

Influence of Mass Media Law and Ethics on Journalism Practice in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of mass media laws and ethics on journalism practice in Nigeria. In other words, it set out to assess how media laws and ethics affect the standard of journalism practice in the country. The study was a survey. The population consisted of the 351 registered journalists in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. The study adopted the census method, thus the population remained the same as the sample. Out of the 351 copies of the questionnaire administered, 343 were properly filled and returned to the researchers. The data gathered were analysed using the simple percentages and based on the 5-point Likert scale. The study revealed that despite the importance of media laws and ethics to journalism practice, journalists' adherence to media laws and ethics was low. The study also revealed that journalists sometimes contravened media laws and ethics because of sycophancy, security reasons, desperation, greed, ethical dilemmas, ignorance of media laws and ethics, and laziness. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that media establishments should endeavour to employ only trained journalists to work as journalists. Again media organisations should establish legal departments so as to guide journalists in the establishment on how to practice within the bounds of applicable laws and ethics. 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.

Key Words: Mass media law, media ethics, journalism practice, professionalism, media accountability

1.1 Background of the Study

The mass media are fundamental in ensuring purposeful and peaceful co-existence in the society. They are indispensable to the success of every human endeavour. Through their agenda-setting role, the mass media set the hierarchy of current issues, determine the extent of transmission and establish the terms of reference and limits of debate, which ultimately influence people's actions, reactions, decisions and judgements on the issues so raised. However, the current trend in mass media practice has raised a controversy as to who really set the agenda – the media or the state?

It is through the mass media that views in the society are made known, government policies and activities are publicised and opposing views are heard. Again, the mass media serve as the conduit for the various forms of interaction among the different facets of the society. The strings of the interaction are normally controlled by many variables, such as the legal, ethical, political, socio-cultural, technological and economic factors. DeFleur (1989) points out that the interaction is necessary so that certain unacceptable and disruptive behaviours are not exhibited in the society. In view of the fore-going, mass media contents should be packaged in a way that helps the media to perform their roles effectively as the media are a major force that stimulates national, international, socio-economic and global understanding. By reason of their strategic position in the society, the operations of the mass media are affected by many developments in the law, so is the practice of journalism. The central themes of some of these developments include the laws relating to the establishment, ownership, operation and control of the mass media. These basically reflect the scenario in Nigeria as well as the international picture. Crone (1989, p.1) asserts that, "the mid-1980s have seen a trend towards greater interference in the working of the media from the courts, from the government and legislators and, at times, from the police. These have the various mechanisms for the control of the mass media (and journalism practice in particular)." Despite the myriad of institutional and organisational pressures, journalists have to be knowledgeable in the laws which guide their practice and be professionally conscious so as to safeguard press freedom. This is one of the ways in which the press would achieve its goals and meet society's expectations.

McQuail (2007, p. 41) however argues that the relations between the media and the society have material, political and normative or socio-cultural dimensions. The central political issue here is the question of freedom and control, while the main normative question is on how the press ought to use the freedom it has. Morley (1992) observes that the degree of control of the media by the state or society depends on the feasibility of applying such control. He adds that the most regulated media have typically been those that are most easily supervised. In Nigeria, the unfortunate thing is that press freedom is illusive because the press is not allowed to exercise its supposed role in the general interest of the public (Thompson, 1997). It thus appears as if the suppression of the press is a normal thing. This could be accounted for by the series of socio-political and economic influences that the society usually exerts on the mass media, irrespective of the supposed power of the

media. The activities of the media are usually determined both by the media themselves and the society in which the media operate. Although the relationship is symbiotic, society tends to suffer the ultimate effect. For the freedom of the press to be realised, it is imperative for certain conditions to exist, there must be access to the media and the liberty to receive diverse information. McQuail (2007, pp.193,194) identifies the main structural conditions for effective media freedom as follows:

- (a) absence of censorship, licensing or other controls by government so that there is an unhindered right to publish and disseminate news and opinions;
- (b) the equal right and responsibility for citizens to have access to channels of expression and publication as well as access as receivers (right to communicate);
- (c) real independence from excessive control and interference by owners and outside political or economic interests;
- (d) competitiveness of the system, with limits to media concentration and cross-ownership; and the
- (e) freedom for news media to obtain information from relevant sources.

The expected benefits of press freedom give additional expectation from the media. They are expected to follow an active and critical editorial policy and provide reliable and relevant information (Waisbord, 2000). The position here is that the press should not be unduly conformist, but should be marked by diversity of opinion and information. The press should therefore carry out an investigative and watchdog role on behalf of the public, but this does not prevent it from taking sides or engaging in advocacy. It should not be simply propagandist. The indication here is that the free press is characterised by innovation and independence, with originality, creativity and diversity as basic ingredients. It is doubtful whether there is any mass medium in Nigeria, like in most countries of the world, that meets the above standard.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Journalists, the world over, have to fulfil certain expectations and moral obligations because they hold privileged positions in the society in line with the value and the trust inherent in the fiduciary relationship between them and the society. Mass media practice in Nigeria is generally governed by the same laws and ethics, as such all the mass media professionals in the country are guided by the same laws and code of practice. Unfortunately, a cursory observation indicates that certain mass media and media professionals seem to operate and practise outside the bounds of media laws and ethics.

Also, some journalists in the country write stories to express their sentiment and involvement. Sometimes, foul and strong languages are published in the media. In other instances, some journalists incur avoidable legal suits to their organisation on issues relating to media laws and ethics. The issue then is: to what extent have media laws and media ethics affected the practice of journalism in Nigeria?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were to:

- i. Ascertain the level of knowledge of Nigerian journalists of the various mass media laws and ethics.
- ii. Determine whether the knowledge of Nigerian journalists of the various mass media laws and ethics influences journalism practice in the country.
- iii. Examine the extent to which Nigerian journalists adhere to the applicable mass media laws and ethics in their practice.

1.4 Research Questions

The following questions helped to solve the research problem and also aided the study to realise its objectives:

- i. What is the level of knowledge of Nigerian journalists on the various mass media laws and ethics?
- ii. Does the knowledge of Nigerian journalists of the various mass media laws and ethics influence journalism practice in the country?
- iii. To what extent do Nigerian journalists adhere to the applicable mass media laws and ethics in their practice?

2.1 Media Laws and Journalism Practice

Mass media laws are the rules, regulations and policies from the government that regulate journalism practice. Over the years, government has enacted such laws in order to regulate mass media practice generally in the country. The first press law in Nigeria was enacted during the colonial era. It came into force in 1903 (Dimkpa, 1997). Its primary aim was to regulate the press and monitor the activities of the press at the same time. The first Governor-General, Lord Lugard, amended the 1903 law in 1917 to checkmate newspapers' freedom and responsibilities. Even though it has gone through a series of changes and amendments over time, that law still remains the basis of the contemporary mass media laws. For instance, following the heat generated

by indigenous writers, the colonial government amended the 1917 press law in 1948 to set more boundaries, which the freedom of the press could not cross. According to Senam (2014), two facts were very glaring during the regime of the press freedom in the colonial era:

- (a) journalism and the fight for press freedom were spear-headed mainly by non-journalists, such as economists, politicians, public administrators etc; and
- (b) the struggle for press freedom was conducted side-by-side with the fight for Independence.

Unfortunately, the colonial press law did not terminate with the demise of colonialism in the country. It rather formed the basis for the post-Independence mass media laws.

The first step in the promulgation or amendment of press law by the Federal parliament after independence in 1960 was the amendment of the Newspaper Act in 1964. Dimkpa (1997) observes that the main aim of this amendment was to monitor or possibly stop rumour-mongering, which was a basic political antics of the time. Surprisingly, the General Johnson Thomas Aguiyi-Ironsi's administration in 1966 promulgated a decree lifting the ban on newspaper circulation in the country, which was however re-promulgated in 1976 by General Yakubu Gowon. Gowon also promulgated Decree No 11 of 1976 which was adopted by General Murtala Muhammed's regime in May 1976. Ewelukwa (2004) asserts that Decree No. 11 of 1976 was one of the most controversial mass media laws that restricted press freedom in Nigeria. The decree sought to check false accusation against public officers, which was prevalent at the time. A breach of Decree No. 11 of 1976 attracted two years imprisonment without the option of a fine. The decree provided, *inter alia*:

- (1) Any person who publishes and reproduces in any form any statement, rumour or otherwise... alleging that a public officer in any manner has been engaged in corrupt practices or has in any manner corruptly enriched himself or any other person shall be guilty of an offence under this decree and liable on conviction, to be sentenced to imprisonment for a term of not exceeding two years, without the option of a fine.
- (2) In any prosecution for an offence under this decree, the burden of proving that the statement, rumour or report, which is the subject matter of the charge, is true in every material particular, shall notwithstanding anything to the contrary in any enactment or rule of law, lie on the person charged.

When Major General Muhammadu Buhari became the Head of State in 1983, he consolidated this decree (Decree No. 1 of 1976) with stiffer sanctions through the promulgation of the draconian law—Decree No. 4 of 1984 (Public Officers Protection Against False Accusation). This decree made Buhari very unpopular in the press circle. Many scholars and journalists such as Thompson (1997) describe his regime and Decree No. 4 of 1984 as the most significant blow to freedom of the press in Nigeria. The decree was stiff and highly dreadful.

When General Ibrahim Badmasi Babangida took over power from Maj. Gen. Mohammadu Buhari in 1985, he (Babangida) gave the impression that his regime was going to be media friendly, and that press freedom was guaranteed. This was a mere plausible statement because, in reality, there is no congruity between military rule and press freedom. As a step towards the materialisation of his promise of press freedom, Gen. Babangida, in the early stage of his administration, repealed the dreaded Decree 4 of 1984 (Public Officer Protection Against False Accusation Degree) and reassured the press in particular and the citizenry in general that he was relatively restoring the freedom of the press through progressive mass media laws. General Babangida enacted the following decrees in 1993:

- (a) Decree No. 43 – The Newspaper Registration Decree
- (b) Decree No. 48 – The Newspaper Prohibition and Prevention from Circulation Decree
- (c) Decree No. 85 – The Nigerian Press Council Decree; the Press Council was set up to promote professional standards for the Nigerian press.

When General Sani Abacha became Head of State in 1993, he enforced Babangida's Decree No. 48 - The Newspaper Prohibition and Prevention from Circulation Decree, 1993. Thompson (1997) says that the enforcement of Decree No. 48 of 1993 led to the closing down of three national newspapers with their allied publications in one fell swoop, for more than one year. They were: *The Guardian*, *the Punch* and the *Concord* group of newspapers. Even though the government had been insisting on the continued application of Decree No.48 of 1993, the atmosphere in Nigeria and international community concerns were a major force militating against the further enforcement of the decree.

President Olusegun Obasanjo's civilian regime (1999-2007) had no serious impact on the freedom of the press, except the refusal to sign the Freedom of Information Bill into law, which was assented to by President Goodluck Jonathan on the 28th day of May, 2011. The Freedom of Information Act (2011) hinges on people's right to access public records and information. The access here does not relate to journalists alone, but every citizen of Nigeria. In 2008, the Yar'Adua administration arbitrarily closed down Channels Television for three days for reporting that the President would, on his return from Saudi Arabia for medical treatment, resign as President on health grounds.

Clearly, mass media laws have a great impact on the extent of press freedom in the country. For more than 53 years, the press has operated generally under constitutional protection. For instance, section 25(1) of the

Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1963), Section 36(1) of 1979 Constitution and Section 39 of the 1999 constitution all make provisions for free press. Section 39 (1) of the 1999 Constitution (as amended in 2011), under the heading “the Right to Freedom of Expression and the Free Press” states that:

- (1) Every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression, including freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference.
- (2) Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (1) of this section, every person shall be entitled to own, establish and operate any medium for the dissemination of information, ideas and opinions.

In spite of the constitutional guarantees, press freedom in Nigeria has been hindered by a number of factors. The foremost instruments of press control in Nigeria are laws, policies and regulations. Many mass media laws are in existence to regulate journalism practice in the country. These include: defamation, sedition, obscenity, copyright, privacy and official secrecy laws. For journalists to practise their profession well, they need to be fairly versed with the mass media laws among other requirements.

2.2 Media Ethics and Journalism Practice

Ethics is a branch of knowledge which is concerned with the standards of good or bad conduct in society, using societal norms as a basis for the evaluation of human conduct or behaviour. This indicates that ethics applies to all spheres of life and profession in the society. Every profession has its ethics. The class of ethics that governs mass media practice is called media ethics. According to Prasad (2008, p.33), “media ethics is the subdivision of applied ethics dealing with the specific ethical principles and standards of media, including broadcast media, film, theatre, the arts, print media and the Internet. The field covers many varied and highly controversial topics, ranging from war journalism to advertising.” It must however be pointed out that there are many classes of media ethics, viz: media ethics relating to: journalism, entertainment, democracy, media economics, public officials and culture (Wikipedia, 2011). Of all the areas of media ethics, journalistic ethics is one of the most well-defined. Two reasons can be advanced for this. First, it is frequently taught in higher institutions offering communication and journalism studies. Secondly, journalism is the nucleus of mass media practice. Journalistic ethics are the codes of behaviour or moral principles that guide the activities of journalists in any given situation. They are therefore the bases for the judgement of the rightness or otherwise of the action or behaviour of the journalist. They are often encapsulated in journalism codes of practice. Media ethics mainly revolves around truthfulness, accuracy, fairness, objectivity and editorial independence (BBC, 2010). Other topics covered by journalism ethics include news manipulation, truth and values, truth and fantasy, truth and public interest, privacy, taste and conflict with the law. In this case, the equitable maxim, *where equities are equal, the law prevails*, is instructive – meaning where there is a conflict between media ethics and the law, the law takes pre-eminence.

The depiction of violence and sex, the presence of foul/strong language, product placement, stereotypes, taste and taboos constitute the concern of ethics of the entertainment media. Because of the questions of values in artists and entertainment, ethics becomes imperative since these two aspects (values and arts) usually come in conflict with each other.

From the above discourse, it is obvious that both media laws and media ethics constitute a kind of watch-dog to journalism practice. While media laws are rules made outside the media circle, ethics is the objective moral principle, which forms the basis of guidelines for, and regulating, the conduct of journalists in their profession. Unfortunately in Nigeria, contemporary socio-economic and political trends seem to contradict the above function of media laws and ethics. It therefore becomes necessary to critically examine the extent to which mass media laws and ethics have influenced journalism practice in Nigeria.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

Journalism practice entails a great deal of fiduciary relationship between the journalist and members of the society, to whom the journalist publishes. This relationship therefore entrusts a commendable level of responsibility on the journalist. A good practice of journalism demands high compliance with the legal and ethical dictates of the profession. This research is hinged on the law and ethics of journalism profession. In order to give the study a focus in the light of related concepts and principles, the study is founded on the framework of the *Social Judgement theory*. The theory hinges on how individuals judge the message they receive. It follows that every bit of information from the mass media passes through some sorts of judgement by the audience before it is accepted, rejected or is left in-between acceptance and rejection. The social judgement theory was postulated in 1965 by Muzafer Sherif, Carolyn Sherif and Carl Hovland. For them, social judgement theory extends its concern to the fields of perception and persuasion, based on the attitude of the audience. According to Griffin (2000) attitude, which guides a person to pass judgement on the message, is an amalgam of three zones:

- (a) The latitude of acceptance – it is made up of the items that people underscore as being acceptable.

- (b) The latitude of rejection – it comprises the opinions or information that people cross out as objectionable.
- (c) The latitude of non-commitment – it consists of the message or information which people find neither objectionable nor acceptable. This implies either the audience is yet to pass judgement, for whatever reason or the issue is too insignificant for the audience’s thought and judgement over it.

The foregoing means that for the audience of mass media, judgement is anchored on perception and attitude. Thus where people (the audience) judge a new message or information to be within their latitude of acceptance, they then adjust their attitude somewhat to accommodate the new input. Accepting or rejecting a message or exhibiting non-commitment, to some extent, relates to the cognitive map of the audience. Perry (2002) links the social judgement theory to ego-involvement. Ego-involvement relates to how crucial an issue is in the life of the audience. Thus where the mass media content is of significance to the audience, it becomes pertinent for the audience to be engaged in the cognitive process of arriving at the appropriate judgment. The social judgement theory is relevant to this study in the sense that, our contemporary society is too advanced for it to be thought that the audience would receive all the media contents hook, line and singer, without any form of judgement. It was part of the onus of this study to examine the nexus between mass media law and ethics and the *prima facie* social judgement passed on journalism practice in Nigeria.

3.1 Research Methodology

The survey method was adopted for this study. This was to enable the researchers to examine certain variables and their interrelationships and then develop explanatory influences. The population of the study comprised all the registered journalists in, Akwa Ibomm State of Nigeria. This consisted of about 351 people. Akwa Ibom State is one of the 36 states in Nigeria. The choice of the State for this study was necessitated by the fact that Akwa Ibom 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 a study of journalism practice in Akwa Ibom State can be generalised throughout Nigeria.

Since the population was not too large, a complete census was taken. This was possible because of the homogenous nature of the universe, especially in terms of educational and professional background of the members of the population. The data for the study were gathered through the questionnaire. All the questions were close-ended to make for easy and precise coding, computation and interpretation of findings. Most of the questions were constructed based on 5-point Likert scale with the following weighting: SA=5; A=4; U=3; D=2 and SD=1. Other questions demanded “yes” or “no” answer. The formula for computations based on 5-point Likert scale was $\frac{AR \times W}{R \times NQ}$

While that of the simple percentages was $\frac{R \times 100}{N}$

where AR=Aggregate Response; W= Weighting; R= Number of Response; N= Total Number of Respondents; NQ= Number of Questions.

4.1 Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion of Findings

Table 1: Journalists’ extent of knowledge of specific mass media laws and ethics.

Response	Knowledgeable in the following mass media laws												Knowledgeable in the following media ethics									
	Defa- mation		Seditio n		Copy- right		Obscenit y		Privacy		D-notice		Truth- fulness		accurac y		Fairness		Objec- tivity		Editorial indep endence	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Yes	343	100	281	82	336	98	206	60	237	69	69	20	343	100	343	100	340	99	336	98	196	57
No	0	=	62	18	7	02	137	40	106	31	274	80	0	=	0	=	03	01	07	02	147	43
Total	343	100	343	100	343	100	343	100	343	100	343	100	343	100	343	100	343	100	343	100	343	100

N = 343

Table 1 indicates that all the 343 respondents (100%) were knowledgeable in the law of defamation; 228 respondents (82%) said they were knowledgeable in the law of sedition, while 62 (18%) said they were not. Three hundred and thirty six respondents, representing 98% said they were well knowledgeable in the law of sedition while only 7 respondents (2%) said they were not. On journalists’ knowledge of the obscenity law, 206 respondents representing 60% said they were knowledgeable in the law while 137 (40%) said they were not. A total of 237 respondents (69%) were knowledgeable in the privacy law while 106 (31%) were not. Only 69 respondents (20%) said they were knowledgeable in the D-notice while as many as 274 respondents (80%) said they were not aware of it.

On journalists' knowledge of media ethics, Table 1 still indicates as follows: all the 343 respondents (100%) said they were knowledgeable in truthfulness and accuracy; 340 respondents (99%) said they were knowledgeable in the ethical principle of fairness while only 3 respondents (1%) said they were not. Three hundred and thirty six respondents, representing 98% said they were had a fair knowledge of objectivity while 7 (2%) said they did not have. On editorial independence, 196 respondents, (57%) said they were knowledgeable in this principle. Surprisingly, as many as 147 out of 343 journalists (43%) said they had no knowledge of the ethical principle of editorial independence.

Table 2: (a) Effect of Journalists' knowledge of media laws and ethics on their adherence to professional code of practice; (b) Respondents' opinions on journalists' adherence to applicable mass media laws and ethics

Category	Knowledge of media laws and ethics affects journalists' adherence to professional code of practice		Journalists adhere to the applicable media laws and ethics governing journalism	
	No.	%	No.	%
Strongly agree	182	53	10	3
Agree	106	31	45	13
Undecided	4	1	17	5
Disagree	41	12	168	49
Strongly disagree	10	3	103	30
Total	343	100	343	100

$$\frac{AR \times W}{R \times NQ} = \frac{1438}{343} = 4.19$$

$$\frac{AR \times W}{R \times NQ} = \frac{720}{343} = 2.09$$

From Table 2(a), out of 343 respondents, 288 representing 84% agreed that the knowledge of Nigerian journalists of the various media laws and ethics affected their adherence to professional code of practice, 51 (15%), disagreed while four respondents (1%) were undecided. Thus the computed figure based on 5-point Likert scale was 4.19

Table 2(b) shows that out of 343 respondents, 55 representing 16% said Nigerian journalists did adhere to the applicable media laws and ethics in their practice while 271 (79%) disagreed. Seventeen respondents, representing 5% were undecided on the issue. Thus the computed figure based on 5-point Likert scale was 2.09.

4.2 Discussion of Findings

This study set out to ascertain the influence of mass media law and ethics on journalism practice in Nigeria. The influence is discussed based on the research questions earlier posed to guide the study.

4.2.1 Research Question One

What is the level of knowledge of journalists in Nigeria on the various mass media laws and ethics?

Table 1 gives a clue to the answer to this research question. According to the Table, out of 343 respondents, 113 (33%) had a fair knowledge of the various media laws and ethics while as many as 192 (56%) did not have. It is surprising that the level of journalists' knowledge of the media laws and ethics is so low despite the availability of training institutions, ICTs and the various media that publish information relating to the laws and ethics of media practice. Knowledge itself is a step which, if well directed, would enhance professionalism. Within our contemporary democratic market-driven society, journalism entails more than the mere gathering and dissemination of news. It is the critical application of analytical knowledge of diverse relevant topics and discourses in research and editorial work in order to give the audience the opportunity to join the significant public discourse of interest (Kovac and Rosenethiel, 2001). The knowledge of and adherence to the laws and ethics of journalism would be an immense asset to a journalist. This presents the possibility of knowledge shaping the professional's action in practice. In the views of 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.

The reasoning is that knowledge of the laws and ethics does not translate into their being applied in the course of practice. Whether the journalist is knowledgeable in the laws and ethics of his profession, or whether environmental factors influence the journalist, does not wither away the journalist's social responsibility. This therefore makes this study to have some base on the social responsibility theory.

4.3.2 Research Question Two

Does the knowledge of Nigerian journalists of the various mass media laws and ethics influence journalism practice in the State?

Table 2 provides the answer to this question. Table 5 indicates that out of 343 respondents, 288 (84%) said that journalists' knowledge of media laws and ethics affected their adherence to professional code of practice, but only 51 (15%) said it did not. Moreover since the computed value in t Table 2 was 4.19 which is above the mean weight (3.0), it implies that the knowledge of journalists has influenced journalism practice in Akwa Ibom State. Providing a basis on which media professionals may engage in their professional practices within a given legal confine, remains the whole gamut of mass media law and ethics (Ingram, 2008). 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 as posited in the statement of the problem of this study. Meanwhile, Tables 1 has clearly shown that the level of journalists' knowledge of media laws and ethics is low and that the standard of journalism practice is not commendable. It appears the respondents' position that media laws and ethics have positively influenced journalism implies that, without media laws and ethics, journalism practice in the country would be worse than its already bad state.

As earlier asserted under literature review in this study, media laws and ethics are 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, media laws and ethics still have some influence on the practice. That could be the reason why Crone (1989) asserts that many developments in the law do affect journalism practice and the mass media at all levels. In his view, Eweleukwa (2004) reasons that in any media system, whether there is press freedom or not, or whether media professionals comply with professional codes and the law or not, there is the obvious tendency of laws and policies regulating and influencing mass media practice, journalism in particular. This settles it all that, although journalism practice vis-a-vis adherence to media laws and ethics is not commendable in Nigeria, media laws and ethics have some influence on journalism practice.

4.2.3 Research Question Three

To what extent do journalists in Akwa Ibom State adhere to the applicable mass media laws and ethics in their practice?

As the calculated value (2.09) is less than the mean weight (3.0), the implication is that, journalists' adherence to media laws and ethics is low. It is as low as 2.09 out of 15 points. Again, Table 3 indicates that, out of 343 respondents, only 55 (16%) said that the extent of journalists' adherence to media laws and ethics was high while as many as 271 (79%) disagreed. This implies that many journalists in Nigeria do not adhere to the applicable media laws and ethics in their practice. This is not a commendable development. Adherence to media laws and ethics is very important to journalism practice. 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, commercialisation and the media's lack of independence from political influences. Given the above scenario, journalists who adhere to media laws and ethics have gone a long way towards overcoming the multifarious challenges facing journalism.

The mass media are an essential ingredient of liberal democracy modelled on the open-market economic philosophy. There is therefore much concern on the current state of affairs in media ethics. Neither communication nor media ethics is problem-free. Each of them carries its own universe of ambiguity, contradiction and confusion. This accounts for some of the reasons why Nigeria, like many other countries in the world, adopts the legalistic approach to media ethics. This approach relates to the use of positive legal prescription to engender ethical conducts and greater social responsibility in media practice. This implies codifying the ethical principles based on the applicable laws regulating the profession. Certainly, ethics remains a major leeway from the various dilemmas facing journalism (Ekeli and 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 slogan, *Nigeria ... good people great, nation*. This underscores the relevance of the deontological theory to this study. The precepts of the theory make a loud call on journalists to practise their profession based on good intent and ethical rectitude.

5.1 Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions were drawn:

First and foremost the study concludes that there is an inseparable relationship between mass media law and ethics, and journalism practice. It is difficult to talk of professionalism or the discharge of social responsibility by journalists without a circumspect examination of the relevant laws and ethics. It then follows that journalism thrives more when the professionals are guided by the applicable laws and ethics.

The study also made it clear that despite how important law and ethics are in mass media practice, majority of the mass media establishments in Nigeria do not have legal departments neither do they expose journalists to workshops on media laws and ethics. It is further concluded that the extent of journalists' adherence to media laws and ethics is mainly determined by the knowledge of such laws and ethics they experience in the field. This makes some journalists to sometimes flout media laws and ethics where their unrefreshed knowledge may run short when faced with serious legal and ethical challenges. Again, the study concludes that there are some bad eggs in the journalism circle in Nigeria who, from time to time, flout media laws and ethics without any qualm. This set of media professionals are those giving journalism a bad image in Nigeria.

Also the legal and ethical stance of the media establishment and journalist's level of adherence to media laws and ethics constitute one of the bases of assessing media professionalism. Audience members have a way of assessing journalism practice and passing judgement on the performance of journalists, even though the audience members may not be media professionals. This judgement in turn affects the credibility of such media establishments. The major yard stick for this judgement is the level at which the media professionals adhere to the applicable media laws and ethics in their practice. This then establishes the importance of the social judgement theory to this work.

5.2 Recommendations

The success of the mass media establishment owes a lot to the legal and ethical stance of media professionals. Based on the findings of this study, the following suggestions become necessary:

- (i) Mass media establishments should endeavour to employ only formally trained journalists to work as journalists.
- (ii) Refresher courses on media law and ethics should be organised from time to time by media establishments for media professionals.
- (iii) Journalism training institutions should increase the number of ethics-based courses in their curricula in order to inculcate the culture of media ethics in future media professionals. This would plausibly reduce instances of journalists' non-adherence to media law and ethics.
- (iv) Media establishments should endeavour to establish legal departments to serve as a platform for some media workers, who are trained lawyers, to render media law services that would curb some incidents of breach of media laws and ethics.

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