

Impact of Media Ethics in News Gathering and Dissemination among Journalists in Ilorin

By

Abubakar Oba Shehu

Principal Lecturer, Department of Mass Communication, School of Information and Communication Technology, Kwara State College of Arabic and Islamic Legal Studies, Ilorin,

Abstract

Constant clamour about mass media being objective is easier said than done or achieved. But one good thing about journalism is that journalists are always under the watchful eyes of the people. Obviously, being objective is a great asset to the field of journalism and of course pays the medium which abides by it religiously. However, if a medium is in the habit of looking at issues or presenting one-sided stories or reports, then the people would have no choice to look elsewhere for objective reports especially at the critical moments when the correct positions of things must be known to the public. It is on this account that this paper considered the imperative of media ethics to the practice of journalism in Nigeria. This paper i.e. Impact of Media Ethics in News Gathering and Dissemination among Journalists in Ilorin introduces the issues surrounding the practice of journalism and upholding the ethics of journalism in the course of practice. Therefore, literature shall be reviewed in order to come out with issues that may emanate from this topic. Also, survey research method shall be employed for data gathering and analysis through the use of questionnaire. It is expected that this will give credibility and objectivity to the findings from this study. For the purpose of focus, the study shall limit itself to study of journalists in Ilorin metropolis.

Introduction

Thomas Jefferson in one of his speeches said, *information is the lifeblood of human society and said to be the currency of democracy*. Those were the words of Thomas Jefferson, the former President of United State of America. The comment from the statesman who was known to be an agent of true egalitarian society and a believer of democracy is apt to prove that without the flow of information, the egalitarian society, which we all desire, would be a mirage (Odemwingie, 2000).

In a dynamic and changing society like Nigeria, the roles of Nigerian journalists in information gathering and dissemination are too numerous to mention. Journalists in Nigeria serves as a pivot around which socio-economic, political and cultural activities revolve. It is on this basis that successive governments in Nigeria depend largely on the support of the media to propagate policies and programmes to the people (Okoro, 2004). In essence, the reason for this can be explained by simple realization that humans are curious being. Their inquisitive minds always

seem to comprehend and interpret the world around them and the occurrence therein. Above all, *people are social beings; they are communicating creatures* (Folarin, 2005:27).

Over the years, journalism in Nigeria have become an important force in the society not only as means for the expression of ideas but also as a social force to be reckoned with and a vehicle for mobilization. This can also be understood that the media has become one of the important and basic social processes in any society. This is simply so because people as social being, must communicate and by so doing establish credibility and enhance survival. Hence, mass media performs a number of vital functions such as: information, education, agenda setting, watchdog, cultural promotion, integration of culture etc. without which society would be in chaos and in the dark (Akinfeleye, 2005).

However, journalism as a profession demands discipline, abiding by ethics, and good moral behaviour in order to safeguard the society, which depended so much on journalists for timely and day-by-day information. This is essential because the society is expected to react constructively and knowledgeably through information received from the journalists. Consequently, the people will be able to take appropriate decisions through numerous informative, educative and entertaining programmes that are disseminated by journalists (Okoro, 2004).

Unfortunately, due to government pressure on the journalists, desire to protect personal and corporate interests, poverty and insufficient professional training; many journalists engage in unethical practices such as sensationalism, invasion of privacy, infringement of code of conduct, impunity, disregard for security laws, collection of brown envelope etc. (Bankole, 2002). These negative developments affect credibility of the mass media to their audiences; the listeners, readers and viewers have lost confidence in mass media contents in Nigeria owing to influence of unethical practices on news judgment and objectivity as opposed to the ethics of the profession. Ojo, (2003), posits that ethics should give the journalist standard by which he can judge action to be right or wrong, good or bad, responsible or irresponsible; that journalists today need to know their limitation so as not to abuse the power of the media.

Regrettably, communication in Nigeria is mainly influenced by economic extremism on one hand and government pressure on the other hand. In developing nation like Nigeria, poverty debases human dignity and causes the scale of honour and trust for money through unethical practices to influence the news as opposed to editor's sense of value. Apparently, the income of average journalist is too poor for the enormous tasks they perform in society thereby making him or her to compromise (Folarin, 2005). It is in recognition of these views, that the researcher set out to examine, critically, the impact of media ethics in news gathering and dissemination among journalists in Ilorin metropolis through empirical study for test validity.

Statement of Research Problem

Mass media is a powerful instrument and channel of information dissemination to the people. There is, however, no gain saying that we are facing a crucial transformative moment in the history

of Nigeria. To state that the mass media, as an institution, and the journalist as an individual plays a significant role of communication management in the society is a fact that cannot be disputed in Nigeria, in view of the crucial role of journalists in the society as a conveyer of information i.e. watchdog, education, information, integration, and entertainment etc. It is regrettable to observe in the recent time that misconduct has taken over the mass media contents courtesy of the journalists (Umechukwu, 2001). Consequently, the development has generated various opinions among educated class, opinion leaders, government agencies, stakeholders and general public on the efficacy of the media and journalism as a profession. In this regard, some communication scholars such as Daramola (2006) and Babatunde (1999) were of the views that they don't believe in the media message or content as they use to be. Assertions have been made that journalists and indeed mass media lack credibility and objectivity in their reportage of events owing to influence of unprofessional practices on the part of journalists (Babatunde, 1999).

In addition, the growth in the area of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), particularly the influx of information on the social media, makes it quite easy and accessible for journalists to source for information and thereby reducing the stress of sourcing and gathering information materials. This information which most times are not factual often finds itself in public domain via the mass media (Daramola, 2006). This accessibility to internet and other communication technologies, in addition to the poor environment journalists operate makes such information convenient to exploit. This emerging negative trend in information gathering and dissemination drew the attention of the researcher to set out to examine critically the impact of media ethics in news gathering and dissemination by journalists in Nigeria using journalists in Ilorin metropolis as study population.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study therefore are to:

1. Determine the general attitude of Nigerian journalists towards ethics of journalism.
2. Investigate the feelings of the Nigerian journalists about the workability of the ethics of journalism.
3. Analyse the Nigerian journalists' opinion about how ethics of journalism can facilitate the performance of their duties.
4. Examine the mass media environment in Nigeria in terms of factors working for or against media practice.
5. Ascertain how unethical practice influences journalists sense of judgment.

Hypotheses to be tested

In trying to achieve the following objectives, the study attempted to test the following hypotheses:

1. A deliberate distortion of information is directly related to the amount of confusion and disservice to audience who patronises media contents.
2. Media as an institution is seen as a reflection of the society; hence, performance of the journalist is directly related to the incorruptibility of Nigerian society.
3. Maintaining ethical standard in the practice of journalism is closely and directly related to high level of poverty, poor training, poor remuneration, corruption, religion and political affiliations etc.

Theoretical Framework

The absolutist and social responsibility theories were put into use in this paper. The absolutist theory argues that there are moral universally accepted values which should be the watchword for all human beings no matter the place, time, or age. It is based on the premise that a good action in a given society should be acceptable everywhere in the world, at all times and in all circumstances. According to Merrill (1974), 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.

Social responsibility theory was adopted for this paper too; this entails to large extent mutual relationship between the journalists and members of the society, to whom journalists publishes. This relationship therefore entrusts enormous level of responsibility on the journalists. The paper therefore, is saddled on the ethics of journalism profession. This theory according to Tsegysu and Asemah (2014:11), has its roots from the Hutchins Commission of 1947 and has 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.

Literature Review

Ethics

Ethics is the general science of right or wrong. Ethics as a concept can be traced to Aristotle's book titled *NICHOCHEAN ETHICS* which according to Duyile (2005:79) *has brought worldwide recognition and focus on this subject which influences the conscience of the journalist in the performance of his duty*. In that book, Aristotle argued that happiness can be achieved from a contemplative use of the mind: the cultivation of the virtues of prudence, temperance, courage and justice. Duyile (2005) observes that ethics belong to the mind and that one's conscience is the judge.

Every profession is governed by certain norms of conduct as ethics or code of conduct. Ethics according to Daramola (1999:198) is *the study of human action in respect of being right or wrong*

or the study of human conduct in the light of moral principles. Ethics are codified rules or code of conducts. In the case of mass media, these ethics are also known as canons of journalism which have been defined by Duyile (2005:79) as prescription guiding all journalists in behaving right while carrying out their functions to inform, to educate, to entertain and to lead the public. The major advantage of ethics is captured by Daramola (1999:198) thus:

These professional ethics have the advantage of infusing dose of morality into the crude performance of a particular profession to which they refer. They enhance competence in the exercise of the profession. They constitute a means of control and discipline among members of the profession. Invariably, professional ethics regulate the relationship between professionals and their particular publics.

The above views further buttress the fact that ethics are instruments of professional sanity and moral uprightness. Ethics are placed on a higher pedestal than law because what is considered lawful in a society may be unethical. Let us look at this example, no law forbids a male lecturer from sleeping and impregnating his female students as long as there is mutual agreement between them. However, such an act may be considered unethical.

Nigerian Society and the Mass Media

For proper understanding of the ethics of journalism in Nigeria, it is necessary to examine the Nigerian society because it is believed that institutions are reflection of their immediate environment. The mass media is a by-product of the larger society hence; the nature of the society determines the kind of media systems the society would have.

According Daramola, (2006:5), he sees society as the *web of social relationship*'. It is the *whole complex scheme* or *whole tissues* of social relationships. A sociologist, George Simmel in Daramola (2006:2) defines society as *a number of individuals connected by interactions*. Equally, an anthropologist, Ralph Linton in Daramola (2006:3) sees society as *any group of people who have lived and worked together long enough to think of themselves as a social unit with well defined limits*.

Nigeria has up to 250 tribes and there is diversity in terms of culture in the country. The economic, political, social and religious activities in the country among different tribes or sub-groups reflect the diversity of the Nigerian society. Commenting on the ethnic chauvinism on the Nigerian press, Umechukwu (2001:139) posits that:

.....why did the press sink into low ethnic ebb? Ethnicity is so entrenched in the Nigerian psyche that the political stratification cannot be anything but ethnic; economic and cultural activities in the country cannot be anything based on ethnic principles.

Brief Historical Perspective of Nigeria Mass Media

To get a clear picture about issues of ethics in Nigeria media practice, it is pertinent to have a look into the journey of the Nigeria mass media and this might assist the researcher of this study about the likely challenges, prospect and problem(s) if any the media must have which perhaps may be the root cause of our problems. According to Daramola (2006), a close observation of the Nigerian press can be appreciated through the following eras:

1. Colonial era (1800-1949)
2. Pre-independence era (1950s-early 1960s)
3. Post-independence era (1960-2000)
4. The present era (2000 to date)

The colonial era marked the introduction of the press in Africa by the missionaries. Newspapers were established in Africa by the missionaries for the purpose of spreading gospel among the people (Akinfeleye, 2005). That is why in the field of journalism, it is widely accepted that the Nigerian press was borne and nurtured in the waters of colonialism (Daramola, 2006). According to Daramola (2006:78), Nigerian press had *its debut in Rev. Henry Townsend's newspaper Iwe Iroyin fun awon ara Egba ati Yoruba, which began publication in 1859.*

Later, the pre-independence era shows a considerable growth of political awareness by Africans as they demand for independence and self governance (Daramola, 2006). Indigenous newspapers sprang up to at this era and waged a dogged war against socio-political and economic injustices of the colonialists (Daramola, 2006). Newspapers such as, the Nigerian Pioneer established in 1914 by Kitoyi Ajasa and Ernest Ikoli's African Messenger established in 1921 came on news stand during this period (Akinfeleye, 2005).

Also during the post independence era, communication and mass media research received a tremendous improvement. The leaders and stakeholders began to advocate for development journalism while lots of legal barriers were mounted against the press. There was a sudden shift from national aspirations to regional politics. Daramola (2006:89) describes this scenario:

From 1959 to 1966, the press took regional and ethnic posture.

This was as earlier stated due to struggle for power by the nationalists who now formed the bulk of local politicians....

since no press operates independent of the society on which it operates, the regional politics of the post independent Nigeria ultimately gave rise to regional government establishing regional newspapers: radio and television were meant to champion their parochial interests on national issues.

Furthermore, in the present era, the mass media in Nigeria performs well in terms of improvements in the training of professionals and communication research. There is a remarkable improvement in both broadcasting and the print media. That notwithstanding, the press is still inhibited by endogenous and exogenous problems like economic challenges, technological impotency, censorship and social mishaps. A renowned communication scholar, Ralph Akinfeleye (2007) captures the progress of this era thus:

The number of Nigerian journalism/mass communication institutions continues to increase at a very high rate in the same way that the number of Nigerian journalists continues to increase. For example, in 1999, there were only fifteen (15) accredited journalism institutions in Nigeria at both the University and Polytechnic levels. But today, 2007, my latest research findings on this reveal that there are fifty-eight (58) journalism institutions in Nigeria. And that Nigeria is being serviced by three hundred and fifty (350) radio and television stations; a number considered by media researchers too low for a population of over 140 million people.

Ethical Issues in Nigeria Mass Media

There is no doubt that all journalists would like total freedom and autonomy to publish or broadcast what they like. But considering the great powers they wield in the shaping of the society, the freedom and the autonomy they want must be tempered by commensurate sense of responsibility, considering the fact that modern media's all pervasive reach touches virtually all aspects of life. It

is time someone undertook the task to fill the ethical vacuum which is at present occupying the hearts of most media establishments. Egbon, (2001:28).

From the above views expressed by Egbon, it is apt to state that ethical issues have become very sensitive issues in modern society. In Nigeria for instance, corruption is one of the nagging issues in the media. A journalist is not supposed to take or accept bribe to suppress a story. Journalists are also not supposed to disclose their sources of information to anybody. Plagiarism and many other ethical issues are addressed by professional bodies in Nigeria. This study at this juncture shall peep into the Code of Ethics for Nigerian journalist approved by the Nigerian Press Organisation and published by Nigerian Press Council to appreciate critical ethical issues in the Nigerian mass media.

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, a journalist should always have healthy regard for the public interest. Truth is the cornerstone of journalism and every journalist should strive diligently to ascertain the truth of every event. Conscious of the responsibilities and duties of journalists as purveyors of information, the Nigerian journalists, give to itself Code of Ethics.

The Imperatives of Mass Communication Ethics

It has been pointed out that ethics is basically self-imposed and self-enforced. Mass communication ethics is therefore the set of moral guidelines which the mass communication professionals have articulated to guide their professional conduct. Ethics compel the professional to consider his/her basic principles and values, his/her obligations to himself/herself and to others. It compels the professional to decide how to live, how to conduct his/her professional affairs, how he/she will think, act and react to people and issues around him/her.

Journalistic ethics is subsumed in mass communication ethics, since journalism is only a part of mass communication. Merrill (1982), defines journalistic ethics as:

The branch of philosophy which helps journalists to determine what is right to do, by giving the journalist standards by which he can judge actions to be right or wrong, good or bad, responsible or irresponsible.

Furthermore, according to Merrill (1982), ethics is what is good or bad journalism and entails the obligations of journalists to the profession, to the society and democracy. This brings us to the question who is a virtuous journalist? A virtuous journalist is the one who has respect for and tries to live by the cardinal virtues which Plato prescribes in 'The Republic' (Merrill, 1982). The

cardinal virtues which Plato prescribes in *The Republic* are: wisdom, courage, temperance and justice.

- **Wisdom:** Wisdom can be defined as the correct application of knowledge. It is what gives direction to moral life and it is the rational, intellectual base for any system of ethics. Wisdom is partly natural and partly acquired. It is acquired through the following ways: maturing, life experiences, study, association, etc.
- **Courage:** Courage is needed to resist the temptation to do the wrong thing, that is, deviate from the path of wisdom. In other words, it helps a person to pursue the goal which wisdom has helped set for him/her.
- **Temperance:** This is a virtue which demands reasonable moderation. It helps people to avoid fanaticism in the pursuit of any objective that knows where to apply the brakes, as it were.
- **Justice:** Justice is the virtue which considers a person's 'deservingness'. It refers more specifically to a person's social relations. All men should be treated equally, but equal treatment simply does not satisfy 'deservingness'. A person gets what he deserves. For example, if there is one seat available for two persons, justice, at least in the African culture, demands that the oldest person should be offered the seat while the younger person stands until another seat is fetched for him. Looking at another scenario, should young man be stoned to death for snatching a wallet at a bus stop? Does he deserve to die for that minor offence? That is jungle justice, which is no justice at all.

The Regulation of the Mass Media

All over the world, governments regulate various fields of human endeavour. Thus, education, banking health, tourism etc. are regulated. This means that these industries are provided with basic structures for their operations. The mass media industry is equally regulated. However, because of the peculiar nature of the mass media as vehicles for free expression, which is fundamental human rights, government is careful to regulate the media only to the extent consistent with the expectations of a democratic society. Thus, over-regulation of the media will stifle free expression and give rise to underground press and even rebellion.

Malemi (1999:32) identifies four formal regulatory mechanisms of the mass media and which operates till today as follows:

1. Constitutional provisions.
2. Statutes.
3. Ethical guidelines.
4. Informal restraints.

Constitutional Provision

The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Section 39.

Statutes

Statutes (e.g. The Official Secrets Act, Laws of Sedition, Contempt, Obscene and Harmful Publications Act, Defamation, Copyright, Advertising Laws, National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) Code, Newspaper Act, Media Council Decree, which establishes the Nigerian Press Council (NPC), the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) Act, the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) Act, etc.

Ethical Guidelines

Professional bodies provide mechanisms for the regulation of their members, each having a constitution and a code of ethics.

Informal Restraints

Examples are beat associations and other arrangements which impose certain demands on members.

Malemi (1999) further argued that Codes of Ethics cannot bring the desired result if these unlisted obstacles to objectivity are not put into consideration:

Limited Space: In all mass media, reporters and editors do not have the space to include all the materials they would want to include always. This is particularly so in newspapers where limited space often results in the abridging of stories during make up. On radio and television also, the anchor must abridge a statement as soon as he receives the signal that the programme must come to an end. In essence, the sudden end of a story or a narration for space constraints may result in the inability to present all sides of an issue fairly and equally, thus undermining objectivity.

Laziness of the Reporter: If a reporter is not resourceful enough, he may not take enough pain to obtain all the sides of a controversy. Objectivity suffers thereby.

Lack of Openness of the News Source: Some news sources would not open up to the reporter for one reason or the other. A lady in a divorce suit, a jilted lover, a fired employee, or the victim of an ugly incident such as robbery, fraud, rape etc. may find it difficult to talk to the press. And this robs the reporter of the ability to present the facts objectively.

Conflict of Interest: Concept of interest ranges from accepting gifts and travel junkets to political involvement and all forms of divided loyalty. If a journalist's conscience has been compromised in any way, it is impossible for him to maintain objectivity either as a reporter, editor, or programme presenter on radio and television or as a producer or even a contributor.

Advertiser Control: Since substantial amount of media revenues comes from advertising it follows that that pressure from advertisers is also a fact of life. There is no doubt that pressures affect the effort of the media to present all sides of an issue fairly and balanced.

Government Pressure: Pressure from the government can come in form of written and unwritten laws. National security must be protected at all cost and government policies sold to the people. For this reason, government is usually impatient with the media when they do not show sufficient understanding and sympathy with government position, they would abdicate their responsibility to the people.

Methodology

Basically, the study was aimed at looking into journalism and the imperative for media ethics in Nigeria. To achieve the objectives of the study, primary data was collected via survey research. One hundred and seventeen copies of questionnaire were administered to respondents in Ilorin metropolis. Due to the small scale of the study, respondents were selected randomly depending on willingness to participate in the survey except in relation to gender where deliberate effort was made to ensure females were captured in the sample. Essentially, close-ended questions were used as they are quicker to answer and more straight forward to analyse. They were also found to be more appropriate in leading respondents to agree or disagree with an explicit point of view. Ranking questions were used to obtain information regarding the degree of importance of the set priorities that people give to a set of attitudes or objects. In addition, secondary data was collected from books, journals, magazines and newspapers. This enabled a review of the literature in the area as well as to build a theoretical/conceptual framework for the study. It was also recognised that it is only in or after doing so that a wider perspective on the most important issues in this study-journalism, mass media and imperative of the law can be fully grasped.

Research Findings (Result of Data Analysis)

By *sex*, seventy-nine (67.5%) of respondents were males while females constituted the remaining 32.5%. Perhaps, the small number was due to unwillingness female gender to participate in questionnaire administration. On *marital status*, a large number of married persons (61.5%) were recorded while single is 38.5%. The *ethnic* origin of the respondents under study shows the ethnic groups as follows: Igbo 5.10%; Yoruba 45.3%; Nupe 14.5%; Hausa 8.5%; Batonou 10.2%; as 'others constituted 15.4% of the population. This signifies that Ilorin, the capital of Kwara State is a cosmopolitan city with predominantly Yoruba speaking people but with different ethnic groups living in the town. This should not affect in any way the value of the sample or study but rather enriches it; more so that the study is directed towards journalists in Nigeria. On *job* distribution, all the population under study are practicing journalists which are demarcated thus: Print 41.0% and broadcast 58.10%. The *age* distribution of the respondents indicated that 18-25 years (17.9%); 26-40 years (25.6%); 41-60 years (41.0%) and 61 and above (15.4%).

On educational qualification/attainment, the questionnaire is designed to allow respondents to state their highest qualification which they have obtained. From the study, almost all the respondents had some form of education. This was not a deliberate objective or target of the survey process, though it eventually ended up being useful since the study is essentially a perception study which

requires a respondent having reasonable degree of understanding to comprehend and comment on the kind of questions contained in the questionnaire. This, in a way may be considered a shortcoming of the study; being a study on the perception of the literate who is a minority among Nigerian population. Thus primary and secondary education certificates holders are not considered in the study. However, 35% had either National Certificate of Education (NCE) or Diploma; graduates of University and Polytechnic constituted 51.3%; Masters Degree holders constituted 11.11% and none was captured having Doctoral degree. In respect to *religious* affiliation, respondents were not provided options to pick from but were to state their religion. Only 5.1% of the respondents probably did not like the question regarding their religious background and therefore did not answer the question. But from those that responded, (62 out of 117), 52.10% were Muslims; 41.0% were Christian and 0.8% belonged to other religions apart from these two major religious.

On the issue of *income* (monthly), the percentage of non-response was recorded higher than all the responses received so far (48.7%). Responses was however, collected from 51.3% respondents. About 17.9% of respondents indicated that they earn below forty thousand naira per month; 16.2% earn between forty to fifty five thousand naira; another group which is 17.1% earn above fifty five thousand naira.

Furthermore, the samples as analysed captured population at the low, middle and high income levels. Therefore, if we classify earners below forty thousand naira and those from forty to fifty five thousand naira, we have 34.2% of the respondents in this category. While earners of above fifty five to eighty thousand naira only amounted to 17.1% of the sample and constituted the middle income group.

At this juncture, we now test the hypotheses of this study stated earlier by examining issues such as: Extent of compliance to ethics by the journalists would depend on time and resources put together by the regulatory bodies to fight unethical practices; A deliberate distortion of information by journalists can bring about confusion and disservice to audience who patronises media contents; A corrupt society cannot wish to have credible institution such as journalism; Level of poverty among other ills is one of the major constrains to effective media practice and journalists sometimes pays the source especially for exclusives while the source at times pays journalists to report certain issues to their favour.

All the one hundred and seventeen (117) of respondents answered the question on extent of compliance by journalists would depend on the effort of the regulatory bodies. Of this number, ninety seven (97) persons or 82.9% are optimistic that the more the regulatory bodies intensify their effort, the more positive result compliance from the journalists, three (3) persons i.e. 2.6% are indifferent, while seventeen (17) respondents or 14.5% are of view that no matter the effort of the regulatory bodies journalists would continue to play against the rule. Therefore, majority of the respondents which is 82.9% are optimistic of the statement. Few respondents i.e. 2.6% are actually not sure of what to say about the question. However, 14.5% of the respondents are of

opinion that no matter the effort of the regulatory bodies in this present circumstance cannot enforce ethics meaningfully on Nigerian journalists.

Still on the question of compliance by journalists, seventy two (72) out of one hundred and seventeen (117) which 61.5% are of opinion that sincerity of purpose is required of journalists in Nigeria and continued enactment or enforcement of ethics would suffer if these elements are absent, while ten (10) i.e. 8.5% of the respondents are indifferent. But thirty five (35) or 30.0% of respondents are of view that vigorous enforcement should be carried out by the regulatory bodies to force journalists to comply. The result indicates that even if the regulatory bodies continue to enforce the ethics and that is not matched by sincerity and purposefulness from the journalists, the exercise would suffer a setback.

Also on the issue of causing confusion through deliberate distortion of information disseminated to the people; only eighty two or 70.1% out of one hundred and seventeen (117) responded. Thirty five (35) or 29.9% of the respondents did not answer the question at all. Of the eighty two (82) or 70.1% of the respondents that responded, eighty (80) or 97.6% persons agreed that most distorted and fabricated stories are done by journalists deliberately to achieve aims and objectives. Two (2) or 2.4% of the respondents are indifferent. The result indicated that inaccurate and unbalanced stories are often done deliberately and not act of mistake or poor judgement on the part of the journalists to achieve certain selfish ends.

In addition, on the statement that media is a powerful institution and cannot be affected by corrupt society. Of the one hundred and seventeen (117) respondents, ninety four (94) representing 80.3% responded to the question. From that figure i.e. ninety four (94), fifty three (53) which is 56.4% disagreed with the statement. Twenty three (23) which is 19.6% did not attempt the question at all. Forty one (41) which is 43.6% of the respondents agreed with the statement i.e. media as a powerful institution cannot be affected by corrupt society.

From above analysis, though the number of respondents that disagreed with this question is more than those with contrary opinion because of the closeness of the numbers. In fact, the percentage of those who did not respond to the question is quite high, hence, making it difficult to really make wider demarcations of respondents' views on that question. However, the number of those who disagrees that media as an institution cannot be separated from corrupt society is higher.

In the same vein, on the question that majority of journalists in Nigeria collect bribes in form of 'brown envelope'; Out of one hundred and seventeen (117) respondents, eighty four (84) which is 88.8% respondents responded to that question. Thirteen (13) which is 11.1% did not attempt the question at all. Of those that answered the question, eighty six (86) which is 82.7% disagreed with the above question. Eighteen (18) which represent 17.3% of the respondents agreed with the above question.

Again, on the issue of gratification, Nigeria journalists rely absolutely on bribes and other forms of gratification than their remuneration or salary. All the one hundred and seventeen (117)

respondents responded to the question. Seventy four (74) or 63.2% disagreed with the statement. Eighteen (18) or 15.4% are indifferent to the question, while twenty five (25) or 21.4% of the respondents agreed with the question i.e. that journalists in Nigeria relies on bribes and other forms of gratification than their legitimate earnings. From the result, it depicts from the majority of the respondents that though bribes may be offered but it has not become a regular income for journalists in Nigeria.

Furthermore, on the question of maintaining ethical standard by Nigeria journalists; of the one hundred and seventeen (117) respondents that was questioned, one hundred and twelve (112) or 97.7% agreed that high level of poverty, poor training, poor remuneration corruption, religion and political affiliations etc are constraints in maintaining ethical standard by journalists in Nigeria. Subsequently, another question was asked if all these constraints are addressed, complying with ethical standards in Nigeria would not improve. One hundred and two (102) or 87.2% out of one hundred and seventeen (117) are enthusiastic and optimistic that with enhanced remuneration, good training and reduction in poverty in the society particularly among journalists would reduce unethical practices. Two (2) or 1.7% of the respondents is indifferent. Thirteen (13) or 11.1% of the respondents are not enthusiastic or optimistic that journalists in Nigeria would follow best practices even when those conditions stipulated was improved upon.

Finally, on the question of whether both the journalists and news sources are guilty of unethical practices by in Nigeria eighty nine (89) or 76.1% out of one hundred and seventeen (117) responded to the question asked. Twenty eight (28) or 23.9% did not respond to the question asked at all. Of the eighty nine (89) or 76.1% that responded; sixty seven (67) or 75.3% agreed with the above question, eight (8) or 9.0% are indifferent while fourteen (14) or 15.7% disagreed with the above submission. From this analysis, majority of the respondents favours the opinion that both the journalists and news sources should be blamed for unethical practices.

Summary, recommendations and conclusion

Journalists in Nigeria played a significant role in actualising self government during agitation for independence before 1960 when Nigeria got her independence. Even after independence, journalists in Nigeria has continued to play a major role in enshrining democratic principles through her reportage of political, economic and social spheres of Nigeria. However, since democratic dispensation in Nigeria, journalism as an institution has to some derailed from its cardinal because of their affiliation with political and interest groups etc. with its attendant consequences for the nation. This study set for itself the objectives of assessing journalists in Ilorin metropolis and the ethics that guides its practice.

Therefore, Five (3) hypotheses were tested for the purpose of achieving the set objectives. They are (i) a deliberate distortion of information is directly related to the amount of confusion and disservice to audience who patronises media contents; (ii) media as an institution is seen as a reflection of the society; hence, performance of the journalist is directly related to the

incorruptibility of Nigerian society; (iii) maintaining ethical standard in the practice of journalism is closely and directly related to high level of poverty, poor training, poor remuneration, corruption, religion and political affiliations etc;

The study is considered important as it determined the perception on extent of compliance of ethics by journalists in Ilorin metropolis. It also assessed the level of understanding by journalists and how imperative media ethics is to media practice. In addition, democracy, good governance, service to humanity and other developmental agenda depends largely on professionalism by journalists in Nigeria.

Primary and secondary data were collected to meet the objectives of the study. The former was through the administration of questionnaire on respondents using close-ended and at other times, ranking questions, while the latter was collected from books, journals and newspaper articles. These were used for reviewing literature and building a theoretical framework for the study.

To achieve the needs of the study, literature review examined the definition of ethics; Nigerian society and mass media; brief historical perspective of Nigeria mass media; codes of ethics; ethical issues in Nigeria mass media and the regulation of the mass media. All which were shown to be related. From the survey of literature, it was opined that good professional conduct is an asset to good governance and egalitarian society. In addition, a good and incorruptible society provides enabling environment for sustainable economic growth and development. Consequently, a sound economy is responsible for political, economic and social growth especially when given a right media practice.

From the results collected and analysed, the data indicated that four (2) of the hypotheses of the study have been confirmed, while one (1) was disproved. It goes thus: Under the aspect that a corrupt society cannot wish to have good and sound institution such as journalism; On the issue that journalists deliberately distort and give inaccurate stories to the public; On the issue that the more regulatory bodies intensify its level of compliance the more result oriented, and that both the journalists and news sources are guilty of unethical practices by journalists in Nigeria. The other one (1) of the hypotheses i.e. that Nigeria journalists relies absolutely on bribes and other gratification than their legitimate earnings were disproved.

As a result of all these above findings, the following suggestions are hereby made:

- i. Just as obtained world over, governments should regulate various fields of human endeavours. This connotes that if banking, insurance, law, education, health system, hotel, transportation etc. are regulated then the mass media cannot be isolated. But it should be noted however that mass media as an institution is a vehicle for free expression, which is fundamental human right; government and its agencies should be careful to regulate the mass media only to the extent consistent with the expectations and desires of a democratic society.

- ii. As earlier pointed out, nowhere in the world is press freedom absolute. Even in the most democratic countries, there are still laws in respect of libel, sedition, copyright etc. which seeks to protect individual rights and intellectual property. Hence, government in Nigeria should strengthen the activities and powers of the Nigeria Press Council (NPC), the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), and the National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB), so that they can effectively carry out their mandates.
- iii. Humans are endowed with intellect which enables them to reason. The lower animals do not have intellect but instinct. From the foregoing, it is evident that only higher animal, that is, man should be concerned with ethics. Therefore, journalists in Nigeria should always be in pursuit of excellence. This means commitment to the highest standards both in personal life and in the world of work. It implies not given to the acceptance of mediocrity, and being willing to go the extra mile to ensure that things are done in orderly and proper ways, regardless of personal interest or cost.
- iv. Traditionally, mass communication is known to consist of press (newspaper and magazine), radio, television, film, public relations and advertising. But today, media laws and ethics which govern the conventional media should have same supervision be extended to internet, photograph, satellite broadcasting and all forms of New Communication and Information Technology (ICT); especially now that Nigeria is combating with the menace of hate speech.
- v. Finally, obstacles to objectivity such as laziness on the part of journalists, lack of openness of the news source, conflicts of interest, editorial control, advertiser influence and government pressure has been a age-long militating factor in the practice of journalism in Nigeria. Journalists themselves should be above board to reduce the effect of these factors on their jobs. This can be achieved through proper education/training, good remuneration and job satisfaction.

In conclusion, Nigeria mass media as an institution and journalists as individuals should see themselves as partners-in-progress with government and particularly Nigerians who they serve. Journalists should understand the crucial role it is expected to play in our national lives politically, economically, socially and culturally. Journalists have a lot of influence on the people because of power it has to control how people think. Therefore, journalists are expected to play the game by the rules. All sides to a story should be treated equally. This is even apt now that Nigeria is being faced with so many problems. Recently, there have been calls to deal with issue of fake news and hate speech. Fake news and hate speech to mention few according to admonitions from government and well meaning Nigerians is causing a lot of disharmony among Nigerians. Hence, media and journalists in Nigeria should be upright and independent to carry out their duties as enshrined by the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, enabling laws and ethics of journalism. It is therefore in the interest of both the individual journalists and media organisations that news should be presented as objective as possible.

Reference

- Anaeto G, Olufemi, & Osifor. J. (2008). *Models and Theories of Communication*, Maryland, Nigeria: African Renaissance.
- Akinfeleye, R.A. (2005). 'Journalistic Integrity in Political and Economic Reporting', a paper presented at the Nigerian Press Council National Workshop on 'Reporting Politics and the Economy-Responsibilities of the Mass Media'. Held at Ajah, Lagos, Nigeria, from October 18-21, 2005.
- Bankole, A. (2002). 'Best Practice in Judiciary Enforcement of Access to Public Records'. Media Rights Monitor, Vol. 7, No. 1.
- Codes of Ethics (1998) for Nigerian Journalists by the Nigerian Press Organisation and Published by Nigerian Press Council.
- Codes of Ethics and Professional Conducts, Radio-Television News Directors Association of the United States of America: [Wysiwyg:/82/http://www.rtnda.org/ethic/coe.shtml](http://www.rtnda.org/ethic/coe.shtml).
- Duyile, D. (2005). *Writing for the Media: A Manual for African Journalism*. 2nd edition. Lagos: Gong Communication.
- Daramola, I. (2003). 'Press Freedom: Legal Bases and Constraint In America and Nigeria' in R.A Akinfeleye, and I. Okoye (ed), *Issues in Nigeria Media History*, Lagos: Malthouse, 153-166.
- Daramola, I. (1999), *Laws and Ethics of Media Practice*, Lagos: Rothan Press.
- Egbon, M. (2001). *Democratic Journalism in Two Worlds: A Comparative Study of Press Freedom in the American and the Nigerian Mass Media*. Zaria: Tamara Press.
- Folarin, B. (2005). *Theories of Mass Communication: An Introductory*. Lagos: Stirling Horden.
- Josephson Institute for the Advancement of Ethics (2003). *Resources' Making Ethical Decisions*. www.josephsoninstitute.org.
- Merrill, J.C. (1982). 'Ethics and Journalism' in *Ethics and the Press: Readings in Mass Media Morality*, New York: Hastings House Publishers. 10-11.
- Malemi, E. (1999). *Mass Media Law: Cases and Materials*, Lagos: Grace Publishers Inc. National Broadcasting Commission (2003), *National Broadcasting Code*.
- Okunna, C.S. (1995). *Ethics of Mass Communication, Enugu: New Generation Books*, 3-4.
- Odemwingie, O. (2000). 'Harvest Brooms: 1999 Annual Report on the State of Media in Nigeria'. Ikeja: Media Rights Agenda.
- Okoro, N. (2004). *Freedom of Information: A Way Forward for Accountability in Government*. In: *Journal of Human Law and Practice*. Vol. 3, No. 3 and 5.

- Ojo, E. (2003). *'Media Roundtable on the Freedom of Information Bills'*. Lagos: Media Rights Monitor Agenda. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, New 8th Edition in page 1414.
- Odunewu, A. (2000). *'Ethics and Professionalism'* in Arogundade, L. and B. Eitokpah (eds) *Media in a Democracy*, Lagos: International Press Centre and Friederich Ebert Foundation.
- Pasqua, T.M., J.K. Buckalew, R.E. Rayfield, & J.W Tankard (1990). *Mass Media in the Information Age (Instructor's Edition)*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Tsegyu, S., & Asenah, E.S. (2014). An Investigation of Media Practitioner's Adherence to Professional Ethics in Minna, Nigeria. *Review of Communication and Media Studies*. 10-21.
- Umehackwu, P. (2001). *Media and Nigerian Society (Developmental Issues and Problems)*. Enugu: Thompson Printing and Publishing Company. 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.