

JOURNALISTS' PERCEPTION OF THE CHALLENGES OF NEWS COMMERCIALIZATION AND NEWS AS PUBLIC GOOD

¹IHEANACHO Cajetan O., Ph.D

¹OKALA Fabian, Ph.D

¹UKPONG Edikan N.

¹Department of Mass Communication, Imo State University, Owerri
kajetaniheanacho@gmail.com

Abstract

This study is on Journalists' Perception of the Challenges of News Commercialization and News as Public good. It made use of the survey research method to weigh the opinions of Journalists in Imo State using the questionnaire. Anchored on the Social Responsibilities, the study argued that news commercialization is posing serious ethical challenges in journalisms to the extent that puff is now sold as news to the unsuspecting audience. To this end, the study revealed that news commercialization continues to be on the increase with journalists Imo State viewing it as a means of survival in the quest to fulfil their duties. Again, news commercialization influences news content and news as public good. The continuous growth in news commercialization negates the ethics of journalism and this is leading to a temporary decline of journalism's expensive but vital watchdog function. Based on this, the researcher recommends that there should be an improved salary for journalist as this can control the urge to seek personal reward.

Keywords: Journalists, Perception, News Commercialization, News, Public Good

Introduction

News commercialization has become a major trend in news treatment globally, and an issue of ethical concern in the mass media. It is a tactful strategy through which the media relegates its responsibility of surveying the society – disseminating information on the event, and people of social interest aside for financial gains. First there is need to establish the concept of news in the context of which it is regarded in this paper.

In Peterson, et al (1965) is to act as the society's watchdog, they are expected to mount surveillance over the environment and correlate the media as tools for mass communication which have unique responsibilities to keep members of the society informed, educated and entertained, It is through the mass media that the society gets to know what is happening within and around the country and react accordingly. The basic functions of the mass media, according to Lasswell components of the society to ensure effective functioning of the system which will assist in the transmission of the social heritage from generation to generation. In carrying out these functions, the mass media make use of several methods of collecting and disseminating information which include straight news reporting. However, recent journalism practice in Nigeria seems to be plagued with the malady of news commercialization. What this portrays is that only the rich will get their ideas communicated to the public thus relegating the common to the background. Media organizations are undeniably expected to protect the public interest of their audiences. Although Azeez (2009) posits that news organization in our contemporary capitalist time are established on profit making motive; perhaps, unarguably, less on the motive of serving the interest of the public for which they are institutionalized. This negates public interest. Napoli (2001, p.1), explains that within the United States it has long been recognized that the Mass Media industries have an ethical obligation to make positive contributions in terms of public service and democratic processes. Within the context of broadcasting "this public service dimension of mass media industries has been taken a step further, with broadcasters operating under a government-imposed mandate to serve the public interest, convenience, or necessity" (communications Act of 1934).

According to Asogwa and Asemah (2012, p.3) news is increasingly becoming a commodity valued for its role in informing or persuading the public on political, social, cultural and economic issues. Thus, in modern journalism practice, news is commercialized to the extent that only the rich get their ideas communicated to the members of the public. They further explained in succinct terms that: News commercialization 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. Ethics and truth in journalism have assumed global concern as scholars recognize that their basic constituents of objectivity, accuracy, fairness and balance have merely assumed.

In Peterson, et al (1965) the media act as the society's watchdog, they are expected to mount surveillance over the environment and correlate the media are tools for mass communication which have unique responsibilities to keep members of the society informed, educated and entertained, it is through the mass media that the society gets to know what is happening within and around the country and react accordingly. The basic functions of the mass media, according to Lasswell components of the society to ensure effective functioning of the system which will assist in the transmission of the social heritage from generation to generation. In carrying out these functions, the mass media make use of several methods of collecting and disseminating information which include straight news reporting.

More so, funds are crucial for the establishment and continued survival of any organization, whether in the public or private sector, a media or non-media outfit. In fact, money is like oxygen for the blood. Without it, nothing can succeed. Indeed, media management is often money-gulping, always giving the managers sleepless nights on how to remain financially solvent without renegeing on their commitment to their readers, listeners/viewers. This challenge becomes even more worrisome because returns on media investment are not often very high, as recent media history has shown. In the past decades or thereabout many media houses have had to shut down on ground of financial insolvency. Even seemingly financially sound companies were not spared the challenges of mortality, part of the problem arises because investors in the media industry often see the glamour and media power, without adequately appreciating what goes into running an efficient and sustainable media organization. Interpretative reporting and investigative reporting. The result, quite often, is that no sooner do such outfits open shop than they are forced to shut down. Many media houses, including those with rich finances have suffered the same fate, although other reasons may be responsible for such situations.

Statement of the Problem

News commercialization has become a major trend in news treatment globally, and an issue of ethical concern in the mass media. It is a tactful strategy through which the media relegates its responsibility of surveying the society – disseminating information on the event, and people of social interest aside for financial gains (Chioma 2013). Therefore, the issue of news commercialization has come to characterize journalism practice in Nigeria. A situation that prompt journalist/media organization to collect money in order to publish. The Nigerian adage “money for hand back for ground” comes to play here. Whereby “no money no reporting”. This practice is like a cankerworm eating deep into journalism practice in Nigeria. The good old fairness, objectivity, balance and truth in journalism has been eroded by selfish greed and profit-making motive by various media houses in Nigeria. As Azeez (2009) puts it, news organization in our contemporary capitalist time are established on profit making motive; perhaps, unarguably, less on the motive of serving the interest of the public for which they are institutionalized. This negates public interest therefore projecting the voice of the rich at the expense of the poor or the voice of those who can pay at the expense of those who cannot.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate the perception of Imo State Journalist on the influence of news commercialization exerts on media credibility. The study is anchored on the following objectives.

- i. To ascertain the perception of Journalist in Owerri metropolis on News commercialization.
- ii. To examine the extent to which news commercialization influences objectivity, fairness, balance and truth in reporting.
- iii. To explore the forms of news commercialization that is manifest among Journalists in Owerri Metropolis
- iv. To examine what journalists perceive as reasons responsible for News commercialization.
- v. Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

- i. What is the perception of Journalist in Owerri Metropolis on news commercialization?
- ii. To what extent have news commercialization influence objectivity, fairness, balance and truth in reporting?
- iii. What are the forms of news commercialization manifest among Journalist in Owerri metropolis?
- iv. What are the possible reasons for the practice of News Commercialization in Imo Metropolis?

Economic Influence in Journalism

One widely discussed tension in journalism relates to the fact that most media organizations need to rely on revenues from advertising, creating tension between economic and journalistic objectives. To ensure autonomy and strengthen professionalism, newsrooms established a rhetorical, and often physical, boundary to separate the economic and journalistic sides of the company (Coddington, 2015). Additionally, this so-called “wall” (Coddington, 2015) could act as an indicator of credibility and integrity, as journalists may have felt more empowered to reject influences from outside the newsroom. Growing economic pressures and changes in the media environment have seen this wall become more porous, and economic influences are being felt both on the organizational level and in individual journalists' daily routines and practices.

On the organizational level, new technologies enabled media companies to merge content creation, and control packaging, distribution and place of consumption (Salamon, 2016), but new media also added to the existing competition over audience attention, and thus to the fragmentation of audiences. As traditional media were unable to trade the attention of mass audiences to advertisers, advertisers began migrating to media that could target consumers more individually online (Picard, 2005). To remain financially sustainable, newsrooms have been re-structured, with fewer resources invested to cover the same spectrum of topics (Lee-Wright2012; Ferrucci 2015). PR material is recycled as original journalistic work (Lewis, Williams, and Franklin, 2008; Jackson and Moloney 2016), the production of content is outsourced (Örnebring and Ferrer Conill2016), and wages among freelancers and contingent workers have been reduced (Cohen 2015). All these changes arguably make individual journalists more vulnerable to economic influences, as they lack the time and financial security for thorough research and in-depth reporting. On yet another level, the rhetorical wall between editorial and advertorial is being diminished to a line in news management discourse (Coddington2015; Artemas, Vos, and Duffy 2016).

On the individual level, the trend towards commercialized reporting and fewer resources can affect journalists' perceptions of influences and autonomy (Örnebring et al.2016), even if they do not always recognize them. For example, Hanitzsch and Mellado (2011) found that the extent of perceived economic influences is relatively lowing Western countries. This led them to assert that the power and consequences of economic influences, although they objectively exist, may not appear particularly obtrusive in the journalists' perceptions” (Hanitzsch and Mellado2011, 419). In a similar vein, Örnebring et al. (2016, 320), argued that “journalists do not necessarily see external autonomy factors (notably commercialization) as directly affecting their internal (workplace) autonomy”. However, the authors observed that the degree of commercialization within media system did affect the perceived autonomy of journalists.

Media Commercialization

Media commercialization is a concept that has to do with the restructuring of media structures, characters and contents to reflect the profit-seeking goals of media industries. It underpins the assumption that media products are governed by economic/market considerations. Thus, for any media organization to remain afloat in a competitive world of market forces of demand and supply, it must generate enough revenue to cover cost, break even with considerable profits on investment.

The term 'media' is the plural of the noun 'medium' it means a method of giving information or a form of art. Literally, a medium could be the human voice, television, radio, newspaper, body language, interpersonal communication etc. through which a message travels.

Communication scholars have often distinguished between medium and channel as elements of the communication process. While the former relates to the mode of communication, the latter denotes specifically, the pathway, the conduit or the mechanical substance which links the source to the receiver. Hence, we talk of channels in terms of the technical modulation of signal frequency and amplitude (i.e. AM/FM) in the case of radio and the quality range of signals (whether Ultra High Frequency (UHF) or Very High Frequency (VHF) in the case of television broadcast.

Commercialization is a concept that gained much currency in Nigeria in the eighties. Its arrival in the Nigerian media lexicon followed the introduction of the World Bank's Structural Adjustment Program as the remedy for Nigeria's ailing economy by the Babangida administration. Like its twin variant, deregulation, commercialization, as applied by the military regime then came indifferent nuances. There was partial and full-scale commercialization depending on the fate and lot of whatever organizations that were so listed for unbundling by the rest while Technical Committee on Privatization and Commercialization (TCPC). The idea of commercialization was for corporations or organizations which hitherto had depended on government to source for their own revenue and be self-sustaining.

We operationalize the concept of media commercialization in this paper to imply the on-going trend in the media industry wherein the idea of public service journalism or media practice is subjugated to purely commercial consideration of market forces. In other words, media commercialization is construed in line

with Nnorom's view cited by Ekwo (1996:63-64) as: A phenomenon whereby the (electronic) media report as news or news analysis a commercial message by an unidentified or unidentifiable sponsor; giving the audience the impression that news is fair, objective and socially responsible. Media commercialization is the natural precursor of Commodification of news, information and other sundry products through the policy and principle of cash and carry or what is now known in media parlance as Let Them Pay” (LTP). This is what Oso (2006) refers to as news by barter.

Public Interest on the other hand denotes what is generally regarded as 'good' to the majority of the people. It relates to the concept of majoritarianism which implies that the media consider the opinion of the majority and strive to satisfy or meet their needs. Public Interest is superior to “particular interest”. The media are expected tend to meet the needs of their audiences through carefully designed contents or products in line with the prevailing trend in the industry. The pursuit of public interest requires that the mass media carryout a number of important tasks in the contemporary society and these tasks are supposedly to be of benefit to the generality of the populace. The concept of public interest continues to gain prominence in intellectual discourse because the so-called free market place of ideas (the central tenet of the Libertarian theory) has failed to generate press freedom and to yield the expected benefits to the society. Rather, the commercial development of the press and unforeseen developments in media. Technology always tend to limit access to the media for individuals and groups, and to concentrate media power in the hands of a few businessmen (advertisers) and media professionals who have the means to set-up media empires.

In Nigeria, the term 'public interest' as a key variable in this paper is a fundamental issue which derives from the constitutional provision on the people's right to know. As a key provision of Section 22 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria under the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy, journalists are empowered to “at all times uphold the fundamental objectives and responsibility and accountability of the government to the people” Such objectives included: freeing the nation from the pangs of scourges of unemployment, homelessness, poverty, ignorance, illiteracy, disease, population explosion etc. Hence all media activities directed towards fulfilling the constitutional provision on the people's right to know, accountability in governance, freedom of expression including other objectives identified in this section fall within the ambit of public interest. Anything done by the media which in reality negates the spirit and letter of the constitutional stipulation is deemed to be against public interest. A lot of scholars have examined the concept of development and its implications for the socio-economic and political life of people at both societal and national levels. Like in all other human issues opinions vary on the appropriate conceptual context of development as a socio-economic construct.

However, for the purpose of this paper, development is interpreted in the context of Usman (2008:46)'s definition to imply, “the ability of a people within a given area to manage the local natural resources within their local environment effectively to induce positive changes that would enhance the quality of their lives and their economic well-being. Conceived in this way, we have tried to avoid such controversies usually associated with the divergent ideas of scholars on development theories or paradigms along the lines of modernization, dependency, communitarian etc. The engagement here is to see how the reality of media commercialization interfaces with public interest and in turn impact on the nation's drive to attain what Ugwu (2004:28) describes as the “improvement of the total circumstance of an individual and granting him mastery of his environment, and such fulfilled individuals acting together to build a systematically organized, self-generating and technologically advanced society”.

Empirical Review

The study of Jamo (2017) on Commercialization of News in The Nigerian Television Authority: A Dislocation of Journalistic Ethics, looked closely at the effect of commercialization of news on traditionally time tested ethics of journalistic practice where the media is expected to function as a catalyst for social transformation, national unity as well as growth of democracy. To undertake this crucial assignment, the journalist is expected to be free and socially responsible to provide information in form of news that will empower the people to have access to balanced and credible information so that they can in turn contribute meaningfully to national growth and development. This work attempts to access the meaning of news, commercialization, and the enduring dislocation as a result of the pursuit of profits rather than reporting news objectively. Anchored on the Social Responsibility Theory, this paper seeks to situate this dislocation within the context of accountability and responsible conduct of media practitioners to the audience, a doctrine the theory professes. The paper therefore argues that a commercialized news environment invariably undermines ethical values. The work also recommends that the media should do more of critical human angle and investigative reports to enjoy the trust of the people.

The study of Sulieman and Ojomo (2019) on The Political Economy of News Reporting and Poverty in Nigeria examines the political and economic factors that underpin Nigeria's media. It seeks to understand

whether these factors influence media content and invariably, poverty level in the country. Nigeria's economy has depreciated over the past few decades. Unemployment stands at 23 per cent, with more than half a million of the citizens living on less than \$1.90 a day, more than any other country on earth (Knoema, 2011; The Economist, 2019). The paper argues that if the Nigerian media could positively impact the growth of democracy and strengthen democratic institutions as they did in the past, they could also facilitate economic development, and poverty reduction in the country through news reporting. After all, one of the major features of democracy is to seek the happiness of the majority of the citizens by adequately providing for their wellbeing. It is therefore important to assess how the Nigerian media can provide useful information that can ensure poverty reduction. This paper draws on review of past studies, journal articles, newspaper and online publications in the related area. The paper recommends that the National Broadcasting Commission should mandate broadcast organizations to devote 80 percent of their broadcast to development information, events and conditions about the people of the state where they operate.

Takes a close look at news commercialization and its implication for national development in Nigeria. Many believe that this idea blossomed because of poor funding of government media organizations. The paper is anchored on the social responsibility theory of the press which encourages media outfits to contribute positively to their society. It notes that news commercialization has unpalatable effects on different aspects of society such as national integration, peace building, value system, education, socialization and others. The paper recommends better government funding of public media and higher commitment to continuous and systematic improvement of facilitates, while embracing international best practices. Journalists on their part, must always uphold the ethics of their profession. Introduction Funds are crucial for the establishment and continued survival of any organization, whether in the public or private sector, a media or non-media outfit. In fact, money is like oxygen for the blood. Without it, nothing can succeed. Indeed, media management is often money-gulping, always giving the managers sleepless nights on how to remain financially solvent without renegeing on their commitment to their readers, listeners/viewers. This challenge becomes even more worrisome because returns on media investment are not often very high, as recent media history has shown. In the past decades or thereabout many media houses have had to shut down on g rounds of financial insolvency. Even seemingly financially sound companies were not spared the challenges of mortality, part of the problem arises because investors in the media industry often see the glamour and media power, without adequately appreciating what goes into running an efficient and sustainable media organization. The result, quite often, is that no sooner do such outfits open shop than they are forced to shut down. Many media houses, including those with rich financiers have suffered the same fate, although other reasons may be cited for such situations. In the not too-distant past such newspapers as The Democratic, The Diet, The Report, The Concord, The Post and Others have gone the way of history.

The study of Tesbee and Akopo (2015) on Commercialization of News Content in Nigerian Broadcast Media Industry. Ideally, broadcast media organizations should exist to serve public interest. However, recent journalism practice in Nigeria seems to be plagued with the malady of news commercialization. What this portends is that only the rich will get their ideas communicated to the public thus relegating the common to the background. Media organizations are undeniably expected to protect the public interest of their audiences. Although Azeez (2009) posits that news organization in our contemporary capitalist time are established on profit making motive; perhaps, unarguably, less on the motive of serving the interest of the public for which they are institutionalized. This negates public interest. Napoli (2001, P.1), explains that within the United States it has long been recognized that the Mass Media industries have an ethical obligation to make positive contributions in terms of public service and democratic processes. Within the context of broadcasting "this public service dimension of mass media industries has been taken a step further, with broadcasters operating under a government-imposed mandate to serve the public interest, convenience, or necessity" (communications Act of 1934). According to Asogwa and Asemah (2012, p.3) news is increasingly becoming a commodity valued for its role in informing or persuading the public on political, social, cultural and economic issues. Thus, in modern journalism practice, news is commercialized to the extent that only the rich get their ideas communicated to the members of the public. They further explained in succinct terms that: News commercialization 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.

The Banjac and Maeres (2020) on The Power of Commercial Influences: How Lifestyle Journalists Experience Pressure from Advertising and Public Relations in recent years, combined with the economic downturn in many news organizations has led to renewed debates about the influence of commercial pressures on journalistic work. While the relationship has frequently been studied in relation to hard news journalism, less attention has been paid to other beats, especially those which have always had a closer relationship with commercial interests. Focusing on the field of lifestyle journalism, this article presents the

results of a survey of more than 600 Australian lifestyle journalists. It examines in detail how these journalists experience working with advertising and PR interests, as well as the provision of free products and services. It finds that lifestyle journalists broadly deny being influenced too much by these pressures, however, regression analysis suggests that, in particular, younger journalists experience more pressure, as do magazine journalists, as well as those working in the areas of travel, fashion and beauty journalism.

Also, the study of Kamaldeen and Lambe on *Corruption in the Media: Implications for Ethical and Socially Responsible Journalism in Nigeria*. Corruption is an important problem affecting every strata of the Nigerian society. Its impact on Nigerian media is no exemption. Corruption concerning media is popularly tied to the brown envelope which ultimately affects journalist sense of news judgment. Hence, this paper took a conceptual approach to examine the relationship between the issue of brown envelope syndrome and unethical practice within the Nigerian media system and its implications on ethical and socially responsible journalism. Surprisingly, the result of the literature reviewed revealed that poor journalistic training and lack of professionalism is responsible for unethical practice in Nigerian media. It further revealed the loss of credibility, loss of watchdog roles and decline in news quality, values and public trust of journalists as its implications on ethical and socially responsible journalism. This paper recommends among others, that sound education in form of regular seminars, workshops and professional training be given to would-be journalists where the legal framework and media regulatory bodies served their responsibilities by regularly checkmating the excesses of journalists to confirm strict adherence to ethical codes.

According to Arun and Pichandy (2016) on *Media Professionals Perception on Bribe and Corruption*. Instances of bribery are a common feature in press meets and events especially in developing nations including India. Cash, gift vouchers or expensive items are distributed to reporters as well as photographers or videographers along with their press kits, sometimes even openly. Similarly, there are situations where money, land-plots and other rewards are handed over to selected journalists, both by government as well as private establishments for preferential media coverage (Ristow, 2010). Though there have not been any empirical studies in this area particularly in India, some reports do indicate the presence of such a phenomenon. In one instance at Puri in Odisha, journalists themselves complained of attempts to bribe them. The scribes complained that a member of parliament with the political party Biju Janatha Dal, Pinaki Mishra had tried to bribe them by inserting cash of 200 rupees in envelopes along with the press kits after a press conference. Similarly, the then union coal minister, Beni Prasad Verma was accused in Parliament by the Opposition of trying to bribe journalists. In fact, a study done across the world on the prevalence of bribery among journalists by Kruckeberg (2003) had ranked 33 nations on the possibility for the prevalence of 'cash for news phenomenon'. India was ranked in the 25th place while China was ranked 33rd which was the last place in the list.

Bribery among the media personnel has to be viewed seriously as one of the major effects of bribery is that the journalist is forced to do a story which otherwise may not be of any value or interest to the society at large (Okoro, 2013). Several reasons have been cited for bribery among journalists. They range from the low salaries earned by journalists, to lack of professional ethics and the socio-cultural situations of the society where the journalists function to various other possible factors (Ristow, 2010). The most common reason cited by many scholars is the low salaries offered to journalists. They argue that this forces many of the journalists to accept bribes. Mabweazara (2010) journalists knew it was unethical, but were forced to accept them due to their poor financial conditions. A similar opinion was expressed by Kasoma (2009) and Ndangam (2010) who studied journalists in Ghana and Cameroon, respectively. Adeyemi (2013) said that around 75 per cent of the journalists in Nigeria agreed that corruption is rampant in the profession. He attributed a combination of reasons but poor pay was the major reason cited by him. These studies are some of the many studies which attribute low pay as the major factor causing corruption. Transparency International (2013) too reports that the low salaries contribute to corruption and advised media organizations to initiate steps to address this problem.

Apart from poor salaries received by journalists, another important factor cited by scholars is the everyday culture of the society where the journalist operates. Yang (2012) said that in countries where free press is comparatively new, the legal regulations as well as professional regulations would be at an early stage of development. In such places, corruption might be rampant. Ristow (2010) too agreed that a culture and social acceptance of corruption encouraged bribery. In a study among Indonesian journalists, Hanitzsch (2005) observed that the everyday culture of the society too determines corruption. He observed that even many of the educated young journalists justify corruption as they experience them regularly. Wu (2011) observed that many journalists viewed bribes as a legitimate source of secondary income. Substantiating this argument, Dirbaba (2010) reported that most of the new entrants to journalism are first introduced to bribery as an acceptable practice by their peers and even seniors. This could give an impression in the minds of a young journalist that bribery is acceptable. Some feel that in societies where corruption is rife, corruption will

be more prevalent Elahi (2013) and Omenugha& Oji, (2008). In other words, where corruption is rampant, the people might perceive it as normal. Gaining credence to this argument, Sanders (as cited by Skjerdal, 2008) said that bribery which was prevalent in United States and England till the start of the 19th century had ceased to exist even though the working conditions of the journalists continued to be terrible. Sanders claimed that the professional codes of ethics which were formulated had brought an end to such practices in these countries.

More so, according to Azuka and Ojiin (2008), news commercialization, ethics and objectivity in journalism practice in Nigeria: strange bedfellows? Journalism practice wields such enormous powers and calls for the highest standards of ethics and commitment to truth. Ethics and truth in journalism have assumed global concern as scholars recognize that their basic constituents of objectivity, accuracy, fairness and balance have merely assumed mythical qualities as journalists battle to assign credibility to their news stories. Tuchman (1978: 2) describes objectivity as 'facticity' (a mechanism which allows the journalists to hide even from themselves the 'constructed' and 'partial' nature of their stories). This view seems to have garnered force as increasingly scholars suggest that news even when professionally 'selected' is guided more by organizational needs than by professionalism. The journalist thus becomes 'a walking paradox' (Nordenstreng, 1995) as one cannot fail to see that journalism is so full of contradictions that "we have to question even the most fundamental dogma of the profession – truth seeking – because the way it has been conceived and practiced in journalism serves as a deceptive filtering device preventing as much as helping the truth being discovered" (Nordenstreng, 1995:117). News commercialization practice in Nigeria media industries adds to this contradiction and deception, creating a continuous dilemma for ethics and objectivity in journalism practice in Nigeria.

Also, in the study of Odunlami and Adaja (2015) on the, Media Commercialization, Public Interest and Sustainable Development in Nigeria. The economics of media production, distribution and consumption makes the issue of commercialization an inevitable reality in the modern society. But the mass media exist essentially as a social institution to provide voice to the populace through a 'full, truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day's events in a context – that gives meaning'. However, unfolding realities reveal that commercial considerations have vitiated the statutory mandate of the media as the fourth estate of the realm. In Nigeria, like other developing countries, the challenge is how media professionals can balance their desire to break even and successfully navigate the complex and harsh mace of economic realities for an enhanced bottom-line on the one hand and remain committed to the professional demands of their calling on the other. This is crucially so because of the media's place and role as societal conscience, compass and barometer of development. This paper x-rays the emerging issues in the wake of media commercialization in Nigeria and their implications for public interests and sustainable national development with suggestions on the way forward.

According to Apuke (2016) in Journalists' Perception of News Commercialization and its implication on Media Credibility in Nigeria, the perception of journalists in Nigeria on news commercialization and media credibility with special reference to Journalists in Imo Metropolis. The quantitative survey design was used. The population comprised of Journalists in Imo Metropolis which are about 293. The researchers employed Taro Yamane's formula to sample size out 75 Journalists which formed the sample frame. Questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection. The questionnaires were administered among 75 Journalists in Imo Metropolis registered under NUJ who were purposively selected on the basis of on-the-job experience. All the questionnaires distributed were duly filled and retrieved by the researchers. Data gathered were presented using tables while frequency counts and simple percentages were used for analysis and interpretation. Findings revealed News commercialization affects objectivity and balance in reporting. The study further revealed that poor remuneration, personal greed and corruption are some of the reasons why news commercialization strives. Some of the recommendations proffered for reversing this trend are: Media professional bodies should be serious in maintaining ethics in the media industry by sanctioning defaulting journalists to ensure that journalism practitioners adhere to laid down codes of practice, sound education and professional training of journalists should be provided this will serve as a good antidote for solving the problem of news commercialization.

Theoretical Framework

The theory suitable for this study is the social responsibility theory. The social responsibility theory came as a result of the libertarian theory. The theory came into existence the middle of 20th century. In Okunna's (1999) word, social responsibility is a modern theory because it was the freedom given to them, which they enjoyed as a result of the free press. Under every free press objective flow of information ought to be which gives citizens avenue and opportunity to express themselves well as air their viewpoint. But due to

sensationalization and yellow journalism this free flow of information was deterred in the libertarian system.

Against this backdrop, social responsibility theory rests on the concept of free press acting responsibly. The press, which enjoys a privileged position under the government, is obliged to be responsible. The theory urges media practitioners to ensure representation of all facts not siding or becoming sensational in reportage but being balance and unbiased. This implies that a journalist ought to protect his image by being fair, objective, unbiased, thereby reporting events/occurrences as it happens without icing or decorating it. By so doing, a journalist is mandated to win the trust of his audience through credible and not biased reporting. Oluagbade (2003), cited in Asemah (2011) defines communication ethics, as the basis for conforming to recognized standard; of course, the point of communication ethics is to prevent good men from going bad. Ethics emphasizes -responsibilities of the media in the packaging of their contents.

The theory is relevant to the study because it reprimands and cautions journalists not to disregard his duty to the society; he must not 'yellow journalize' stories or use the media to cause chaos in the society but engage in truthful journalism rather than journalism full of deceit, lies and subjectivity

From the foregoing, the Social Responsibility Theory sets out to outline professional standards in information dissemination where truth, accuracy, obligations and balance are adhered to. These are core values journalists and other media professionals are expected to uphold. However, while exercising their independence at all times, media practitioners should not be oblivious of their obligations to society in the course of their duty.

Research Methodology

The researcher adopted the survey research design which gives room for people to give their opinions on a given issue. The choice of this survey was to facilitate the production of an accurate and identifiable picture of the chosen population. According to Creswell (2012), **survey research designs** are procedures in quantitative research in which investigators administer a survey to a sample or to the entire population of people to describe the attitudes, opinions, behaviours, or characteristics of the population. **The population of this study comprise registered journalists in Imo State according to NUJ Imo chapter, the population of registered journalists is 389.**

The researcher used the census principle which is surveying the opinions of all elements of a population. This is done because the population is quite manageable. Therefore, census principle used here covers both the sample size and the technique. The instrument for data collection was the questionnaire. The instrument for data collection for this study was administered by the researcher on face-to-face basis in different days for a week with the help of research assistant.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This is the presentation and analysis of the various data collected from the respondents. These data are presented using simple frequency and percentage tables.

Research question 1: what is the perception of journalists in Owerri metropolis on news commercialization?

	Frequency	Percent
Valid Payment for News Publication	158	41.6
Generating Revenue for Media Houses	48	12.6
Intentional Presentation of Sponsored news to audience.	152	40.0
Getting gratification to suppress the truth	22	5.8
Total	380	100.0

Source: *SPSS version 23*

The table to research question one displays that among the 380 respondents, 158 (41.6%) Payment for news publication, 48 (12.6%) generating revenue for media houses, 152 (40.0%) intentional presentation of sponsored news to audience, 22 (5.8%) getting gratification to suppress the truth. In conclusion to this a good percentage (41.6%) concurs that news commercialization is the payment for news publication. That is their

understanding of the issue being treated.

Research question 2: what is the extent at which news commercialization influences objectivity, fairness, balance and truth reporting?

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	265	69.7
	Agree	80	21.1
	Strongly Disagree	20	5.3
	Disagree	15	3.9
Total		380	100.0

Source: SPSS version 23

The table above on research question two displays that out of 380 respondents, 265 (69.7%) Strongly Agreed, 80 (21.1%) Agreed, 20 (5.3%) Strongly Disagreed, 15 (3.9%) Disagreed. The data explains that 265 (69.7%) of the respondents Strongly agreed that news commercialization influence objectivity, fairness, balance and truth.

Research question 3: what are the forms of news commercialization that is manifest among journalists in Owerri metropolis?

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Brown Envelope	230	60.5
	Luncheon	36	9.5
	Gifts	114	30.0
Total		380	100.0

Source: SPSS version 23

The above table give answers to research question 3. From among the 380 respondents, 230 (60.5%) brown envelope, 36 (9.5%) Luncheon, 114 (30.0%) gifts. A greater percentage has it that news commercialization is more carried out in brown envelope. It is a situation where by money or cheque is put in an envelope and presented to journalists on ground before or after an event.

Research question 4: what are the possible reasons for the practice of news commercialization in Owerri metropolis?

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Poor Renumeration	256	67.4
	Government Regulation	32	8.4
	Pressure from colleagues	92	24.2
Total		380	100.0

Source: SPSS version 23

The above gives us the analysis to research question 4. Out of the 380 respondents, 256 (67.4%) poor remuneration, 32 (8.4%) government regulation, 92 (24.2%) Pressure from colleagues. The data gives us a clear explanation that poor remuneration is the major reason for journalists to engage in news commercialization.

Discussion of findings

This research work is on journalist's perception on the challenges of news commercialization and news as public good.

The first research question focuses on understanding journalists' perception of news commercialization. Payment for News publication stands out with a percentage of 41.6% against getting gratification to suppress the truth which is 5.8%. This data is an indication that news commercialization is when an organization or media house Is given some cash to help publish news item. This is in line with Arun

and Pichandy (2016) on Media Professionals Perception on Bribe and Corruption where they explained that instances of bribery are a common feature in press meets and events especially in developing nations.

The second research question seeks to know the extent at which news commercialization influences Objectivity, fairness, balance and truth. 69.7% of the respondents strongly believed that news commercialization affects objectivity, fairness, balance and truth. Though a sample size of about 3.9% disagreed, it shows the level of corruption news commercialization has on news as public good. That is why Asogwa and Asemah (2012) noted that news is commercialized to the extent that only the rich get their ideas communicated to the members of the public.

The third research question tries to explain the various forms news commercialization exhibited by journalists within Owerri metropolis. Brown envelope stands out with 60.5%. It is imperatively becoming a norm to pay journalists to cover events by public figures. This notwithstanding will encourage the journalists to present the news item in ways that will suit his/her host. This is opposing the study of Jamo (2017) who said that the media is expected to function as a catalyst for social transformation, national unity as well as growth of democracy.

In discussing the fourth research question, we look at the reasons for journalists' practice of news commercialization. 67.4% said that poor remuneration of journalists remains the major reason for commercializing news. Mabweazara (2010) postulated that journalists accept bribes due to their poor financial condition. Most Journalists within the state and country at large are poor paid coupled with the deadline constraint of the job. The job prevents them from trying other sources of income thereby forcing them to engage in fraudulent activities.

With the aid of questionnaire and table presentation, the study discovered Journalists perception on the challenges of news commercialization and news as public good. Fairness, accuracy, objectivity which are the hallmarks of ethics for journalists have continued to depreciate.

Conclusion

The findings of this study show that commercialization of news affects objectivity, fairness and balance. Journalists have the duty to refuse any incentive or payment for doing their job. Journalists should be truthful, accurate, fair, objective and relevant. Credible news item should be given for public consumption as this will help in the growth of the nation's democracy.

Recommendations

The researcher made the following recommendations towards resolving journalists' perception on news commercialization.

1. There should be a proper orientation for journalists on commercialization of news.
2. Journalists should be made to understand that news commercialization influences objectivity, fairness, balance and truth. Therefore, the quality of news should be standard.
3. Journalists should be made to know the various forms of news commercialization and see ways of curbing it.
4. There should be an improved salary for journalist as this can control the urge to seek personal reward.

REFERENCE

- Asemah, E.S. (2011). *Principles and Practice of Mass Communication*. Jos: Great Future Press.
- Asogwa, C. E. & Asemah, E. S. (2012). *News Commercialization, Objective Journalism Practice and the Sustenance of Democracy in Nigeria*. (Vol. 3, No. 2). Higher Education of Social Sciences. from <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/hess/article/view/j.hess.1927024020120302.1817>.
- Asogwa, C.E and Asemah, E.S (2012). *News Communication, Objective Journalism Practice and the Sustenance of Democracy in Nigeria*. In Higher Education of Social Science.
- Azeez, A.L (2009). *The Effect of Commercial Pressures on News Organizations in Africa*. Journal of Arts and Cultural Studies 2(1) pp. 85–90.
- Chioma, P. E. (2013). *News Commercialization in Nigeria: Understanding Issues in Public Interest for Financial Gains*. International Journal of Innovative Research & Development. Vol. 2 Issue 13. p.172 Retrieved from www.ijird.com
- Coddington, M. (2015). *The Wall Becomes a Curtain*. In *Boundaries of journalism: Professionalism, Practices and Participation*. edited by Matt Carlson and Seth C. Lewis, 67–82. London: Routledge.
- Hanitzsch and C. Mellado. (2011). *What Shapes the News Around the World? How Journalists in Eighteen Countries Perceive Influences on their Work*. *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 16 (3): 404–426.
- Jackson, D., and K. Moloney (2016). *Inside Churnalism*. *Journalism Studies* 17 (6): 763–780.
- Lasswell, H (1965) *Mass Media and Society*, in Peterson. et al (Eds). *The Mass and Modern Society*. London: Hott, Rinehart and Winston, Inc
- Lee-Wright, P. (2012). *The Return of Hephaestus: Journalists 'Work Recrafted.'* In *Changing journalism*, edited by A. Phillips, P. Lee-Wright, and Witschge, 21–40. London: Routledge.
- Lewis, J., A. Williams, and B. Franklin. (2008). *A Compromised Fourth Estate? UK News Journalism, Public Relations and News Sources*. *Journalism Studies* 9 (1): 1–20.
- National Broadcasting Commission (2010). *Nigeria Broadcasting Code; 5 draft*. Nigeria: National Broadcasting Commission.
- Okunna, C.S. (1993) *Theory and Practice of Mass Communication Enugu and Lagos*: ABIC publishers.
- Omenugha, K.A and Oji M. (2008) *News Commercialization, Ethics and Objectivity in Journalism Practice in Nigeria; Strange Bedfellows? Estudosemcomunicacao* Vol. 3 Pp.13-28. Retrieved from <http://www.ec.ubi.pt/ec/03/pdf/omenugha-oji-newscommercialization.pdf>
- Picard, R. (1998). *Media Concentration, Economics and Regulation in The politics of News*. *The News of Politics*. Doris Graber, Dennis McQuail & Pippa Noris (Eds). Washington, DC. CQ Press Pp. 193–217.
- Salamon, E. (2016). *E-lancer Resistance: Precarious Freelance Journalists use Digital Communications to Refuse Rights-grabbing Contracts*. *Digital Journalism* 4 (8): 980–1000.