

## **RADIO STATIONS NEWS COMMERCIALISATION AND JOURNALISM PRACTICE IN RIVERS STATE**

**EKE, Chigozi<sup>1</sup>**

**ADEYEMI, Muideen Opeyemi<sup>2</sup>**

**OCHOR, Ruth Udoka<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1, 2, 3</sup>, Ph.D Students, Department of Linguistics and Communication Studies, University of Port Harcourt

**Corresponding author:** EKE, Chigozi<sup>1</sup> [elechiwatson@gmail.com](mailto:elechiwatson@gmail.com)

### **ABSTRACT**

This study was to examine radio stations news commercialisation and journalism practice in Rivers state. The objectives were to find out the extent news are commercialized in radio stations in Rivers State and to examine the radio stations journalists' views of news commercialisation with respect to the ethics of their profession. The study adopted the descriptive survey design. Journalists who work in public and private radio stations in Rivers State formed the population of the study. The population of registered public and private radio stations journalists and the Nigeria Union of Journalists in Rivers State in 2023 is 256. Since the population of the study is not too large, the study adopted a census and a purposive sampling technique. The data for this study were generated using the questionnaire. The data were analyzed using weighted mean score (WMS), statistical technique, such as Likert scale. The findings showed that the extent to which news are commercialized in radio stations in Rivers State were to a high extent. Another finding revealed that news commercialisation negates the ethics of journalism and there is no justification for media organization to charge for legitimate news coverage in whatever guise since it is the responsibility of the media to the society. Based on the findings, it was concluded that with the news commercialisation thriving in the media industry, the social responsibility of the media to society is jeopardized. It was therefore recommended that media contents should be made more enriching, attractive and engaging to attract more audience and in turn get the attention of advertisers' fund.

**Keywords:** Radio, news, commercialisation, journalism, practice

### **Introduction**

In contemporary societies across the globe, despite the increasing media theory and communication system, the society relies on the media for information about the events within and outside its environment. The media, through their interpretation and analysis of these events, help the society make informed decisions. Lending credence to the presupposition, Konkwo (1997) admits that the recipient depends on the information he or she obtains from the media to make rational decisions in the economic, political and cultural spheres. Therefore, news provides one of the platforms through which the mass media perform their cardinal functions of information, education, entertainment and mobilization of the society to the desired objectives. News is not paid for but it is determined by certain professional and traditional characteristics called news value such as timelines, prominence, oddity, consequence, proximity, human

interest among others. However, with divergent definitions by various scholars, news is an accurate and timely report of current events/issues that is of interest to the populace.

News is cardinal to the practice of journalism, all media establishment and by extension the general public. As it singularly informs and enlightens the public on recent happenings in their locality and on the global scenario. News has been defined by several media scholars and practitioners alike, but has no generally acceptable definition; news is a report that presents a contemporary view of reality with regards to specific issues, events or process (Defleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1975). News is a timely record of happenings that are of interest to the audience of a medium (Nwabueze, 1999). News as a concept of the mass media can be seen as a published or broadcast account of an event, issue or process considered to be of interest to the audience by the journalist. Implying that journalist in any media establishment in his/her capacity as a reporter, an editor, news producer or manager etc. determines what makes news.

As a result of this professional privilege of the journalist and the mass media at large, the media has become an indispensable aspect of modern life and thus, commands a degree of societal dependence on it, for information and general intelligence utilized for daily decision making. This dependence and the all-important role ascribed to the Nigerian media in the 1999 constitution and by the provisions of the social responsibility theory of the press, suggest a high degree of responsibility by media practitioners, essentially in the area of news production. This places the media as a public service institution, expected to function to defend the interest of the public by promoting balance in the society with the provision of an accessible platform for the exchange of ideas and views, by various social strata, rather than just the wealthy and or prominent few. News, therefore, provides one of the platforms through which the mass media perform their cardinal functions of information, education, entertainment and mobilization of the society to the desired objectives. Unlike advertisement, news is not paid for but it is determined by certain professional and or traditional characteristics called news.

Over the past decade, there have been increasing concerns about the emergence of news commercialisation in Nigeria that tends to be gradually redefining the traditional concept of news among journalism practitioners. Omenugha and Oji (2008) aver that news commercialisation operates at two levels in Nigeria; at the institutional level, where charges are officially placed for sponsored news programmes; and at the journalists' level, where the journalists ask for "brown envelop" before he or she reports newsworthy events. All broadcast stations in Nigeria now have the legal right to engage in commercial broadcasting as reflected in Section 0. 1. 1. 3 of the National Broadcasting Commission Code (2010) which stipulates that "broadcasting in Nigeria shall provide the entire range of sound and vision services that cater for and reflect the diverse range of Nigerian cultures through effective distribution of public, commercial and community broadcasting services..." (pp. 11-12).

Udomisor and Kenneth (2013) posit that commercialisation at the institutional level is thriving because editors, publishers and owners of the broadcast stations see the organizations and their investments as a profit-making venture that should yield the required financial return. Commercial oriented news is taking the place of hard news owing to monetary demand to cover an event. Hence, in modern media practice, news is being commercialized to the extent that only the rich get their ideas communicated to the members of the public. To maintain the highly sophisticated and expensive broadcast equipment, pay salaries and overhead costs, broadcast station (private and public) has since devised various means and strategies to generate revenue (Agbanu, 2011). Apart from the regular spot advertisements, programme sponsorship, live coverage and guest appearance, one major means through which stations now source revenue is new commercialisation. The phenomenon of news commercialisation makes it mandatory for news sources to pay some fees before they can have access to the media. Against this backdrop, events, issues, etc., which would not have attracted media attention, became major news items as long as the source can pay the bill. On the other side of the globe, those issues which ordinarily would have been the major

news if the traditional criteria for news worthiness were followed seem to be either relegated to the background or ignored completely.

### **Statement of the Problem**

News is an important content which the mass media dish out to their audience on a daily basis. This is a crucial function which the mass media are expected to perform in line with some ethical considerations such as fairness, objectivity and balance. But the ability of the media to effectively carry out this task in the face of news commercialisation has been a major source of concern. The journalists as gatekeepers alongside their editors decide which information will go through and which will not get to the public. Journalists through this process are able to control the public's knowledge of the societal events by letting some stories pass through the system, while keeping others out (Agbanu, 2011). However, with news commercialisation, the poor and even the enlightened citizens who may not afford to pay for certain news may not be heard. This creates an imbalance; constituting a problem not only to the impact of journalism practice to the society but also to the right towards equal access to the media by members of the society.

Meanwhile, some observers have argued that with payment for news stories to be eligible for broadcast, the watchdog function of the mass media may be defeated. To put it more succinctly, they argue that news commercialisation encourages corruption among media practitioners, discourages investigative journalism and undermines the social responsibility of the media. This school of thought believes that the practice of news commercialisation whittles down the quality of media news content and most times forces media organizations to compromise standards in their judgment. On the other hand, scholar like Una (2014) believes that news commercialisation is a practice that has come to stay with the Nigerian society as a result of news being liberalized and deregulated by advertisers who insist that whatever they are sponsoring must be presented within the news. Such school of thought is of the opinion that news commercialisation is a product of a free economy and as a result, has a lot to contribute to the economy in the monetary terms. Based on these, this study sets to examine radio stations news commercialisation and journalism practice in Rivers State.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The aim of this study was to ascertain radio stations news commercialisation and journalism practice in Rivers State. The objectives were to:

1. Find out the extent news are commercialized in radio stations in Rivers state, and
2. Examine radio journalists' views on news commercialisation with respect to the ethics of journalism profession

## **Literature Review**

### **News Commercialisation**

News commercialisation 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. Asogwa and Asemah (2012) describe news commercialisation as the situation whereby the electronic and print media carry paid news, which does not have an identified sponsor and giving the audience-members the notion that the news is fair, objective and socially responsible. Continuing, they posit that the mass media news is supposed to be an index of socio-political life of the people, but reverse is the case. News commercialisation has made the media to mortgage their consciences and professional ethics, for political patronage and appointments. Through their news, they hail every ruler until his tenure

elapses. The media have established themselves as false shade to the truth. The journalist who collects money from his interviewee will definitely write news to favour him.

Nwosu and Ekwo (1996) capture this ugly development thus; the social service or public service role of the communication media especially the 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. By news commercialisation, it implies that news has become a commodity, which can be bought by those who have the money so that their voices can be heard and in turn they could influence other member of society to buy into their ideas. In these circumstances, news rather than being the account and or report of accurate, unbiased account of significant facts of a timely happening that is of interest to the audience in turn become a commercial product to the detriment of important developments

The foregoing contradicts the National Broadcasting Commission NBC Code 2010. According to the Code, news is sacred, therefore, sponsorship of news cast, commentaries, analysis, current affairs programmes and editorials detract from the integrity and predisposes a bias in favour of the sponsor. News programmes shall not be sponsored in any manner including the use of backdrops (NBC, 2010). It also states that news shall be factual and presented in a correct and fair manner without distortions, exaggerations or misrepresentations; materials omissions; or summarizations, if news is co-modified, it not only distorts the information but it is also an insult to the intelligence of the audience. Adaba (1998) corroborates the above submission when he said that charging and receiving fees by whatever name called to cover news events, company annual general meetings, weddings, funerals, workshops, seminars, events organized by charity organizations, stations are not only prostituting the integrity of news but they are also insulting the audience and breaching the broadcasting code.

### **Empirical Review**

Asemah and Omula (2013) did a study on “Understanding the influence of news commercialisation on objective journalism practice. “The objective was to examine salient issues in news commercialisation. The study adopted a survey design and questionnaire was the instrument for data collection. The findings showed that news commercialisation is an impediment to objective journalism practice in Nigeria. Another finding revealed that news commercialisation can weaken the editing and gate keeping power of journalists. The study concluded that news commercialisation is inimical to journalism practice in Nigeria. The study therefore recommended that government should give subvention to both private and public media organizations as this would reduce dependence on profit from commercialized news. The reviewed study and the current study are related as both studies focus on news commercialisation and journalism practice. While the reviewed study focused on understanding the influence of news commercialisation on objective journalism practice, the current study focuses on radio stations news commercialisation and journalism practice in Rivers state. The area of divergence is on the objectives, scope and methodological approach.

Oberiri (2016) carried out research on “Journalists’ perception of news commercialisation and its implication on media credibility in Nigeria.” The objectives were to ascertain the perception of Journalist in Jalingo metropolis on news commercialisation among others. The quantitative survey design was used. The population comprised 293 Journalists in Jalingo Metropolis. The study employed Taro Yamane formula to get 75 Journalists which formed the sample frame. Questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection. Data gathered were presented using tables while frequency counts and simple percentages were used for analysis and interpretation. Findings revealed news commercialisation affects objectivity and balance in reporting. The study further revealed that poor remuneration, personal greed and corruption are some of the reasons why news commercialisation strives. Both the reviewed study and pioneer study are related as both studies focus on news commercialisation. But while the reviewed study centred on journalists’ perception of news commercialisation and its implication on media credibility in Nigeria, the

present study centres on radio stations news commercialisation and journalism practice in Rivers state. The difference is on the objective, scope and the method.

### **Theoretical Underpinning**

The social responsibility media theory was propounded by F.S. Siebert, T.B. Peterson and W. Schramm in 1963 (Anaeto et al 2008). The social responsibility theory as summed up by McQuail (2000), among others demonstrate that the media have an obligation to the wider society and media ownership is a public trust; news media should be truthful, accurate, fair, objective and relevant and media should follow agreed codes of ethics and professional conduct. By these treaties, media ownership is a form of stewardship and never an unlimited private franchise. That is to say that the media are set up to serve the interest of the public rather than personal interest. Also the social responsibility for the journalist means the ability to write news without threatening the social fabrics of the society. He adds that the media as a whole should be pluralistic and reflective of diversity of the society, giving access to the various points of view and right to reply.

The social responsibility theory, according to Asogwa and Asemah (2012), is an offshoot of libertarian theory, which sprang up in the middle of 20<sup>th</sup> century and it owes its origin to an initiative-the Commission of Freedom of the Press. Its main driving force was the realisation that in some important respects, the free market had failed to fulfil the promise of the press and to deliver expected benefits to the society. Thus the theory tried to accord independence to the media on the one hand with obligations to the society on the other hand (Nkwam-Uwaoma, et al., 2020). The theory emerged because the press was believed to have abused the freedom, which they enjoyed as a result of the free press. Under a free press, there ought to be a flow of objective information that will allow citizens to make intelligent decisions with respect to social, economic and or political issues affecting their lives. The excesses and distortions in yellow journalism and sensationalism did not allow these objectives to be achieved.

It is an extension of the libertarian philosophy in that the media recognize their responsibility to resolve conflict through discussion and to promote public opinion, consumer action, private rights and important social interests. One of the foremost communication scholars Denis McQuail summarizes the basic principles of social responsibility theory thus: media should accept and fulfil certain obligations to society; these obligations are mainly to be met by setting high or professional standards including, truth, accuracy, objectivity and balance; in accepting and applying these obligations, media should be self-regulating within the framework of law and established institutions; the media should avoid offensive content triggering crime, violence or civil disorder or harm to minority groups; the media as a whole should be pluralist and reflect the diversity of their society, giving access to various points of view and rights of reply; society and the public have a right to expect high standards of performance and intervention can be justified to secure the, or a, public good; Journalists and media professionals should be accountable to society as well as to employers and the market (McQuail, 2005).

The underpinning of the theory in essence behoves on the media practitioners to ensure representation of all facets of the society. To this end, the social responsibility theory is relevant to this study as it reminds the journalists of their obligation to the society. Thus, the journalists must not sensationalize stories or fail to report news stories that are not paid for, which would have helped in advancing the societal good and or use the media to cause confusion in the society but rather engage in truthful and responsible journalism.

### **Methodology**

The survey design was adopted in this study. The descriptive survey attempts to picture or document current conditions or attitude that is, it describes what exists at the moment. The descriptive survey technique was useful in this study as it described the processes and various factors that come to play in the course of the news commercialisation and journalism practice. Journalists who work in public and private radio stations in Rivers State formed the population of the study. The population of registered public and private radio

stations and the Nigeria Union of Journalists in Rivers State in 2023 is 256. Since the population of the study is not too large, the researcher carried out a census. The study adopted the Non probability sampling technique, using the purposive sampling that is selected based on characteristics of a population and the objective of the study. The data for this study were generated using the questionnaire. A total of 256 copies of questionnaire were administered to the public and private radio stations practitioners, which formed the bulk of the primary data were used for the study analysis. The data analysis for the study involved the use of statistical technique, such as Likert scale. The researcher adopted the weighted mean score method in presenting and analyzing the data. The research questions were analyzed with 4-point weighted mean score. The score of the weighted mean score was 2.5 ( $4 + 3 + 2 + 1 = 10$  divided by  $4 = 2.5$ ). Any item that has more than 2.5 points was considered positive but scores below 2.5 points was taken to be negative.

## Results

The results of the analysis were presented in the table below:

**Research Question 1:** what is the extent to which news are commercialized in radio stations in Rivers State?

**Table 1: Extent News are Commercialized in Radio Stations in Rivers State**

S/N	Items	VHE	HE	ME	LE	$\bar{x}$	StD	Extent
1.	Individual, communities, private and public enterprises during news time in my station prescribed fee and couched news form	157 (628)	82 (246)	15 (30)	2 (2)	3.53	0.64	High
2.	NGOs, all levels of governments and ministries gain access to my station during news times with prescribed fees and are included in news bulletin	138 (552)	88 (264)	30 (60)	0 (0)	3.42	0.87	High
3.	News in my station are becoming what money can buy	142 (568)	89 (267)	20 (40)	5 (5)	3.44	0.44	High
4.	News analysis and commentary are bought by prospective customers who remain unidentified in my station	162 (648)	52 (156)	42 (84)	0 (0)	3.47	0.77	High
5.	My station has become difficult for those who are financially handicapped to have access	154 (616)	65 (195)	27 (54)	10 (10)	3.42	0.87	High
<b>Grand Mean</b>						<b>3.46</b>		<b>High</b>

Data in Table 1 above indicated that the extent to which news are commercialized in radio stations in Rivers State were to a high extent.

**Research Question 2:** what are the radio stations Journalists views in Rivers State about news commercialisation with respect to the ethics of their profession?

**Table 2: Views on whether Commercial News negates Journalism Ethics**

Options	SA	A	D	SD	Total
---------	----	---	---	----	-------

Frequency	142 (55%)	95 (37%)	12 (5%)	7 (3%)	256 (100%)
Weighted	568	285	24	7	884
WMS					3.5

From the data generated in table 2 above, the result revealed that news commercialisation negates the ethics of journalism.

## **Discussion**

**Research Question One:** what is the extent to which news are commercialized in radio stations in Rivers State? The answer to this research question was presented in Table 1. From the data, it was revealed that the extent to which news are commercialized in radio stations in Rivers State were to a high extent. The social responsibility theory that underpinned this study gives backing to this finding. The theory proposes that there ought to be a flow of objective information that will allow citizens to make intelligent decisions with respect to social, economic and or political issues affecting their lives. The excesses and distortions in yellow journalism and sensationalism did not allow these objectives to be achieved. Also, this study finding is not in tandem with the study of Oberiri (2016), which posits that that poor remuneration, personal greed and corruption are some of the reasons why news commercialisation strives. Account in support of this finding, is Asogwa and Asemah (2012) as stated that news has been commercialized to the extent that only the rich get their ideas communicated to the members of the public. It is therefore essential for the media operators to know that by charging money in the, they are reducing their credibility in the eyes of the public. Instead of them to be controller of news, it is now the advert companies that determine the pace and flow of news at any point in time.

**Research Question Two:** What is the view of journalists in radio stations in Rivers State about news commercialisation? Answer to this research question is presented in Table 2. The study found out that news commercialisation negates the ethics of journalism and there is no justification for media organization to charge for legitimate news coverage in whatever guise since it is the responsibility of the media to the society. This finding aligns with the study of Obriri (2016) as stated that news commercialisation affects objectivity and balance in reporting. The finding also upholds the finding of Asemah and Omula (2013), when they found that news commercialisation is an impediment to objective journalism practice in Nigeria. Also, that news commercialisation can weaken the editing and gate keeping power of journalists. The social responsibility theory that the study was anchored also validates the finding of this study. The theory according to McQuail (2005) posits that the media as a whole should be pluralist and reflect the diversity of their society, giving access to various points of view and rights of reply; society and the public have a right to expect high standards of performance and intervention can be justified to secure the, or a, public good; Journalists and media professionals should be accountable to society as well as to employers and the market.

## **Conclusion**

From the findings of the study as summarized above, it is concluded that even though commercial news provides an unprofessional source of revenue generation for the media organization. However, commercialisation of news violates the ethics and code of conduct of journalism practice, which states that it is the duty of the journalist to refuse any reward for publishing or suppressing news or comment. And with the news commercialisation thriving in the media industry, the social responsibility of the media to the society is jeopardized.

Also, this study concludes that news commercialisation has become a major trend in news treatment globally, and on issue of ethical concern in the mass media. It is a tactful strategy through which the media relegate its responsibility of surveying the society. News has impulsively become a commercial product to the disservice of essential developments. In the mass media, news has to be paid for by those who want to be heard. News has gingerly become a packaged broadcast or report that is sponsored or paid for by the

concerned parties. The imputation here is that it is difficult for those who are financially hamstring to have access to the media.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Broadcast stations should made media contents more enriching, attractive and engaging to attract more audience and in turn get the attention of advertisers' fund.
2. Media professional bodies should demonstrate serious in maintaining the ethics of journalism in the Nigeria media industry and regularly train their members on the need to make their organization understand why they should play along professional dictates and laid down codes of practice.

### References

- Adaba, T. (1998). Selling news on air in Lanre Idowu. (Ed.). *Watching the watchdog, in media review*. Diamond Publishers Limited. Pp. 100 – 115.
- Agbanu, v. 92011). Re-examining brown envelop and news commercialisation syndromes: A case redefined new judgment and media ethics. *Journal of Communication and Media Research*, 3(2), 83 – 93.
- Asemah, E.S.& Omula, E. (2013). Understanding the influence of news commercialisation on objective journalism practice. *Kogi State University Journal of Mass Communication*, 2, 69-89.
- Asogwa, C. E. & Asemah, E. S. (2012). News commercialisation, objective journalism practice and the sustenance of democracy in Nigeria. *Higher Education of Social Science*. 3(2), 27-32.
- DeFleur, M. & Ball-Rokeach, S. (1975). *Theories of mass communication*. Holt, Reinhert& Winston.
- Konkwo, D. E. J. (1997). *Principles, concepts theories and practice of mass communication*. CRC Publications Ltd.
- McQuail, D. (2000). *McQuails mass communication theory*, (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Sage Publication.
- McQuail, D. (2005). *Media performance: Mass communication and the public interest*. Sage Publication.
- Nigeria Broadcasting Commission (NBC) Code 2010 Edition Abuja: NBC Publication.
- Nkwam-Uwaoma, A.O.A., Etumnu, E.W.,& Okoro, N.L. (2020). Influence of gratification on the performance of journalists in Owerri metropolis. *GVU Journal of Communication Studies*, 2(2), 121-128.
- Nwabueze, C. D. (1999). *The art of investigative reporting: A practical guide*. Daisy Press.
- Nwosu, I. & Ekwo, U. (1996). Commercialisation of the news in Nigeria media: An impediment to information flow. In Nwosu, I. & Ekwo, U. (Eds.). *Mass media and marketing communications*. Thought Communications Publishers.
- Oberiri, A. D. (2016). Journalist's perception of news commercialisation and its implication on media credibility in Nigeria. *World Scientific News*, 55 (2016), 63 – 76.
- Omenugha, K. A. & Oji, M. (2008). News commercialisation, ethics and objective in journalism practice in Nigeria: strange bedfellows? <https://www.iiste.org/journals/index.php/NMMC/article/download/5546/5659>.



Udomisor, I. W. & Kenneth, A. (2013). Impact of news commercialisation on Nigeria broadcasting. [www.iiste.org](http://www.iiste.org).

Una, F. O. (2014). News commercialisation and the future of journalism in Nigeria. A paper presented to the Department of mass communication, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State.