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ETHICAL PROBLEMS FACED BY JOURNALISTS IN NIGERIA AND THE ROLE OF MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS IN SUSTAINING PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

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Abstract

Ethics are significant because they outline appropriate standards of conduct for journalists. This paper examines the ethical problems faced by journalists in Nigeria and the role of media organizations in sustaining professional standards. The population of this study are journalists and media professionals from various media houses in Lagos State. A total number of One Hundred and Fifty (150) journalists were selected using purposive sampling technique. The study made use of a questionnaire as a research instrument. The findings of the study revealed that journalists in Lagos adhere to media laws and ethics (X = 3.81, SD = 2.74) and journalists in Lagos usually break media laws and ethics (X = 3.28, SD = 2.09). Also, journalists may be offered bribes or face pressure to avoid reporting on corruption cases, especially those involving powerful individuals or institutions (X = 3.48, SD = 2.19), journalists may encounter challenges in having access to accurate information and official data which may hinder them in reporting accurate information (X = 3.19, SD = 2.29) and corruption is one the factors that contribute to ethical problems in journalism (X = 3.23, SD = 2.05). The study recommends that journalists should be trained on media ethics and moral of conducts.

Keywords: *Ethical problems, Journalists, Media Ethics, Media Organizations and Professional standards*

Introduction

The worrisome rate of spreading fake news, hate speech, source's reliability, falsehoods, poor internal censorship, and other unhealthy activities leading to major ethical difficulties is the guiding and core narrative of ethical issues in journalism in Nigeria. According to Briggs and Burke in 2005, they claimed that "journalists are not to be trusted" and that they can be "derogatory". (Briggs and Burke, 2005). This is due to the fact that, regardless of whether a news organization is privately or publicly owned, its employers are subject to editorial control. What appears on the newspaper's pages can be decided by politicians who have the funds to operate a media organisation organization (Dare, 2010: 2). Private media work to safeguard the interests of the owners, whereas government-owned media work to preserve the government's interests. This results in violations of the established code of ethics. He who pays the piper, as the adage goes, sets the tone.

Journalists serve as the watchdogs or gatekeepers of society because they select the news and make critical judgments about what society should say to itself. As the guardians of society, journalists must abide by a code of ethics that makes sure they carry out their duties appropriately. The journalistic code of ethics is the set of values that journalists are expected to uphold. These include a dedication to telling the truth objectively

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and without being swayed by personal gain; upholding source confidentiality; and giving credit where credit is due (Ike, 2005: 74).Media is become as essential as food and clothing. It has served an important part in societal strengthening. The media is regarded as a "mirror" of modern society; in actuality, it is the media that influences our lives. The goal of the media is to enlighten people about current events and to keep them up to date on the newest gossip and fashion. It tells the story of people who are geographically separated. In other words, the media can make a significant contribution to society. Because they have access to people, it has a lot of power to change people's minds. This power can be utilized constructively by educating people or maliciously by misleading innocent people. The most significant application of media is to educate people about fundamental human rights. The media serves as a conduit between government and the general public. Given the importance of the media in society, there is a need for ethical concerns.

Statement of the Problem

Ethical problems have been the most significant impediment to Nigerian journalism profession. Since gaining widespread adoption and recognition in the country two decades ago, online journalism platforms have frequently violated ethical constraints in the name of the much-touted press freedom, spreading fake news, hate speech, a lack of source credibility, falsehoods, poor internal censorship, and other unhealthy operations that have resulted in significant ethical problems. Despite the fact that some media regulations limit conventional journalists' ability to obtain information that may be harmful to the nation's sovereignty and citizens' rights and privileges. Some journalists emphasize the act of obtaining important details about business executives, powerful private individuals, and government operations labeled classified information or criticism of government policies and programs in a bid to blackmail government officials for personal gain at the expense of the interest of the public. Many ethical issues are brought up by the constant insults, threats, incendiary material, obscene scenes, reckless language, and conversations that result from such content in journalism. Online journalism, in particular, and a variety of others, have established a very unique and efficient approach of dominating and controlling public opinions on a variety of subjects with the goal of overwhelming out objective views inside Nigeria's social, cultural, and political environment. This is fascinated by prevalent partisanship that dominates their coverage region or where their contents are desired. Therefore, this study examines the ethical problems faced by journalists in Nigeria and the role of media organizations in sustaining professional standards.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to examine ethical problems faced by journalists and the role of media organizations in sustaining professional standards in Lagos State, Nigeria. The secondary objectives are as follows:

i. To investigate the perceived adherence to media laws and ethical concerns among journalists in Lagos Nigeria.
ii. To identify the ethical challenges encountered by journalists in Lagos State, Nigeria.
iii. To explore the factors responsible for the ethical problems among journalists in Lagos State.

Research Questions

i. To what extent do journalists in Lagos State adhere to media laws and ethics of their profession?
ii. What are the ethical challenges encountered by journalists in Lagos State, Nigeria?

iii. What are the factors that contribute to the ethical problems faced by journalists in Lagos State?

Literature Review

Journalism is assumed to play an important role in the collective life of a community or nation, and as such, the press must be governed, organised, and conducted in accordance with the same underlying values that govern the rest of society (such as free speech, equality of all citizens, and the rule of law) (McQuail, 2013: 5). As a result, because journalism is a main medium of public communication that provides all citizens with information and guidance for developing opinions and making decisions, it is a necessary condition for these values. As a result, there can be no real public space and no opportunity to participate in self-government activities if there is no media. As a result, there can be no real public space and no democracy without media. According to Garnham (1990: 364), journalists have two primary roles in the public sphere: acquiring and transmitting information and creating a forum for debate. However, even in long-established liberal democracies, the space for free expression has been and continues to be reduced in the twenty-first century (White, 2007).

Ethics is a philosophical branch that "entails systematizing, defending, and advocating principles of right and wrong behavior." By defining concepts such as good and evil, right and wrong, virtue as well as vice, justice and crime, ethics attempts to address the concerns of human morality (Martinez, 2019). The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), an organization with over 600,000 media professionals from more than 140 nations that was founded in Paris in 1926 but now has its headquarters in Brussels, Belgium, highlighted some ethical concerns about journalism. Despite being approved as the IFJ Global Charter of Ethics for Journalists on June 12, 2019 at the 30th IFJ World Congress in Tunis, the resolution ranked the transmission of the truth and factual information to the public as the foremost obligation of journalists.

Journalists must not only provide unbiased news reporting, but they must also resist suppressing vital information, falsifying papers, and distorting facts. To make this a reality, journalists must extensively verify their sources. The Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), a signatory to the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), approved the IFJ Global Charter of Ethics for Journalists for its members. The Nigerian Press Council (NPC), which is responsible for ensuring the highest standards of ethics and professionalism in the Nigerian media, has developed a code of ethical conduct for Nigerian media professionals.

It is modeled after the International Federation of Journalists' Global Charter of Ethics for Journalists, and it will assist the Nigerian press in achieving a high level of professionalism and trust among the public. Among the fundamental components of the NPC's code of ethics are:

Editorial independence: News content material should exclusively be determined by journalists. The stories should be fabricated or slanted to unfairly favor one side or another. The news should contain information that is the obligation of the journalists.

Accuracy and fairness: The basic idea of journalism is to provide the public with accurate, unbiased, balanced, and fair news. As a result, the NPC's code of ethics required Nigerian journalists not to be involved in false and deceptive reporting in order to carry out good journalism and gain the confidence and trust of the general public. Instead, they should endeavor to distinguish realities from speculation and commentary.

Privilege and non-disclosure: Nigerian journalists should uphold the privacy and confidentiality of their information sources. When a source requests that information be kept "off-the-record," the journalists must comply. It is important to protect privacy.

The fundamental norms that guide journalism practice around the world are the ethical principles in journalism. They are the basis around which the journalism profession is built; without their application to the

news-gathering and producing process, the profession will collapse. (Banjo & Jiboku,2023) Ethics are significant because they outline appropriate standards of conduct for journalists. There is an ethical problem with the development of online media that has to be addressed. The introduction of the Internet has essentially turned everyone become a journalist, much as the creation of Gutenberg of the printing presses made everybody a printer. In place of being a passive user, everyone may now create, own, and act in media thanks to citizen journalism (Ezeibe & Nwagwu, 2009, pp. 65–66).

Some of the ethical issues are as follows:

Accuracy: The authenticity of news released online has been called into question over the years, with many proving to be fraudulent. Many publications are little more than rumour mills that don't bother to examine details before posting. Despite the attempts of online news organisations to break stories, there is still skepticism about the quality of journalism produced on the Internet. This skepticism may account for the traditional media's persistent unwillingness to comprehend Internet news. Many of the expanding administrators of online news organisations, in comparison to those in traditional media, lack fundamental journalistic skills.

Plagiarism: The practice of online journalism in Nigeria has significant difficulties due to the blatant absence of source attribution and occasionally open plagiarism. The moral obligation of the profession requires the attribution of all information sources. If the story is false or contains libel or slander, attribution helps the medium's reputation and shields it from legal issues. Online platforms will now reject news from outside sources and decline to give them credit.

Obscenity: Obscenity refers to any language or behavior that gravely violates morals. Obscenity is frequently expressed through the publication of pornography, nudity, and sexual assault. It was once frowned upon in the procedure of journalism, but today it is common in online media, and society no longer views it as improper. Online content that offends the public's sense of morality is often disseminated, going against moral requirements and aspirations.

Theoretical Review

The study is based on Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm's 1956 social responsibility theory of the press. According to the notion, the press is associated with freedom, but it must act responsibly in carrying out fundamental functions of mass communication. McQuail (2005:172) summarizes the theory's fundamental ideas as follows: (i) The media have societal responsibility, and media ownership is a public trust. (ii) Media news should be free yet self-regulated. (iii) In an effort to guide its activities, the media shall conform to certain prescribed codes/ethics. (iv) In specific cases, the government may interfere to protect the public interest.

Empirical Review

Okonji (2020) conducted research on Ethical problems in Nigerian Media and their Relevance for Professionalism. Journalism is a highly regarded profession in Nigeria. Many people respect Nigerian journalists' ability to clamp down on the Nigerian government's bad behavior and regulations. Several citizens may testify about the 4th estate of the realm, revealing certain sharp procedures of some strongly positioned Nigerians who thought they were easily able to get away with their ill-doings and corrupt tendencies. However, the Nigerian press has held them responsible for their heinous deeds. Ibrahim Salisu Buhari, the former Speaker of Nigeria's House of Representatives, can share some of his terrible experiences. He lost his position of speakership and House membership exactly 49 days after his election due to falsification of

credentials and age deception, which the News Magazine discovered. Inevitably, certain members of the realm's thriving fourth estate have been found deficient in their duties. Some have begun to doubt their honesty in regards to purging Nigeria of corrupt tendencies and practices as a result. This requires immediate consideration, which is why this study was necessary to examine these moral dilemmas and determine how Nigerian journalists can get the requisite professionalism.

Duru (2016) conducted a study on online journalism and the challenge of ethics in Nigeria. The internet has transformed how news is gathered and disseminated, yet breaking ethical rules has grown to be a significant cost. While citizen journalism is adopting this role, traditional journalism still needs training. The report emphasizes the necessity of dealing with ethical, professionalism, and training difficulties quickly in order to avoid harming the nation. It also goes into the factors driving the expansion of new news websites. Layefa and Johnson (2016) studied the potential for achieving press freedom in Nigerian society. The authors contend that the Nigerian press's determination and confidence in even in the face of challenging and vicious strategies taken by regimes, especially the military, in an attempt to silence it illustrates a raging desire for press freedom that will eventually lead to the feasible press freedom. The authors contend that, even though press freedom has not yet been fully realized, Nigerian society can still support a free press because of the enormous victories it has seen in politics. The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), among other things, is viewed by the writers as a strong first step towards the establishment of a free press in Nigerian society.

Research Methods

A survey research design was utilized in this study, with the help of a questionnaire that was distributed to respondents. This study's population consists of journalists and media professionals from various media outlets in Lagos State. Purposive sampling was used to pick a total of One Hundred and Fifty (150) respondents.

As data collection instruments, a research questionnaire was used. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 was used to analyze the data. Inferential and descriptive statistics are used in the analysis. The data was analyzed using dispersion measures such as mean and standard deviation, and the hypothesis was verified using Multiple Regression Analysis.

Data Analysis

Research Question One: To what extent do journalists in Lagos State adhere to media laws and ethics of their profession?

Table 1: Adherence to media laws and ethical concerns among journalists in Lagos Nigeria

Responses	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Stand Dev
Journalists in Lagos adhere to media laws and ethics	52 (34.7%)	62 (41.3%)	13 (8.7%)	23 (15.3%)	3.81	2.74
Journalists in Lagos usually break media laws and ethics	46 (30.7%)	57 (38.0%)	28 (18.7%)	19 (12.6%)	3.28	2.09
Journalists in Lagos do not have regard for media laws and ethics	73 (48.7%)	47 (31.3%)	27 (18.0%)	3 (2.0%)	3.63	2.28

Source: Field work, 2023

Table 1 shows that 62 (41.3%) of the respondents agree, 52 (34.7%) strongly agree, 13 (8.7%) disagree while 23 (15.3%) strongly disagree that journalists in Lagos adhere to media laws and ethics, 57 (38.0%) agree, 46 (30.7%) strongly agree, 28 (18.7%) disagree while 19 (12.6%) strongly disagree that journalists in Lagos usually break media laws and ethics. Also, 73 (48.7%) of the respondents strongly agree, 47 (31.3%) agree, 27 (18.0%) disagree while 3 (2.0%) strongly disagree that journalists in Lagos do not have regard for media laws and ethics. This implies that majority of the respondents agree that journalists in Lagos adhere to media laws and ethics to a great extent.

Research Question Two: What are the ethical challenges encountered by journalists in Lagos State, Nigeria?

Table 2: The ethical challenges encountered by journalists in Lagos State, Nigeria

Responses	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Stand Dev
Journalists may be offered bribes or face pressure to avoid reporting on corruption cases, especially those involving powerful individuals or institutions	74 (49.3%)	29 (19.3%)	25 (16.7%)	22 (14.7%)	3.48	2.19
Journalists may encounter challenges in having access to accurate information and official data which may hinder them in reporting accurate information	71 (47.3%)	76 (50.7%)	3 (2.0%)	-	3.19	2.29
Journalists may encounter ethical dilemmas when reporting on issues like terrorism, crime, and public health crises	73 (48.7%)	65 (43.3%)	12 (8.0%)	-	3.31	2.37

Source: Field work, 2023

Table 2 shows that 74 (49.3%) of the respondents strongly agree, 29 (19.3%) agree, 25 (16.7%) disagree while 22 (14.7%) strongly disagree that journalists may be offered bribes or face pressure to avoid reporting on corruption cases, especially those involving powerful individuals or institutions, 76 (50.7%) of the respondents agree, 71 (47.3%) strongly agree while 3 (2.0%) disagree that journalists may encounter challenges in having access to accurate information and official data which may hinder them in reporting accurate information. In addition, 73 (48.7%) of the respondents strongly agree, 65 (43.3%) agree while 12 (8.0%) disagree that journalists may encounter ethical dilemmas when reporting on issues like terrorism, crime, and public health crises. This implies that some of the ethical challenges encountered by journalists include bribe and corruption, challenges in having access to accurate information and official data which may hinder them in reporting accurate information and ethical dilemmas when reporting on issues like terrorism, crime, and public health crises.

Research Question Three: What are the factors that contribute to the ethical problems faced by journalists in Lagos State?

Table 3: The factors that contribute to the ethical problems faced by journalists in Lagos State?

Responses	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Stand Dev
Corruption is one the factors that contribute to ethical problems in journalism	59 (39.3%)	65 (43.3%)	24 (16.0%)	2 (1.3%)	3.23	2.05

The problem of press freedom is one of the factors that contribute to ethical issues encountered in journalism	66 (44.0%)	43 (28.7%)	34 (22.7%)	7(4.6%)	3.51	2.41
Lack of adequate training in media ethics could be a major factor that contribute to the ethical problems in journalism	77 (51.3%)	52 (34.7%)	21 (14.0%)	-	3.09	2.39

Source: Field work, 2023

Table 3 shows that 65 (43.3%) of the respondents agree, 59 (39.3%) strongly agree, 24 (16.0%) disagree while 2 (1.3%) strongly disagree that corruption is one the factors that contribute to ethical problems in journalism, 66 (44.0%) of the respondents strongly agree, 43 (28.7%) agree, 34 (22.7%) disagree while 7(4.6%) strongly disagree that the problem of press freedom is one of the factors that contribute to ethical issues encountered in journalism. In addition, 77 (51.3%) of the respondents strongly agree, 52 (34.7%) agree while 21 (14.0%) disagree that lack of adequate training in media ethics could be a major factor that contribute to the ethical problems in journalism. This implies that corruption, problem of press freedom and lack of adequate training in media ethics are some of the factors that contribute to the ethical problems faced by journalists.

Conclusion

This paper is on ethical problems faced by journalists in Nigeria and the role of media organizations in sustaining professional standards. The population of this study are journalists and media professionals from various media houses in Lagos State. A total number of One Hundred and Fifty (150) journalists were selected using purposive sampling technique. The study made use of a questionnaire as a research instrument. The findings of the study revealed that journalists in Lagos adhere to media laws and ethics (X = 3.81, SD = 2.74) and journalists in Lagos usually break media laws and ethics (X = 3.28, SD = 2.09). Also, journalists may be offered bribes or face pressure to avoid reporting on corruption cases, especially those involving powerful individuals or institutions (X = 3.48, SD = 2.19), journalists may encounter challenges in having access to accurate information and official data which may hinder them in reporting accurate information (X = 3.19, SD = 2.29) and corruption is one the factors that contribute to ethical problems in journalism (X = 3.23, SD = 2.05) and the problem of press freedom is one of the factors that contribute to ethical issues encountered in journalism (X = 3.51, SD = 2.41). This finding is in line with the study of Layefa and Johnson (2016) who reported that the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) is a solid stepping stone toward the realization of free press in Nigerian society.

Recommendations

i. This study recommends that journalists should be trained on media ethics and moral of conducts.

ii. The Nigerian Press and pertinent parties should, among other things, establish a public agenda for press freedom, sponsor and advocate for the passage of a free press law, and contact with other free press nations for prospective assistance.

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