



A REVIEW OF THE CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF THE MEDIA IN FOSTERING NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: THE SOCIO- ETHICAL WAY FORWARD

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to conduct a critical examination of journalism ethics in Nigeria, especially in light of the emergence of modern media technology. It begins by arguing for an ethically grounded practice in journalism, particularly in light of the media's roles as representatives of social realities. A critical examination of professional standards in Nigerian journalism, as well as the complexities of emerging media technology were also examined. This paper utilized a textual, secondary or desk research approach which involves the use of existing data in a systematic way; to call attention to the need for contemporary media practitioners in Nigeria to pay more attention to politics and still see the importance of their reports in terms of positively influencing Nigeria's national development and progress. The paper therefore argued that it is important for the media to behave more ethically in order to close the reputation gap that has already been established. The paper concluded that Nigerian journalists must be aware of emerging threats and hegemonic trends of new media technology.

Keywords: Corruption, Change, Development, Ethics, Media.

INTRODUCTION

The media is a democratic organization that ought to contribute morally to society. According to Paul Johnson (1997:102), the media may be a "great secular church" and "a machine of evangelism for dispelling the darkness of confusion, expelling error, and maintaining reality. Since it is a herald of honesty and a defender of unity and public order, society expects the press to be put on a "respectable basis." However, a quandary seems to exist about the position of the press and the obligations of its operations. The culture requires the press to lubricate its democracy, but it is concerned about the harm and abuse that its flaws impose on the public and the polity. As a result, beyond the myriad legal constraints, there is also a need for a moral media that serves moral aims and is operated by moral people. This is where ethics becomes paramount, particularly given that the media, above all social institutions, is

thought to wield immense and fearsome power. Such authority and control cannot be limited only by legislative restraints, but rather by journalists' knowledge of the responsibilities that such power entails. For example, in Nigeria, political events have taken on a sinister dimension, with contestants seeing winning as a ticket to plunder and amass personal wealth. Corruption, in particular, reportedly became legitimized, especially during the Babangida and Abacha regimes (1985-1998), with huge revenues generated by the country but accompanied by excessive spending and little to display in terms of physical growth. Nigerians have also come to understand the ideology of corruption as settlement syndrome, which has become part of the country's political culture. Public institutions that were the forerunners of social, infrastructural and economic development of Nigeria have continued to fail over the decades. The current decline in the education sector could also be linked and traced back to this period.

Statement of Problem and Objective of Study

The key objective of this paper is to show that there still exist a major gap between the provisions of the code of ethics of the media in Nigeria which include amongst others; editorial independence, accuracy, and fairness, respect for the individual's privacy, adherence to the principle of nondisclosure of the source of information, decency in dress and comportment, nondiscrimination based on ethnic, religious, sex, or handicap, and avoidance of gratification or patronage to influence news reporting and the existing operational methods of media practitioners in Nigeria. Another factor contributing to dishonest practices is the need for wealth and worldly possessions, which has driven many journalists and news agencies to step beyond their purview, granting dubious media prizes to people that are likely willing to pay for those honors. The growing commercialization of media activity has been seen to put media organizations in an ethical quandary. According to Dayo Aiyetan (2002:32), the media in Nigeria today is more corrupt than in the past. The Nigerian media is 'afflicted with cancer, which undermines not only its integrity but also its capacity to play its constitutional functions. The cancer, of course, is corruption, which has spread to such an extent that journalists, who were once widely esteemed by the Nigerian people, are now "treated with general disdain" and "derisively compared to police officers at illegal roadblocks who extort money from passengers." Festus Adedayo (2001:12), writing in the Nigerian Tribune, argued that "the ethical imperatives of precision, integrity, and objectivity that the granddads of journalism like Herbert Macaulay,



Chief Babatunde Jose, Chief Alade Odunewu, and others handed down have taken flight. The Nigerian media situation can be characterized as that of a vibrant, widely distributed national media in which corruption and ethical lapses have been discovered, more or less as a result of the influence of social corruption and moral/material decadence, as well as bad working conditions for journalists. In its preamble, the code of ethics for Nigerian journalists [1998] observes that journalism requires a high degree of public trust, and that in order to gain that trust, the media must work with the highest professional and ethical values, the foundation of which is truth faithfully pursued.

LITERATURE REVIEW

New Media Technology and Ethical Problems

There is no question that digital media innovations are having an effect on the profession of journalism, with a broad range of possibilities arising on how journalists investigate, research, and write stories, as well as create material for television, radio, or print. The evolving possibilities are not without their myriad ethical effects, and in some cases these consequences are so novel that legal ramifications are as yet without precedent and ethical implications are at best hazy and contentious. Technology has enabled the use of hidden cameras and tape recorders in the field of investigative journalism. Journalists should use these tools as long as they improve their journalistic skills. The ethically pragmatic journalists would respond in the affirmative, arguing that everything should be done to obtain and report the facts for the sake of honesty and the publicist's right to information. The ethically humanistic journalist, on the other hand, could react in the negative, claiming that these devices are instruments of deceit and infringement or intrusion into people's privacy. Should undercover reporting be recognized as a journalistic standard? Is there any way that deceit and/or interference can be justified in practice? Is it possible to use hidden cameras and tape recorders responsibly? The Society of Professional Journalists and the Poynter Institute of Media Studies have issued several ethical guidelines on the use of hidden cameras and tape recorders, stating that such devices should be used when the information obtainable is of profound importance, or when there are no other ways of obtaining information, or where the good resulting from the use is important. These rules, as insightful as they are, also leave the ethical question to the individual journalist's personal ethics and subjective conceptions of the context in which the gadgets are used. These are some of the ethical dialectics that are evolving as a result of technology's effect on news investigation and

reporting. Another part of this debate is the legal implications of computer-assisted journalism.

Computer-assisted journalism refers to the use of computers by journalists not only for gathering materials for reporting stories but also for more in-depth research through online or internet databases, to gather facts and records from government and other agencies as well as other sources, to analyze such records, and to use that analysis as background for writing. (Roat and Gotthoffer, 2001:31-35, Callahan 2003:1-18). The biggest ethical quandary of computer-assisted journalism is the accuracy of evidence and facts obtained from the internet. According to Callahan (2003:19-32), the internet's astounding expansion has presented journalists with unparalleled news possibilities as well as unprecedented peril. This is due to the spread of rumors and disinformation on the internet.' One of the aspects that makes the internet so attractive is that anyone can get so much information from it, but on the other hand, anyone can still bring something on the internet. The internet contains both valuable and accurate material, as well as garbage and idle chatter, and many reporters who use it have no idea which is which. Since there are no gatekeepers on the internet, facts on it can be false while retaining the ostensible authority normally associated with the printed word. This brings into question the ethical importance of using internet-sourced content. Internet outlets must be tested for their credibility, and journalists would be wise not to trust anything they read on the internet. When citing or culling from the internet, a healthy dose of cynicism is needed.

Another part of digital media technology's ethical aspects is that the internet has become a haven for individuals to post anything they find suitable for public consumption. Anyone with a basic understanding of computers can build a website, either on their own or with the assistance of a skilled webmaster, to provide content on the World Wide Web, just as any of the well-known and well-organized news media organizations or other such social entities. The right to publish online by anybody, as admirable as it is, and has been massively violated, as shown by the existence of offensive content such as racist and pornographic literature and images. Opponents contend that excluding certain materials violates the right of free expression and that the Web's current express freedom should not be limited in any way. (Shelly, Cashman, Vermaat, and Walker, 1999, pp. 1423-1427).



Today's digital imaging technology has also resulted in improved manufacturing opportunities as well as legal issues arising from digital retouching of images and animation. Digitalization is a commendable technical advance in print and broadcast journalism, resulting in crisper images, clearer and fuller colour, and better shots than were previously available. However, the capacity to retouch photos so that they can be edited to display them in any manner the skilled reporter desires is the other side of the coin. In other words, technology has made the adage "pictures don't lie" obsolete, as images can now be distorted to lie. Retouching images, particularly with the intent of distorting facts on them, is immoral, and journalists should be prohibited from doing so. Another factor to consider is the resources made possible by animation. Although animation has expanded the possibilities for film and cinematography, as well as television advertising, it has also enabled the misuse of falsifying pictures, which has ethical consequences. In general, digital technology and communication innovations have introduced previously unknown opportunities and skills to the field of news, as well as previously unheard-of ethical issues.

METHODOLOGY

This paper utilized a textual, secondary or desk research approach which involves the use of existing data in a systematic way; systematic in the sense that it entails the use of review methods to gather and assess the results of research publications which include but is not limited to summary, collation and or synthesis of existing information either in soft or hard form as against primary research. This study may eventually serve as a precursor to an elaborate primary research.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Why media's focus on and fight against corruption in Nigeria limited

Sensationalism, flippancy, proprietorial power, ethnic chauvinism, and the rise of junk journalism are all impediments to the media's success in the fight against corruption in Nigeria (Ojo, 2006). Yellow journalism syndrome has afflicted media practice and news judgment as well. As a result, efforts to impose professional standards in the battle against corruption have become somewhat shallow and simplistic. The vortex of silence hypothesis is preceded by intimidation, abuse, and threats. Expulsion from official spaces, beating, arrest, abduction, and conviction in a court of justice, as well as seizure, are often used by unethical individuals to silence the press and to further their own

interests. In the daily press, there are several reports of journalists being beaten, having their cameras smashed, and being denied entrance into government buildings. In a nutshell, ownership, commercial, and political interests; pressure to withstand economic distress or recession; corporate and personal protection of employees; regulatory agencies; public relations consultants; and legal issues are all considerations that impede commitment to media ethics in the war on corruption and on ethical media practices.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The ethics of the media are a complicated topic. The topics are so diverse that there sometimes seems to be no choice but to deal with them one at a time if they emerge, and it appears that this is what journalists do, which makes them vulnerable to the ferments that follow on the trails of ethical questions. Journalists who research ethics for the first time are often surprised to discover that the theory and values do not have straightforward instructions by which to address ordinary ethical quandaries on the job. The best anyone can do is improve their self-awareness and develop a moral thought framework that can be implemented when confronted with the reality of the work. Journalists should be able to see more plainly the links between their morality and the ethical decisions they render. In the ethos of journalism, there are two types of codes. One is published by a professional organisation such as the NPO, made public, and reasonably honestly reflects how journalists believe they should act. The other kind is unwritten, shrouded from the consciousness of journalists at times, but more influential in its impact on practice. Professional practice would be improved if external codes were largely internalized by individual journalists to establish their own personal ethics. Journalism is a discipline that can only be done excellently if it is grounded on strong spiritual and ethical moorings.

Furthermore, every democratic society bestows certain sort of social reasoning capacity on the media, which has always culminated in the public having some perceptions of the journalist, as the fourth estate of the realm, making it necessary for every journalist to aspire to live and work above board. There is no question that digital developments are having an effect on the profession of journalism, with a vast range of possibilities arising on how journalists investigate, report, and write news, as well as create material for television or the newspaper. The new possibilities are not without ethical ramifications, and in some areas, these ramifications are so innovative that legal implications



have yet to be established, and ethical implications are at best hazy and contentious. In general, digital technology and communication innovations have introduced previously unknown opportunities and skills to the field of news, as well as previously unheard-of ethical issues. Over all, there is the question of power and imperialism, which are the results of the dominance of digital media by the United States and Western Europe. This dominance extends to technologies, infrastructure, society, and values of journalism practice as accepted by developing-country journalists.

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