

Media Ethics as Key to Sound Professionalism in Nigerian Journalism Practice

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This paper examines the implications of ethics as key to sound professionalism in Nigerian journalism. The paper sets out to assess how ethics affect the standard of journalism practice in the country, using media practitioners in Rivers State, Nigeria as case study. The population of study consisted of the 300 registered journalists in Rivers State of Nigeria, including the editors and managers. The survey research method was used while the questionnaire was used as the primary instrument for data gathering. It was revealed that despite the importance of ethics to journalism practice, journalists' adherences to the ethical codes were low. The study also revealed that journalists most times go against the ethics of the profession due to sycophancy, security reasons, desperation, greed, ethical dilemmas, and ignorance of the code of ethics. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that media establishments should liaise with the Nigerian Union of Journalist (NUJ) to ensure that only trained journalists are employed to work as journalists. Again the NUJ, it should institute standing disciplinary committee to discipline erring journalists both at the State and National levels. The Ethics Committee of the Nigeria Union of Journalists should regularly review the ethical conducts of journalists and encourage them to adhere to their code of practice.

Keywords: ethical codes, media practitioners, professionalism, Social Responsibility Theory

Introduction

Professional journalists in Nigeria face difficult and delicate ethical challenges involving decisions on both their own ethical conduct and that of the several people with whom they inform. This work intends to assess ethics as key to sound professionalism. Ethics is the principle and value a person (or group of persons) uses to govern the activities they perform and decisions they take. In an organization, thus, a code of ethics is a set of principles that guide the organization in its programmes, policies, and decisions for the business. The ethical philosophy an organization uses to conduct business can affect the reputation.

According to Fab-Ukozor (2011, p. 294), the evolutionary phase of the struggle towards professional development in journalism practice shows that starting from the time of *Iwe Irohin* and *West African Pilot*, to the period of *Daily Times* marked an era of non-professional practice. Hence, it was the need to improve and enhance professional practice that inspired the *Daily Times* of Nigeria to establish the Times Training School in the early 70's. This was followed by the introduction of the Nigeria Institute of Journalism (NIJ) who with

Daily Times of Nigeria Training wing did their best to impact basic reporting skills to Journalists. These efforts which came before the establishment of Mass Communication and Journalism departments in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions churned out crop of Nigerian journalists between late 70's and early 80's who could meet with the information needs of the mass media audience in the country.

The mass media are faced with the challenge of breaking even and being financially strong enough to be independent and to withstand both internal and external influences that have always been the bane of professionalism in the media. Financial independence is sine qua non for any media institution which can stand the test of time and uphold the ethics of profession. On the other hand, as an institution bestowed with the responsibility of protecting public interest, the mass media strive to play this noble role which the society bestowed on them. That is to be socially responsible (Nkwachi, 2015, p. 219). Therefore, with the entry recently of highly educated professionals, media in Nigeria have insisted on certain ethical standards and accountability on the part of owners and the journalists. This means adhering to those codes ethics that will enhance professionalism. It also means being guided by a code of conduct that ensures professional integrity.

There is no doubt that effective and efficient practice of journalism lies in the principles of ethical values which set to regulate its activities towards professionalism. Every organization or profession is basically guided and directed by a set of moral principles which oversee its general conduct. The worrisome state of media practitioners' attitude in the conduct of their activities necessitated the emergence of various regulatory bodies in order to curb the excesses of media practitioners (Tsegyu & Asemah, 2014, p. 10). These are the Nigerian Press Council (NPC) and the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC). Later, a more comprehensive code of ethics for journalists was formulated in 1998 by the Nigeria Press Organization (NPO), comprising the Nigerian Union of Journalist (NUJ), Newspaper Proprietors of Nigeria (NPN), Nigeria Guild of Editors (NGE), and the Nigeria Press Council (NPC) (Egbon, as cited in Tsegyu & Asemah, 2014, p. 10).

This paper therefore provides information, analysis, and recommendations regarding professional standards for journalists in Nigeria while the major focus of the paper is on ethical standards as major imperatives for a sound professionalism in journalism in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Every profession, including the journalism profession has guiding rules for the practice of the profession. Therefore, journalists, the world over, have to fulfil these rules as to meet the expectations and moral obligations as bestowed on it by society. Mass media practice in Nigeria is generally controlled by the same ethics, as such all the mass media professionals in the country are guided by the same code of ethics.

Unfortunately, a cursory observation indicates that certain journalists in Rivers State who are seen as professionals seem to operate and practise outside the bounds of the code of ethics. Thus, some journalists in Rivers State write stories to express their sentiment and involvement; foul and strong languages are published in the media which is a problem to this paper. In some instances, some journalists also incur avoidable problems to their organisation on issues relating to ethics. Therefore, to what extent has the code of ethics been seen as the key to sound professionalism in the practice of journalism in Rivers State of Nigeria?

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this paper were to:

(1) Ascertain the level of knowledge of journalists in Rivers State on the code of ethics of journalism practice.

(2) Determine whether the knowledge of Rivers State journalists on the ethical code influences journalism practice.

(3) Examine the extent to which journalists in Rivers State adhere to the applicable code of ethics of journalism practice.

(4) Determine the factors that influence media practitioners in Rivers State negatively to engage on unethical conduct.

Research Questions

(1) Do journalists have knowledge of the code of ethics of Journalism practice?

(2) Does the knowledge of Rivers State's journalists on the ethical code influence journalism practice in Port Harcourt?

(3) Do journalists in Rivers State adhere to the applicable code of ethics of journalism practice?

(4) What factors influence media practitioners in Rivers State negatively to engage in unethical conducts?

Theoretical Framework

The Absolutist and Social Responsibility Theories were adopted for this paper. The Absolutist Theory argues that there are moral universal values which should guide all human beings no matter the place, time, or age. It is also based on the fact that a good action should be right everywhere in the world, at all times and in all circumstances. It is the view of Merrill (1974) that the ethical absolutist believes that there is one universal and eternal code that basically applies to everyone in all ages, that changing opinions, traditions and conditions make no significant differences in this absolute moral code.

Fab-Ukozor (2004, p. 15) posits that in the field of journalism, the professional who believes in this theory accepts in principle that there are absolute and universal journalistic ethics which should guide the practicing journalist everywhere in the world and which should equally form the basis for the articulation of a universal and eternal code in journalism. The ethical moral universals are truthfulness, fair play, accuracy, balance, and objectivity.

Secondly, journalism practice entails a great deal of mutual relationship between the journalist and members of the society, to whom the journalist publishes. This relationship therefore entrusts enormous level of responsibility on the journalist. A good practice of journalism demands high compliance with ethical dictates of the profession. Thus, this paper is hinged on the ethics of journalism profession. In order to give the study a focus in the light of related concepts and principles, the study is based on a second framework of the Social Responsibility Theory. This theory, according to Tsegysu and Asemah (2014, p. 11), has its beginnings from the Hutchins Commission of 1947 and has as its basic postulation that freedom carries a concomitant obligation. The press is responsible to the society by carrying out certain essential functions of mass communication. While the theory emphasizes the need for independent press the scrutinizes other social institutions and provides objective, accurate news reports, the most innovative feature of Social Responsibility Theory was the call for media to be responsible for fostering productive and creative great communities (Baran and Davies as cited in Tsegysu & Asemah, 2014, p. 11). Social Responsibility Theory asserts that media must remain free of government control, but in exchange media must serve the public (Baran, 2004, p. 477). According to Owolabi

(2007, p. 162), there must be development of professionalism as a means of achieving higher standards of performance while the media maintain self-regulations.

This theory is very apt, because if the media are to be responsible to the society, it must adhere to the ethical codes of the profession as its first assignment to the public is to disseminate accurate information. Theory, therefore, cautions the media to be careful while carrying out their function. McQuail (as cited in Anaeto, Onabanjo, & Osifeso, 2008) gives the assumptions of the theory as: the media should accept and fulfil certain obligations to society and that through professional standards of informativeness, truth, accuracy, objectivity, and balance, these obligations can be met.

Conceptual Clarifications

Ethics

The word, "Ethics" according to the Advanced Learner Dictionary, is the science of morals, the branch of philosophy which is concerned with character and conduct of a system of moral and rules of behaviours. Udeze (2012, p. 57) defines ethics as a branch of philosophy that deals with values relating to human conduct with respect to rightness or wrongness of certain actions and to the goodness badness of the motives and ends of such actions. Ethics has to do with what is good and what is bad. To Ogunsiji (Agbanu, 2011, p. 305), ethics is not laws in application but is binding on all members of the profession once it has been officially adopted. A member may be disciplined or reprimanded for contravening the ethics of his profession. He may also be blacklisted or expelled from the profession.

Amakiri (2010, p. 15) states that to be ethical means to be particularistic about the standards of good and bad behaviour. It means adopting a moral position dictated by a sense of right and wrong in one's personal life and in relationship with others. According to Philip (2010, p. 51), ethics is the application of rational thoughts by media practitioners or professionals when they are deciding between two or more competing moral choices. It can also be seen as that which holds society or a profession together or provides stability and security to social or professional cohesion (Kayode's study as cited in Tseguy & Asemah, 2014, p. 11).

Okunna (1995, p. 1) suggests ethics as a moral philosophy is the branch of knowledge which is concerned with the standards of good and bad conduct or behaviour while Ezeukwu and Nwanze (Akabogu, 2005, p. 202) opined that ethic in general refers to a code or set of principles by which men live e.g., medical ethics which means the code which regulates and guides the behaviour of doctors in their dealings with each other and their patients. Therefore, ethics can be said to be set of rules of behaviour or moral principles guiding the activities of a group of persons found in a given profession. It is a Greek word "Ethos" meaning character or what a good person is or does in order to have a good character. Ethics is also a behaviour and moral guides, principles as well as codes which a person or group of persons in a profession voluntarily choose to observe in the course of carrying out their day to day activities, that deals with the decision to do good or bad.

In every society of the world, there are set of rules and regulations guiding the ways and manners they do things and the absence of these rules and regulations will lead to anarchy and lawlessness in such society.

There also exists no universally accepted code of ethics for media practitioners; it varies proportionately with culture, orientation, exposure, and demands of the society at a particular point in time, like culture is dynamic and changes with the society in question. However, no matter the dynamism, there are certain basic provisions that are crucial to the practice of the profession.

Professionalism and Ethical Standard

Professionalism is the conduct, aims, or qualities that characterize or mark a profession or a professional person. Professionalism also describes the qualities, skills, competence, and behaviours that are expected of a person in a given profession. According to Egbujor (2015, p. 29), the identity of every profession is founded on standard principles. Ethical values coexist with the professional ideology of an occupation. She explains further that this is because ethics exists practically in all professions in order to ensure standard practice. Ethical standards in a profession are “rules governing the conduct of a person or the members of a profession and exposes the professional obligations, guides and identity of journalists in journalism practice” (Patching and Hirsts as cited in Egbujor, 2015, p. 29).

Consequently, Egbujor sees journalistic professionalism as “norms and standards that constitute the kind of outputs that are generally recognized as quality journalism”; these definitions expand the scope of journalistic professionalism to include contextual issues assessing the performance of the media and the quality of the information they convey to the public (Egbujor, 2015, p. 31).

Journalism Code of Ethics

Journalism like any other profession has ethical codes that guide them in their activities. This code of ethics consists of moral principles, guidelines, and rules that guide the behaviour of journalists in course of their practice as well as their relationship with the publics. Journalism code of ethics therefore is the set of moral principles guiding the journalism profession. They include:

(1) Editorial independence: This entails that decision concerning the content of news should be the responsibility of a professional journalist.

(2) Accuracy and fairness: (i) The public has a right to know factual, accurate, balanced, and fair reporting is the ultimate objective of good journalism and the basis of earning public trust and confidence. (ii) A journalist should refrain from publishing inaccurate and misleading information. Where such information has been inadvertently published, prompt correction should be made. A journalist must hold the right of reply as a cardinal rule of justice. (iii) In the course of his duties, a journalist should strive to separate facts from conjecture and comment.

(3) Privacy: A journalist should respect the privacy of individuals and their families unless it affects public interest. (a) Information on the life as an individual or his family should only be published if it impinges on public interest. (b) Publishing of such information about an individual as mentioned above should be deemed justifiable only if it is directed at: (i) exposing crimes or serious misdemeanour, (ii) exposing anti-social conduct, (iii) protecting public health, morality, and safety, (iv) preventing the public from being misled by some statement or action of the individual concerned.

(4) Privilege/non-disclosure: (i) A journalist should observe the universally accepted principle of confidentiality and should not disclose the source of information obtained in confidence. (ii) A journalist should not breach an agreement with a source of information obtained as “off-the-record” or as “background information”.

(5) Decency: A journalist should dress and comport himself in a manner that conforms to public taste. (i) A journalist should refrain from using offensive, abusive, or vulgar language. (ii) A journalist should not present lurid details, either in words or picture of violence, sexual acts, abhorrent or horrid scenes.

(6) Discrimination: A journalist should refrain from making pejorative reference to a person’s ethnic group, religion, sex or to any physical or mental illness or handicap.

(7) Reward and gratification: (i) A journalist should neither solicit nor accept bribe, gratification, or patronage to suppress or publish information. (ii) To demand payment for the publication of news is inimical to the notion of news as a fair, accurate, unbiased, and factual report of an event.

(8) Violence: A journalist should not present or report acts of violence, armed robberies, terrorist activities or vulgar display of wealth in a manner that glorifies such acts in the eyes of the public.

(9) Children and minors: A journalist should not identify, either by name or picture or interview children under the age of 16 who are involved in cases concerning sexual offences, crimes and rituals or witchcraft either as victims, witnesses, or defendants.

(10) Access to information: A journalist should strive to employ open and honest means in the gathering of information. Exceptional methods may be employed only when the public interest is at stake.

(11) Public interest: A journalist should strive to enhance national unity and public good.

(12) Social responsibility: A journalist should promote universal principles of human rights, democracy, justice, equity, peace, and international understanding.

(13) Plagiarism: A journalist should not copy, wholesale or in part, other peoples work without attribution and/or consent.

(14) Copyright: (i) Where a journalist reproduces a work, in print, broadcast, art work or design, proper acknowledgment should be accorded the author. (ii) A journalist should abide by all rules of copyright, established by national and international laws and conventions.

(15) Press freedom and responsibility: A journalist should strive at all times to enhance press freedom and responsibility.

Ethical Issues for Journalists

Journalists all over world, including those practicing in Nigeria, face difficult and delicate ethical challenges. These challenges involve decisions regarding to ethical conduct as well as that of publics the journalists work with. These persons include president, ministers, governors, and commissioners, media owners as well as other stakeholders, within and outside government, who are affected by journalism activity. The following brief scenarios are illustrative of the kinds of ethical issues that journalists may face.

(1) A journalist is offered, in confidence, information about possible illegal conduct by a stakeholder.

(2) A journalist may face the challenge of objectivity in writing news, that a News Editor has edited a story to suit his friend because he will be looking toward the next job and, therefore, the content of his report can be more easily influenced.

(3) After reading a report by the journalist, a General Manager complains to the Editor, "You can't air this. The Governor will be furious!"

(4) A journalist is given money to delete what has already been said by a politician.

According to Akabogu (2005, p. 201) in the Nigerian situation, all sorts of ethical issues or problems abound. They include materialism, bribery, corruption, embezzlement, fraud, sycophancy, and all forms of indiscipline. He further stated that the journalist has a good number of these problems to grapple with such as sycophancy, character assassination, pressure from within and outside, confidentiality of sources, Afghanistan, bribery, sensationalism, plagiarism, sexism, moonlighting, invasion of privacy and others.

Ethical Implications of Professionalism

With the growing concern for non-adherence to the ethical codes, which many believe negates all

fundamental principle of fairness, equity, and balance required in journalism practice, many scholars have explored its ethical implications. These are outlined as follows.

Commercialization of news violates the ethics and code of conduct of journalists, which states: It is the duty of the journalist to refuse any reward for publishing or suppressing news or comment. With the zeal to make more money, many news organizations have lost their focus on investigative journalism. This has led to loss of variety in the news, monotony, etc. Many have lost their mission turning to praise singing and propaganda, which has dire consequences for the Nigerian society (Ekwo, 1996, Lai, 2000, and Ogbuoshi, 2005 as cited in Omenugha & Oji, 2015).

The person who pays the piper often calls the tune. Since the media would not like to lose a major customer, they will do all within their reach to satisfy such client that pays them enough money to have to his/her view projected. In return, the client may dictate how and what he or she wants out of the news packaging of the media house. This can extend to dictating to the media what makes news, thereby emasculating opposing views. This is often flagrantly displayed during election times as contestants often buy over one media house or the other, which at every news hour seize the opportunity to praise the “client” and crush his/her opponents.

According to Udeze (2012, p. 73), there is a close relationship between corruption and unethical practice quoting Webster Unabridged Dictionary (2001, p. 456), he noted that being unethical means “the act of corrupting or state of being corrupt, moral perversion, depravity. He further stated that to be corrupt according to same source is to be guilty of dishonest practices such as bribery, lacking integrity, crooked etc. Udeze further emphasized that based on the definition, corruption among journalists means all those acts that media practitioners engage in that contravene the ethics of the media or journalistic profession which enters on truth, fairness, and balance.

Praise singing is one of the journalist’s worst faults particularly in Africa and especially with the government-owned media houses. This kind of journalism eulogizes people unnecessarily. It makes heroes out of villains and giants out of dwarfs (Udeze, 2012, p. 81) for instance in Rivers State, the Rivers State Broadcasting Corporation and the State Television saw formers state Governor Chibuike Amaechi as a saint when workers were owed several months salaries and pensioners died of hunger and starvation. The media did not see anything wrong with the various abandoned project in the administration.

Secondly, the government media who at that political period were basically partisan supporting the All Progressive Congress, APC by airing only the news and jingles about them without recourse to the fact that they need to balance the stories are now presently airing only the news of the opposition party in the State, Peoples Democratic Party, PDP. This in most cases has led to lack of public trust and loss of integrity. Moreover, those in the private media who have in some instances proved in many occasions to be upholders of ethical standards demanded of the watchdog in exposing corruption in the society which has joined in the band wagon due to financial aggrandizement.

In contrast with medicine and law, media professionalization doesn’t include standards for professional training and licensing. Other professions mandate that practitioners receive long and closely monitored professional training. For example, doctors and lawyers undergo from four to 10 years specialized training in addition to completing four years of college. But media practitioners are unwilling to set requirements for professional training and have strongly resisted efforts to license journalists (Baran & Davies, 2006, p. 132).

Brown envelop under whatever guise should be avoided by journalists because it intends to jeopardize the integrity of the journalist and could influence objectivity in news writing. Freedom to objectivity could be

compromised by gratifications as noted by Ogbondah (2003, p. 108) “Journalists must understand that compromising their morals and ethical principles can be a greater threat to press freedom than anybody of oppressive laws”.

Professionals in every field, including journalism, have been reluctant to identify and censor colleagues who violate professional standards. To do so is often seen as admitting that embarrassing problem exists. Public trust in all media professionals might be shaken if too many people are barred from practice. Professional societies tend to operate as closed groups in which members are protected against outside threats and criticism, (Baran & Davies, 2006, p. 131).

The owners of the media set up policies that guide how the media works. In Print you have Editorial Policies where you state reasons for establishing the newspapers while in Radio and Television you have the mission statement. The philosophy put in place by the owners of the organizations control the media. Fab-Ukozor (2011, pp. 291-292) corroborated this fact when she stated that the situation is such that the few rich ones who own the media are either business friends of government or unprofessional journalists who appreciate the position of the “fourth power”, but are reluctant to go headlong in search of truth due to government’s stance of intimidation and oppression. As a result, practitioners in the country are often faced with a conflict emanating from the need to protect their proprietor’s interests and the need to serve public interest.

Fab-Ukozor (2011, p. 292) posits that the Fourth Estate or Fourth power position of the press shoulders enormous responsibility on the journalist to watchdog society. But how does this obligation tally with property right of mass media owners who need to make profit from their business enterprise? She also stressed that striking a balance between fulfilment of social responsibility obligations and the need to maximise profit has continually remained the major focus of journalists and the media owners. Therefore, in order to generate revenue from this source, media organizations often show, surprisingly, an otherwise intolerable sensitivity to the feelings of big business over editorial matters. Under this circumstance, editors walk a tight rope in trying to balance the demands of profit against the imperatives of unfettered journalism.

According to Baran and Davies (2006, p. 134) in the media industries, violation of professional standards rarely has immediate, directly observable consequences. Thus, it is hard for critics to cite violations or to identify the harm that has been done. When doctors fail people die, when lawyers fail people go to jail unnecessarily while the result of incompetent media practice are harder to see. For instance, recently in Nigeria, lawyers who had issues of corruption and were charged with money laundry by the DSS were suspended by the National Judicial Council (NJC).

Regrettably, media practitioner most times has been found wanting in not living up to ethical professional standards they subscribe to. Quite a good number have shown weakness in resisting the temptation of materialism presented in the form of bribery known as “brown envelop” syndrome in Nigeria. For a fee they don’t mind serving as propagandists and spin doctors to powerful political and economic interests.

The influence of ownership of media outlets in the direction of its editorial contents is another crucial reason that has militated against the adherence of ethical standard by Media Managers. The ownership or media outlets have great influence in the direction of its editorial contents, as the saying goes, “he, who pays the piper, calls the tune”. It is common knowledge in Nigeria that government owned newspapers; Radio and Television stations, never write against the government in power while the media practitioner in the privately owned media never go against the desires of the owners. Poor remuneration is another challenge faced by journalists.

Most of them are grossly underpaid, especially in the private media industry and their condition of service very poor.

Methodology

The survey research method was used by this study. Questionnaires were used to elicit answers from respondents who are registered journalists in Rivers State. This method was to enable the researcher to examine certain variables and their interrelationships and then develop explanatory influences. The population of the study comprised of all the registered journalists in Rivers State of Nigeria. This consists of 300 journalists. The choice of the Rivers State for this study was necessitated by the fact that Rivers State is one of the states with a reasonable concentration of mass media facilities and practising journalists. As the trend of journalism practice is fairly the same in Nigeria, the findings from this paper could be generalised throughout the country.

Data, Results, and Discussions

Table 1

Responses as Regard Journalists Knowledge of the Code of Ethics

Response category/options	Respondents	%
Yes	185	61.7
No	115	38.3
Total	300	100

Note. Source Data: Field Analysis, 2018.

Table 1 above shows that 61.7 % of respondents agreed that they have knowledge of the code of ethics of journalism practice, which enables them to practice in accordance with the prescribe code, while 38.3% of the respondents do not have knowledge of the code of ethics.

Table 2

Responses as Regard Influence of the Level of Knowledge of Journalism in Rivers State on the Ethical Code

Response category/options	Responses	%
Yes	105	35
No	195	65
Total	300	100

Note. Source: Survey data from field Analysis, 2018.

The Table 2 above agrees with research question two that the level of knowledge of journalists in Rivers State as regards to ethics of the profession is low; this is evidence as only 35% of the persons who responded are knowledgeable on the code of ethics while the remaining 65% of persons who responded have no knowledge of the code of ethics of the practice.

Table 3

Knowledge of Journalism Ethics by Journalists

Response category	Respondents level	%
Yes	95	31.7
No	205	68.3
Total	300	100

Note. Source: Survey from field Analysis, 2018.

The above Table 3 further buttressed the fact that since most journalists do not know the code of ethics, adherence would be very low; this is reflected in the presentation above as 31.7% of journalists adhere to the code of ethics while 68.3% are now adherents.

Table 4

Factors That Influence Media Practitioners to Engage in an Unwholesome Practice

Response category/options		%
Knowledge of ethical codes	25	8.3
Ownership influence	115	38.3
Commercialisation of news content	98	32.7
Poor remuneration etc.	62	20.7
Total	300	100

Note. Source Data: Survey from field Analysis, 2018.

Table 4 above has enumerated the factors that influence media practitioners to engage in an unwholesome practice which is unethical journalism practice. Ownership influence which is 38.3% tends to be the bane of the practice; followed by commercialisation of news items which ranked second in the table with 32.7% and followed closely by poor remuneration of workers with 20.7%.

The above analysis is the bane of journalism practice in Nigeria. All other factors influenced the first which is the knowledge of ethical code with the lowest at 8.3%. It behoves on journalists, journalism educators, and media owners to find a safe landing for practitioners to enable them carry out their functions effectively.

Discussion of Findings

Findings show that majority of the journalists had a fair knowledge of the code of ethics while so many others did not have. It is pathetic that the level of journalists’ knowledge of the codes of ethics is so low despite the availability of training institutions, Information and Communications Technology, and the various media that publish information relating to the ethics of the profession. Knowledge of the codes of ethics is a step which, if well directed, would enhance professionalism. The knowledge of code of ethics and adherence to it would be an immense asset to a professional journalist. According to DeFleur (1989), the direction of the action is a significant consequence of knowledge. In mass media practice, knowledge of the laws and ethics of journalism helps in determining the choice between alternatives in the conducts and practices of the professional. This means that knowledge of the code of ethics does not translate into their being applied in the course of practice. Whether the journalist is knowledgeable in the ethics of the profession, the environmental factors influencing him does not wither away the journalist’s social responsibility. This therefore makes this paper to have some bases on the Social Responsibility Theory.

Furthermore, in regards to the knowledge of Nigerian journalists of the code of ethics influence on journalism practice in Rivers State. It was observed that some, journalists’ knowledge of the code of ethics, affected their adherence to professional code of practice, while a few did not. It implies that the knowledge of journalists of the code of ethics influenced journalism practice in Rivers State, thereby providing a basis on which media professionals may engage in their practices. DeFleur (1989) asserts that the very essence of media law and ethics is to define various expectations concerning the structure, conduct, and performance of the media. These also involve the principles of professional conduct that are adopted and controlled by both the government (through the law) and the journalists themselves (through code of ethics). Where the expected

functions of media laws and ethics are realised, they reflect the level of professionalism of the journalist. Unfortunately, despite the influence of media law and ethics, the standard of professionalism remains regrettably low.

It was also observed that the level of journalists' knowledge of code of ethics is low and that the standard of journalism practice is deteriorating. It's a known fact that ethics is instruments of media control and regulation of media practice. It is obvious that, no matter how poor the standard of journalism practice may be, or no matter how low the level of journalists' knowledge, code of ethics still have some influence on the practice of journalism in Nigeria.

The third observation was aimed at finding out to the extent to which journalists in Rivers State adhere to the applicable code of ethics in their practice. Findings show that journalists' adherence to code of ethics is low. This implies that many journalists in Nigeria do not adhere to the applicable code of ethics in their day to day practice, which is not a commendable development. As McQuail (2007) has noted, media laws and ethics are a significant response to the perceived failings of the mass media, especially in this era of market dominated society. Certainly, ethics remains a major leeway from the various dilemmas facing journalism (Ekeli & Enokbahare, 2011). Journalism is expected to be based on good intent. The intent is to bring about a virile and united country to rhyme with the nation's image and slogan, *Nigeria ... good people great, nation.*

The fourth observation was to determine the factors that influence media practitioners to engage in unethical conduct. Findings show that commercialization of news, poor remuneration, media ownership pattern, conflict of interest, poor working conditions, intimidation were some of the factors that lead media practitioners to unethical conduct. Ukozor (Tsegyu & Asemah, 2014, p. 17) corroborated the findings when she noted that journalists in the Third World Countries are confronted with several problems, ranging from intimidation, suppression, oppression from government, poor salaries, poor working environment, to repressive press laws.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this paper, it was concluded that there is an inseparable relationship between ethics and journalism practice in Nigeria. It also concluded that it is difficult to talk of professionalism or the discharge of social responsibility by journalists without first looking at the relevance of the code of ethics. This paper has shown that the journalism profession in Nigeria would thrive more in the country when media practitioners are guided by the applicable code of ethics.

The paper also noted that despite how important ethics are in the journalistic practice, most media establishments in Nigeria do not have disciplinary committees; neither do they expose their staff to workshops or in-house training on the code of ethics. This makes them to sometimes go against ethics when faced with serious ethical challenges. Again, some of the journalists whether you like it or not must disobey the code of ethics. This set of media professionals are those giving journalism a bad image in Nigeria as well as contravening the social responsibility role of the media.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this paper, the following recommendations were made.

(1) Media establishments should liaise with the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) in the state to ensure that only formally trained journalists work as journalists in their organisations.

(2) Media organizations should make it a matter of priority to organize yearly refresher courses on ethics for their staff.

(3) Journalism training institutions such as the International Institute of Journalism IJJ should increase the number of ethics-based courses in their curricula in order to make the codes of ethics part of journalists. This will in turn increase the level of adherence to the ethics.

(4) The NUJ as a matter of urgency should institute a standing disciplinary committee like the National Judicial Council (NJC) that can sanction erring journalist both at the state and national level.

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