

The Nigerian Media Space and the Cost of a Bribe

Justine John DYIKUK

Centre for the Study of African Culture and Communication (CESACC), Catholic Institute of West Africa (CIWA), P. O. Box 499, Rumuibekwe - Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria
Currently, Director of Social Communications, Catholic Diocese of Bauchi; Postal Address: St. John's Cathedral P. O. Box 17 Bauchi, Bauchi State, Nigeria

Abstract

Despite the existence of the *Code of Conduct for Journalists*, media practice in Nigeria is marred by the *brown envelope syndrome* – an unprofessional act which gives the profession a bad name. This conceptual study, *The Nigerian Media Space and the Cost of a Bribe* investigated the matter using two theoretical frameworks namely, the social responsibility theory and Aristotle's golden mean theory. The findings revealed that sensationalism and news commercialisation are offshoots of the brown envelope syndrome. It noted love of money, lack of training and conflict as possible causes of the ugly trend. It observed that these unwholesome acts make the media lose capacity to facilitate good governance. Therefore, the study recommended maintenance of professionalism by reporters and remunerating media workers as ways of revamping media practice in Nigeria. In conclusion, the study called on journalists to shun unethical practices and key into the dynamics of professionalism.

Keywords: Bribe, brown, envelope, chequebook, sensationalism

1. Introduction

Media practice is, no doubt, a noble profession. Despite its loftiness and attendant tools of checks and balances namely, Code of Conduct, media practice in Nigeria is faced with the challenge of unwholesome practices by some bad eggs. This ugly development often described as *brown envelope syndrome* or *chequebook journalism* constitute a big drawback to the media labelled as the *fourth estate of the realm*.

With the aid of a theoretical framework, this paper highlights the cost of a bribe in Nigerian media practice from the perspectives of media ethics. It shall as well, posit possible recommendations for a vibrant media practice in Nigeria.

2. Deconstructing Concepts

- (a) **Bribe:** A bribe is understood as the wilful giving or receiving of money or material goods for favours by a journalist in the gathering, processing and dissemination of news. This could be done to give undue advantage in both the coverage and reportage of stories of politicians, business moguls, friends and family. In this paper bribe, brown envelop and chequebook journalism are used interchangeably.
- (b) **Cost:** For the purpose of this paper, cost is the consequence of an action carried out by any media practitioner. Consequence here, refers to the negative effects of an illicit act by a journalist like collecting bribe to cover or report news.

3. Context and Theoretical Framework

The context of this study is media practice in Nigeria. This paper adopts the social responsibility and the golden mean theories as theoretical framework. It has to be noted that the social responsibility emerged:

As a result of the shortcomings of the libertarian theory of the press, the Hutchins Commission on Freedom of the Press set up in the United States of America in 1947 recommended that, apart from ensuring and preserving press freedom, the press is also expected to observe certain social standards and responsibilities in performing their professional functions (Adaja, 2012).

The theory which is associated with the Western world, particularly Britain and Sweden, places emphasis on the moral and social responsibilities of persons who, and institutions which, operate the media. These responsibilities include: obligation to provide the public with information on important social issues and avoidance of activities that are harmful to public welfare and state security. Although it admits of no censorship, it relies on the maturity of proprietors, editors and reporters to act according to required norms (Moemeka, 1980, pp. 1-2). The choice of this theory is informed by the role of the media as a privileged organisation which requires a great deal of responsibility. As part of fulfilling their social responsibilities, every journalist is expected to "... promote universal principles of human rights, democracy, justice, equity, peace and international understanding" (Galadima & Embu, 2000, p.).

For Siebert et al (cited in, Adaja, 2012), the social responsibility theory is premised on six functions:

- i. To serve the political system by making information, discussion and consideration of public affairs

- generally accessible.
- ii. To inform the public to enable it to take self-determined action.
 - iii. To protect the rights of the individual by acting as watchdog over the government.
 - iv. To serve the economic system, for instance the bringing together of buyers and sellers through the medium of advertising.
 - v. To provide good entertainment, whatever “good” may mean in the culture at any point in time.
 - vi. To preserve financial autonomy in order not to become dependent on special interests and influences.

Similarly, the golden mean theory which is also referred to as Aristotle’s theory of golden mean is traced back to the philosopher Aristotle. As given by *mock Him productions* (2007), the theory puts emphasis on virtues which are necessary for achieving the ultimate aim of existence namely, happiness which of itself must be desired. Built on Aristotle’s ethics, the theory is both teleological and practical. It harps on actions which leads to the realisation of the good of the individual and invariably, the good of the community.

The end in view is realised through continuous action in consonance with the virtues which like happiness must be desired for themselves, not for momentary pleasures that can be derived from them. For the individual to act in a virtuous manner, the individual must first acquire virtues through parental upbringing, experience and reason (*aquileana.wordpress*, 2014). Aristotle’s golden mean theory represents a balance between extremes. As such, both the *social responsibility theory of the media* and *Aristotle’s golden mean theory* are appropriate to this study on the cost of a bribe which has ethical implications.

4. Review of Literature

There are cases of journalists in Nigeria who receive favours or gifts in order to cover and report stories. According to Obaze and Fashanu, “...sometimes journalists receive favour to publish or not to publish or kill a story. A journalist sometimes settle for bribe to avoid threat to life or for their own personal interest. Whichever way, it is unethical in journalism practice” (2006, p. 140).

In like manner, the question of accepting bribes, gifts and materialism poses threat to the credibility of journalists hence, an ethical problem to journalism practice in Nigeria. Many journalists often collect money to perform their normal responsibilities of disseminating information. This affects their reportage because facts may be distorted, suppressed or twisted:

In Nigeria, the most common type of bribe in journalism is the so-called “brown envelop” which is a monetary bribe handed out to the journalist to pressurise him or her into doing what the giver wants. Once accepted, monetary bribes and other gifts, “tie the hands” of the journalist who then becomes incapable of being objective in reporting events and issues involving people who gave the gifts. More so, some publishers are in the habit of getting contracts from the government; such publishers always try to discourage their newspapers and magazines from publishing stories that are critical of the government. This makes the journalists to be subjective (Asemah, 2011, p. 53).

Scholars have advanced evidences of *chequebook journalism* in media practice. For instance, as given by Rodman:

Paying news sources to speak to reporters, the essential element of *chequebook journalism*, is viewed by many as unethical because it causes a conflict of interest. The credibility of the news is always suspect when the source has a financial interest in its publication. The potential for sleaze associated with *chequebook journalism* became evident in a 1997 case in which the tabloid *Globe* paid former flight attendant Suzan Johnson for a story about her romance with Frank Gifford, the husband of TV’s morning talk-show host Kathie Lee Gifford (2006, p. 530).

The author further revealed the ground-breaking story thus:

When Johnson approached the *Globe*, the editors were interested in the basic idea of her story, but they did not like that the “romance” was just a flirtation. They then paid Johnson to fly to New York City and seduce Gifford in a hotel room set up with a hidden camera. The *Globe*’s reporting on this “news event” was picked up by many mainstream news organisations – sometimes as a story about the unsavory techniques of the tabloid press (Rodman, 2006, p. 530).

5. Media Law, Ethics and Code of Conduct for Nigerian Journalists

The *Freedom of Information Bill, FOI* - the law of the Federal Republic of Nigeria concerning media practice which snowballed into a full blown *Act* on 28, May 2011 under President Goodluck Jonathan gives journalists the leverage to go about their legitimate business of reportage without fear of intimidation. Whether this would be followed to the latter is altogether a different ballgame. In the context of media law, media personnel have the right to act responsibly by avoiding bribes, biased reportage, and issues such as: invasion of privacy and cases of libel. “In this way, the mass media and their products serve the moral imagination and thus serve moral judgement” (1994, Rossi and Soukup, p. 4). Enemaku (2003, p.70) cited Onabajo as stating that ethics is the judge of law because morality takes precedence over law and is, the standard for law.

It is the desire of every society to have some form of ethical standards. The Media is no exception. Enemaku (2003, p.71) shares this view when he says, “every profession or discipline is expected to have rules governing the conduct of members for internal control and regulation.” He upheld this line of thought by insisting that ethics are generally not externally imposed but developed from within the society or group which subscribes to it (Enemaku, 2003, p.71).

Before we delve into how ethical standards emerged in the media in Nigeria, it is crucial to note that media practice in Nigeria today is in deep crisis of credibility. This is because most of the cherished norms and values of the profession have been abused, violated and debased as a result of individual, organisational, environmental and societal challenges (Adaja, 2012). The media has an enormous moral responsibility which arises from their privileged function and roles in a democratic society (Kieran, p. 83). This is because professionals have a deeper awareness of the need to respect ethics and professional rules (Duplat, 2003, p. 15).

Black and Whitney (cited in Gambo, 2013, p. 104) opine that one of the earliest attempts at codifying the principles of professional conduct for journalists was the 19s08 Journalists’ Creed developed by Walter Williams, Dean of the University of Missouri School of Journalism. The creed which emphasised that no one should write as a journalist what he would not say as a gentleman brought about the whole concept of journalism ethics which is, a sense of moral responsibility for one’s fellows. These scholars contend that this was what led to the new understanding of journalism and what constitutes ethical journalism or the cult of objectivity. Thus, journalism is ethically responsible if it achieves factual accuracy and verification of details.

The idea for a Code of Ethics for journalists in Nigeria dates as far back as 1979 when the Nigerian Press Organisation came up with a code to guide media practitioners in their profession. This submission upholds this way:

In Nigeria, as in many other countries, these principles are contained in the Nigeria Press Organisation Code, the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) Code, Nigeria Press Council Law and other relevant instruments. Therefore, there are clear ethical provisions for journalists and media organisations to be guided by in their operations as obtains in the civilised world. The challenge remains whether journalists, proprietors and managers of media organisations are adequately educated and willing to adhere to these principles within the ongoing democratic experiment (Gambo, 2013, p. 105).

Due to some *lacunae* or loopholes in the 1979 version of the code, media professionals in the country saw the need for a new code. This gave birth to the signing of a new and improved Code of Ethics in 1998 which is currently in use. Being the outcome of review efforts of the Nigerian Press Council, the Nigerian Union of Journalists and the Nigeria Guild of Editors, the current code has the approval of the Nigerian Press Organisation (Nwabueze, 2012, p. 199).

In its preamble, the *Code of Ethics for Nigerian Journalists*, CENJ notes that:

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 a 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, we, Nigerian journalist, give to ourselves this Code of Ethics. It is the duty of every journalist to observe its provisions (*Code of Ethics for Nigerian Journalists*, CENJ).

For Galadima and Embu, the code prescribes accuracy and fairness but proscribes reward and gratification. Again, on accuracy and fairness, the code notes that:

- (i) The public has a right to know. Factual, accurate, balance and fair reporting is the ultimate objective of good journalism and the basis of earning public trust and confidence.
- (ii) Every journalist should refrain from publishing inaccurate and misleading information. Where such information has been inadvertently published, prompt correction should be made. Every journalist must hold the right of reply as a cardinal rule of practice.
- (iii) In the case of his/her duties, every journalist should respect and strive to separate facts from conjecture and comment (2000, p.46).

As regards reward and gratification, the same code says:

- i. Every journalist should neither solicit or accept bribe, gratification or patronage to suppress or publish information.
- ii. To demand payment for the publication of news is inimical to the notion of news as fair, accurate, unbiased and factual report of an event (Galadima & Embu, 2000, p.48).

As given by Galadima and Embu, there is no any justification or reason for demanding and collecting money (bribe as either gift, good will, welfare, public relations, transport fare, qua, press honorarium, brown envelope, egunje, ect) by journalist from people (news source) before or after covering an event. It is unethical to receive money/gift of whatever form from a news source whether during press/news conference, Annual General

Meetings, Parties, or any event (2000, p.51). This means that a reporter should shun gifts. Nwabueze (2012, p. 200-201) cited Igbiniedion as saying: “Brown envelope and free tickets can compromise your integrity as a journalist...if you don’t accept gifts, you will feel freer to report an accurate assessment of an event or issue. Gifts are to influence your coverage. Avoid them.”

On *violence*, The Code of Ethics specifically mentioned that journalists are not to present acts of violence in a manner that supports or glorifies; accordingly, it advises them not to use dishonest means to get *information* – that is, through subterfuge but that they could use “exceptional methods” if the matter is of public importance. *Public interest*, notes the code, requires a reporter to champion national importance and public good. It touches on *social responsibility* which demands that a reporter should not forget that he or she is responsible to the society thus, he or she ought to promote the universal tenets of human rights, democracy, justice and peace. The code warns against *plagiarism*, copying other people’s work verbatim without acknowledging it and also adhering to *copyright* rules to ensure proper acknowledgement is given to originators of works (Nwabueze, 2012, pp. 201-202).

The code is geared towards persuading journalists to ensure that they follow moral principles that are in line with their profession and also face headlong challenges that they may encounter in the field of practice and also, on how to deal with such challenges (Nwabueze, 2012, p. 198).

Ethical standards guard against possible internal and external manipulations. Pertaining media practice, ethical safeguards create a sense of responsibility among journalists especially inordinate passions or ambition. Unethical practices among media practitioners result in media which do not work for greater good or balance in the society. It is clear that these unethical actions are not in accordance with acceptable standards of media professionalism.

In his book *Media and society: Critical perspectives*, Burton quotes McNair as saying: “the journalist is a professional communicator whose work is structured and shaped by a variety of practices, conventions and ethical norms” (2010, p. 241). He argues further that professional values constitute a kind of regulation which leads to values and practices that cannot be challenged easily. That is not to say that codified training or innovation of professional values is completely suspect (Burton, 2010, p. 242).

6. Media Practice in Nigeria: Brown Envelope Syndrome and News Commercialisation

The brown envelope syndrome is closely linked to news commercialisation. In their research on *the Effects of Non-Professionalism in Nigeria Journalism*, Olajide, Benjamin and Ogundeji noted that “...bad headlines, poor production, brown- envelop and other professional misconducts are the effects of non-professionalism in Nigeria journalism” (2012, p. 33). They contend that: “Nigeria journalists truly jostle for both monetary and honorary reward but on the platter of laziness. It is on record that there was no winner for the 2011 TV presenter in the just concluded Nigeria National Media Merit Award (NNMMA) held in Akure Ondo State” (Olajide, Benjamin and Ogundeji, 2012, p. 30). This notion is corroborated by Nkechi and Onwuka, (2013, p. 37) where they observed that brown envelope lead to publication of rumours, speculations, falsehood and vanished truth.

Sensationalism is a situation whereby a report highlights incidents out of context either in headlines or the body. It is the tendency of journalists reporting stories out of proportion by adding other facts or rumours to spice it or make it more interesting for readers. Such stories do not convey much as carried by the headline. This is why sometimes it is common to see many newspapers with such headlines only to read the story and find no substance (Obaze and Fashanu, 2006, p. 140).

Media organisations sometimes cover all forms of scandals and sensationalism which often involve invasion of privacy, bugging, surveillance and subterfuge so as to get higher patronage (Adeyemi, 2013, p. 216). Perhaps it is reason why Nahida (2014, p. 10) observes that media outfits are forced to consider the commercial value of whatever information that would be published regardless of its implication on the larger society. Those who provided gifts in most cases expected the reporter to either give or withhold publicity (Risley, 1998, p. 172).

This brings us to news commercialisation. News commercialisation is a theory which states that news has become a commodity which can be bought by those who have money so that their voices can be heard in the media. It could take the form of sponsored programmes or personality profiles of the rich in society. To drive home the point, Asemah is of the opinion that:

News commercialisation means that news has become a commodity, which can be bought by those who have the money so that their voices can be heard. News has automatically become a commercial product to the detriment of important developments in the country as they are pushed away by, in some cases, trivial news items, concerning urban events as the activities of personalities. In the mass media, news has to be paid for by those who want to be heard. News has gradually become a packaged broadcast or reports that is sponsored or paid-for by the interested parties. By this practice, it becomes difficult for those who are financially handicapped to have access to the media. Thus, it is only organisations and individuals that have money to spend that can gain access to the media during news time for a prescribed fee (2011, p. 32).

This phenomenon makes it increasingly difficult for those who are financially handicapped to have access to the media. As such, only organisations and individuals who have money to spend can have the media at their beck and call. In Nigeria, news commercialisation operate at two levels: at the institutional level where charges are “officially” placed for sponsored news programmes and at the individual journalist level where a journalist or group of journalists make monetary demands to cover an event or report it (Asemah, 2011, pp. 32 & 34).

Ekwo (cited in Asemah, 2012, p. 32) contends that:

The social service or public service role of the commercialisation media, especially the broadcast of electronic media has diminished considerably, paving way to a situation whereby access to the media is guaranteed by how much money one can offer to the media. This practice tagged commercialisation of news as different from advertising in the media, is one of the most recent but dangerous developments in Nigeria media industry dating from 1988.

7. Possible Causes of Unethical Practices in Nigerian Media Space

Here, this study shall review the negative impact of news commercialisation on the media and society at large as well as the possible causes of unethical practices by Nigerian journalists. To start with, the negative impact of news commercialisation include:

- (a) “Buying” of News: It has given birth to a situation whereby news is narrowly defined against the weight of the news source’s pocket since the media, whether it is print or electronic use money as criteria for publishing news.
- (b) Problem of Censorship and Gatekeeping: Censorship and gatekeeping becomes a problem since the editor who is supposed to edit the stories is handicapped under the news commercialisation policy. As such, the editor cannot edit stories according to acceptable standards or principles of journalism.
- (c) Loss of Credibility: It makes the journalist to lose credibility since it is now believed that he pays more attention to who can pay for news.
- (d) Manipulation by Government: Government of some countries may pay journalists to write some news items about its policies even when those policies are inimical to public interest.

The possible causes of unethical practices by Nigerian journalists include: money, lack of training, lack of principle, failure of religion, expectation from the society and conflict; others include, family pressure, poor economy, poor remuneration, lack of facilities, ownership of the media and African culture of reciprocal gesture; others are, knowledge of the power of the press, the love of favours and the love of sensation (Galadima & Embu, 2000, pp. 54-58). Lando (2013, p. 25) discovered that one popular motivation for unethical conducts by media workers, especially taking bribes, is because most media practitioners are underpaid. Accordingly, Semiu, Adejola and Folarin (2012, p. 208) surmise that ethical problems in media practice do not exist in isolation but exist as part of the overall issues and problems in the larger society.

Among other things, Shu (2013) notes that inadequate funding, charlatanism and poor payment of staff constitute the challenges hindering ethical practice in journalism. The monopoly of media ownership in Nigeria by the government, business moguls, politicians and religious bodies gives way to unethical practices. Also, where a journalist is sent to cover a story alone, the temptation to receive a bribe is high. This paper shall discuss these causes of unethical practices by Nigerian journalists under the following headings as outlined by Galadima and Embu:

1. Money: Materialism has eaten deep into this generation and so everybody loves money for what it can bring to him/her – cars, dresses, food, women/men, houses, good schools, etc. The corrupting influence of money saw many journalists demanding and receiving bribe which they colourfully dress as *Tp* (transport fare), *brown envelope*, *Qua*, *Press honorarium*, *Public Relations*, etc. Even news editors and editors are not left out as they demand for “Returns” from reporters especially those assigned to political, energy and financial/business beats. Reporters given these beats are always re-assigned to other beats if they refuse to bring returns to news editors.
2. Lack of Training: Journalists who are not trained in good journalism/mass communication schools are too susceptible to doing unethical acts. This is due to lack of knowledge of the effects of these acts on the profession. This was the reason why the Nigerian Media Council Decree (59 of 1988) made it compulsory for all practicing journalists to obtain a diploma in journalism/mass communication before registration as a member of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ).
3. Lack of Principle: There are trained journalists who still breach the Code of Ethics. Such people do that because they do not have good personal principles upon which they practice their profession. People without good principles are people who can do anything provided such things are in their interests.
4. Failure of Religion: Ethics are moral rules and a good Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, African Religionist, etc will not do anything that is morally wrong. Where such a believer does what is wrong, his or her religion has failed to prick that person’s conscience.

5. Expectation from the Society: Each society has certain expectations from its members and one of such expectations, especially in Nigeria is, wealth as in having cars, houses, good dresses, etc. Nothing less is expected of journalists. Journalism, been a poor profession, makes its practitioners do unethical things in order to meet societal expectations.
6. Conflict of Interest: Where news events affects the interests of reporters, such reporters do breach the ethics of their profession and get involved in those events either by protecting their interests or by promoting same. This may be because the journalist does not want his or her people to disown him or her. These interests, may be religious, sectional, tribal, group membership, state, national and continental. A Christian will always see himself as a Christian first and a journalist second in cases where Christians and Muslims are involved especially in negative cases – wars, crises, riots, etc. Such conflicts of interest do result in unethical practices.
7. Family Pressure: In Nigeria, where the extended family system is the practice, financial and other demands from the journalist's cousins, brothers, sisters, uncles, nieces, nephews, aunties, etc do force him of her to do unethical things in order to reduce these pressures. And the profession is the worst for it.
8. Poor Economy: Africans live on subsistence economy where most people live from hand to mouth. This means that most journalists, do not have enough to eat let alone live comfortably. So, journalists can hardly refuse any gift even if they know that such a gift is a Greek gift.
9. Poor Remuneration: Most journalists are poorly paid and this exposes them to the temptation of demanding for money and other gifts from news sources – a practice which is unethical.
10. Lack of Facilities: Most media organisations in Nigeria lack basic facilities such as vehicles, recorders, communication gadgets, etc. yet journalists from these media outfits are expected to perform their duties effectively. To do their duties, some journalists do resort to unethical practices to achieve it.
11. Ownership of the Media: The owners of most media outfits in Nigeria do establish them for reasons other than education, entertainment and information of the public. So, journalists employed to work in these places should know these hidden/other interests and work accordingly. Remember that *he who pays the piper call the tune*. And so, most times unethical practices are done just to suit the owners of these media outfits.
12. African Culture of Reciprocal Gesture: In Africa, it is believed that if somebody is good to you, you should also be good to that person. This is why it is said, when you scratch my back, I will scratch your own; or better still, it is believed that the right hand is only clean when the left hand washes it. This attitude has made some journalists publish stories or give prominence to news events only when the parties involved have given them money, gifts and other freebies. Those who do not are given less prominence. This is an unethical practice.
13. Knowledge of the Power of the Press: Some journalists who know that their news media are very influential and have high esteem within the society do become arrogant either by refusing to cover news events or writing stories for submission to their editors because they were not given what they wanted by the news sources. This is unethical.
14. The Love of Favours: Many journalists have used and are still using their profession to get favours from individuals, companies and governments at all levels. Favours such as getting employment for your brothers and sisters in companies or getting admission for your sons and daughters in school. Many journalists in Nigeria have visited foreign countries either as pilgrims (Mecca and Jerusalem) or as delegates to certain functions on the tickets of companies and governments.

Many vehicles such as motorbikes, cars and buses have been given to journalists as favours from organisations, individuals or governments. The NUJ have been favoured with fantastic press centres, secretariats and guests houses by organisations and governments at all levels. Many journalists have been favoured with membership of task force boards and boards of parastatals and companies. On the surface we may think there is nothing wrong with these acts but a deeper look will reveal a lot of problems. This is because any journalist who is given such favour will automatically lose the guts to expose any wrong doing or corrupt activities which those who favoured him are perpetrating. And if after the favour the journalist still muster the guts to expose or criticise such individual/government, then that journalist stands the risk of blackmail which may lead to his dismissal from his organisation and the destruction of his credibility. Most newsmakers use the issue of “favours” to manipulate journalists in Nigeria.
15. The Love of Sensation: By this we mean the exaggeration of stories through overblown headlines, gory pictures and overstatements. These actions normally raise emotions of sympathy and disgust. Too much of everything is bad and so too much of sensationalism is unethical especially where the headlines and highlights do not have direct relation with texts.

Having put down some of the reasons for the unethical practices in the journalism profession,

let us quickly say that we should service means of overcoming these problems. There is no problem without solution.

It is an acknowledged fact that the weakness of journalism profession is that it depends on other people for its daily survival. Journalists do not make news but others do and this results in people manipulating journalists to do the bidding of others. Unless journalists are trained in the art of handling newsmakers effectively, others will continue to take advantage of them. In that case, the journalism profession will be the worst for it (2000, pp. 54-59).

It is evident that part of the fallout of unwholesome acts in the media is that they make the media lose capacity to facilitate good governance (Besley, 1998, p. 11) especially in fledgling democracies like Nigeria. This is because, unprofessional deeds make the media to lose its flare and valour as the *fourth estate* of the realm. It is a given that the best way citizens can learn about public life is through the media.

It crucial to note that:

...unethical practices as acceptance of financial gratitude popularly referred to as “brown envelop,” allowing public officers or other personalities or organisations to pay hotel, transport or telephone bills for reporters, writing speeches or doing such other jobs for public officers, could lead to conflict of interests which could make a reporter to compromise objectivity (Nwabueze, 2012, p. 181).

As such, shunning unethical acts is a must urgent need for media persons (Carpini, 2004, p. 423) in Nigeria.

8. Summary and Conclusion

The power of the media is essential in determining the quality of any government. This is why Besley and Chadwick hold that, the health of any true democratic community depends on the media (1992, p. 1). Since the media is public-service driven, ethics becomes a standard for journalists. This is why scholars are of the view that since the media are institutions of public interest, they ought to be accountable to the masses (Nordestreng, 2000, p. 69; Allen, 2002, p. 113). McQuail for instance insists that: “public expectations concerning the role of the media in political life are shaped by norms of truth and fairness” (2003, p. 6). This includes the ability to refuse bribes.

We have seen that although media practice in Nigeria is guided by a Code of Conduct, some journalists fall below the line. We also saw that *chequebook journalism* and news commercialisation have given the profession a bad name. In a society where every profession is fighting for relevance, journalists cannot be indifferent. This is why it was established that journalists in Nigeria have no choice than to apply the appropriate moral safeguards of their profession.

Notwithstanding the challenges faced by media practitioners in Nigeria, the *social responsibility theory of the media* and Aristotle’s *golden mean theory* as they apply to this study serve as a creed that stings media professionals to consciousness so as to cover and report stories objectively and in the interest of the public. This is why the study discovered that persons in the media must always remember that they have a responsibility to the larger society.

The implication of all that scholars have said about unethical practices among journalists is that, they live in society and operate within a social milieu. Therefore, while the onus lies on reporters to keep away from unethical practices such as collecting bribes, the larger society ought to aid them in achieving that. Consequently, if journalists in Nigeria key into the dynamics of professionalism, the Nigerian media space will be filled with objectivity, fairness and equity as far as media and ethics are concerned.

9. Recommendations

As a way of minimising *chequebook journalism* in Nigeria, it is important that journalists return to the traditional values of truthfulness, neutrality and impartiality so as to return the lost glory of the profession (Adaja, 2012). Nwabueze (2012, p. 181) quoted Ogbondah as saying:

The courage of Nigerian journalists to uphold high moral and ethical principleswill be important in the formation of a new climate for mass media growth and development in general and press freedom in particular. Journalists must understand that compromising their moral and ethical principles can be a greater threat to press freedom than anybody of oppressive press laws under the new democratic formation. Journalists must debunk financial enticements that can compromise their professional and ethical principles.

The media must assume a greater degree of social responsibility. This is because they are not only accountable to the public but also to other social institutions. For instance, due to its vast readership and consequent readership, the press is expected to maintain high standard of moral responsibility. As such, good journalism should not only dish to the public what it craves for but it should give them what it thinks is good for public consumption. It is only then that the press will enjoy its freedom with responsibility and balanced reportage (Singh, 2009, p. 25-26).

It behoves on media practitioners in Nigeria to imbibe the values of Corporate Social Responsibility

(CSR). This is because, Corporate Social Responsibility has to do with ethics. It is a given that any organisation wants the continued development of its community. This is why it is necessary for such an organisation to be ethical in terms of helping its members to be responsible in their operations. Adamolekun and Ekundayo (2007, p. 158) outlined some of these qualities of socially responsibility as:

- (a) A clear-cut objective of its business.
- (b) Creation of needed non-discriminatory employment policy for the local workforce (neighbours).
- (c) Conscious effort to ensure that the lives of people are not endangered through environmental pollution, noise and other dumping of industrial wastes.
- (d) Ensuring proper and adequate communication with the people on its philosophy and work programme.
- (e) The chief executive should personally attend local events to identify with the community thereby saying indirectly that “we are part of you.”
- (f) Staff members of the company should participate actively in various community projects, clubs and associations for greater understanding on volunteer basis.
- (g) Show exemplary leadership in the community.
- (h) Make contributions to communal efforts.

The sense of Corporate Social Responsibility as we have seen sets the parameters for what journalists in Nigeria ought to do namely:

1. Pursuance of professionalism: Journalists in Nigeria must be encouraged to maintain a high level of professionalism so as to minimise *chequebook journalism*. Media practitioners ought to key into the dynamics of professionalism so as to hold their heads high among other professionals in the society. It is a must urgent need for journalists in Nigeria to pursue the basic standards of their trade. This will mean aiming for nothing other than doing the oughts and avoiding the oughtn'ts of the media profession.
2. Adequate funding: Owners of media outlets must ensure adequate funding for sustainability. No organisation survives without funding. With a robust economy or funding, media outlets will be able to fund their organisations in a way that they will not be liable to the corrupting influence of manipulation and control of both the rich and government. This will create an opportunity for media organisations to work assiduously at motivating their staff to excellence. Indeed, without adequate funding, both proprietors and workers of media outlets will be willing tools in the hands of those who can “buy” or “access” the media.
3. Good remuneration: Since the primary incentive for every worker is his wage, publishers and management of the various media in the country should pay their workers just wages. This will serve as a stimulant or booster. Where media workers are owed wages, this “kills” commitment, initiative and creativity. Closely related to paying journalists as at when due is motivating talented journalists with stipends or awards. This, no doubt, makes for optimum performance. A well paid journalist is surely a force to reckon with in the surveillance role of the media.
4. Syndicated tasks: Sending journalists in pairs could curb the collection of bribes since they could serve as a check on each other. The argument could be either way – they could connive to collect a *brown envelope*. In any case, where one of the two has good moral grounds, he could reject a favour or gift and challenge his or her colleague not to. In this case, journalists should be paired in tasks so as to reduce the temptation of receiving the *brown envelope*.
5. Media Education/Ongoing training: In life, learning is an ongoing process. The popular dictum that “a person doesn't stop learning until he dies” comes to the fore. It is in the light of this that owners and managers of media corporations should organise periodic seminars, workshops and retreats for their personnel. On their part, media practitioners should ensure that they cease the opportunity whenever it presents itself. Media education which touch on the *Code of Ethics for journalists* will go a long way in reminding journalists who have forgotten the creedal standpoints of their profession.
6. Resorting to sanction or sack: Giving the laid down rules of the profession, when journalists are found wanting of collecting the brown envelope, they should be sanctioned, sacked or both depending on the gravity of the offense, prove at hand and how much is involved. Since a huge bribe is capable of ruining the integrity of a media organisation, it behoves on management, media houses and professional bodies saddled with the responsibility of checks and balances among media outlets in Nigeria as we saw earlier, to act swiftly in accordance to laid down principles so as to protect the corporate image of journalism in the country.
7. Standing their moral grounds: The media should stand their ground as the *Fourth Estate of the realm*. Saddled with the responsibility of interpreting policies and programmes of government to the public, media practitioners in Nigeria should be careful so as not to be used by government officials to write news about government policies as those policies may be inimical to public interest. This means that journalists should stand their moral grounds and keep away from government favours such as: promise of

pilgrimages, employment in companies or getting admission for relatives in school. This means that the media should be impartial and neutral.

8. Diversification of media ownership: In order for the media in Nigeria to act in an ethical manner, there is need for diversification and variety in terms of ownership pattern of the media. Since it is common knowledge that the media Nigeria is owned by a few individuals, civil society organisations and various communities should be encouraged to float their own media outfits. By so doing, the media will be owned and managed by the people and so would not suffer monopoly by a few individuals.
9. Freedom of Information Law: The *Freedom of Information Act* which allows journalists to ply their trade without hindrance should propel the government to allow the *freedom of information law* to take its full cause. This implies that government and its agents cooperate with media organisations. This cooperation includes: stopping unwarranted harassment and intimidation of publishers should they refuse a bribe and insist on publishing a story that is not in the interest of government.

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