are those shortcomings that mar and smear the face of journalism profession and practice. Some ethical challenges of the press, according to Niles (2020) include, "accuracy and standard, slanderous or libelous contents, praise singing, junk journalism, brown envelope journalism, and so many others.

Niles (2020) also writes that, "When ethics is present in the field of journalism, it bends the needle negatively against the industry". Every industry is expected to work in tandem with the basic tenets of such a profession, and journalists are expected to do same. According to Ednah (2013) "in the practice of journalism, just as in other carriers, certain principles and codes are outlined to guide the professionals".

The Nigerian Press Council has sanctioned an ethical document titled, "Code of Ethics for Nigerian Journalists" as a yardstick for the operation of journalism in Nigeria containing about 15 professional codes. These ethical codes help protect the press, the Nigerian government and the society at large (Apuke, 2017). Some of the ethical challenges in the practice of journalism in Nigeria, which the ethical document identifies and tackles are: inaccuracy of reportage, source exposure, indecency, discrimination, gratification, violence, plagiarism, among others (Adunewu,

1998). Ogundipe (1998) also writes that:

An Ethical code is without doubt a sine qua non in any profession. Journalism entails a high degree of public trust. To earn and maintain this trust, it is morally imperative for every journalist and every news medium to observe the highest professional and ethical standards. In the exercise of these duties.

These ethical codes of journalism, when violated, could become hazardous to either the practitioner or the society at large, and to a wide extent, the media outfit. Therefore, Journalism Code of Ethics in Nigeria is designed to protect the industry, the journalist and the society at large and to retain the dignity of the practices and activities of journalism Nigeria.

Journalists

Journalists are people who gather news for the mass media to transmit to the public for the purpose of informing, entertaining and educating them. According to Niles (2020) "Journalism is a form of writing that tells people about things that really happened, which they might not have known already. People who write journalism are called journalists. They might work at newspaper, magazine, website, television or radio stations. Journalism comes in several different forms: news, opinion, etc".

Ureed (2019, p. 18) affirms that there are different types of journalism, each serving a different purpose and audience. There are five types, which are investigative, news, review, columns and feature writing. These journalist are expected to stick to the ethics of journalism

practice during the course of discharging their avowed duties to the society.

The journalist is not unwatched, no, there are statutory bodies formed by either the Federal Government of Nigeria or by the press themselves to monitor the activities of the Nigerian media and journalists. These bodies include the Nigerian Press Council (NPC), National Communication Commission (NCC) and Nigerian Union of Journalist (NUJ), etc. These organizations make sure that the contents and products of the mass media are packaged in such a way that they are in the interest of the society, as well as aligning strictly to the laid down ethical codes of journalism.

The Consequences of Ethical Challenges in the Practices of Journalism

Ethical challenges are like sour tombs that smear the dignity of the journalism profession, thus, wherever they exist consequences abound. Illuminating on the consequences of ethical challenges in the practices of journalism, Singer (2021) writes that;

To say the least, the journalism industry could get under siege if the ethical codes of the industry are not strictly adhered to.

According to Singer (2021) "Our actions affect not only ourselves, but also those around us. Many of our professional decisions involve ethics. If we tell a lie we can lose someone's trust and undermine our own integrity.

When the journalism profession is besieged by ethical challenges, some of the consequences could include the following:

- a. **Clamping down:** The government could clamp down the affected media by shutting it down permanently or even temporarily,
- b. **Fine:** The federal government could also decide to fine any media outfit that has suffered ethical challenges and these fines always run into millions,
- c. **Sanctions:** The Press Council of Nigeria can also place a sanction on the erring station, and
- d. **Reputation Lost:** The public may lose interest in such an outfit, etc.

The repercussions that come with the existence of ethical challenges in the practice of journalism are limitless.

Conclusion

Ethical challenges actually exist in the practice of journalism in Nigeria. These ethical challenges are any act or practice that does not glorify or dignify the reputation of the media industry. For example, when a reporter accepts a brown envelope in the beat he/she has gone to cover an unveiling story, this action may influence and bend the reports of such a story; when this happens, favouritism has stepped in and objectivity trashed into the can. This and more are examples of ethical challenges the practice of journalism suffers in Nigeria. The Nigeria code of ethics designed by the Nigerian Press Council is there to guide all media practitioners and steer them clear from involving in ethical challenges. Hence, adhering strictly to the codes of ethics of journalism

entails respect to the profession, bearing public interest at heart and respecting the existing media laws enacted by the federal government of Nigeria, as well as those enacted by the journalists themselves

Recommendations

In order to reduce or discourage the prevalence of ethical challenges in the practice of journalism in Nigeria by the mass media, these recommendations suffice:

1. The ethical code of journalism in Nigeria which was signed into law in 1998 should be adequately enforced,
2. Media owners should always monitor the reports of journalists before they are disseminated for public consumption,
3. Too much press freedom should be discouraged in Nigeria,
4. The NCC should stiffen its penalty on erring media and journalists,
5. Commercialization of news stories is definitely injurious to the society and should be discouraged completely,
6. Public interest should be paramount to every journalist, because this is part of the social responsibility role of the press to the society,
7. The self-censorship syndrome that exists in the Nigerian journalism industry should be discouraged, and
8. The welfare of the Nigerian journalists should be reviewed upwards, to discourage acceptance of brown envelopes during news coverage, and praise singing for politicians just for pecuniary interests.

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