



## AN EVALUATION OF CONFORMANCE TO THE JOURNALISM CODE OF CONDUCT AMONG NIGERIA UNION OF JOURNALISTS' MEMBERS IN IMO STATE

<sup>1</sup>ODIONYENMA, Chimeremeze Uzundu

<sup>2</sup>IWUCHUKWU, Nkechi Vera

<sup>3</sup>ANYANWU, Perpetual Ulunma

<sup>4</sup>MARTINS-ETENG, Chioma

<sup>1,2,3,4</sup> Department of Mass Communication, Federal Polytechnic Nekede, Owerri

**Corresponding author:** Odionyenma, Chimeremeze Uzundu, [dionchi17@gmail.com](mailto:dionchi17@gmail.com)

### Abstract

The purpose of this research was to investigate whether or not Nigeria Union of Journalists in Imo State ensures abidance to the Journalism Code of Conduct. Theories of absolutist theory and social responsibility served as the basis for the research. This study employed an in-depth interview. The study's population included two staff of the NUJ from each of these units: ethics council, copyright committee, professional training committee. This study's data collection methods included an interview guide. The study found that journalists in Imo State have an above-average understanding of professional ethics. The research also found that journalists adherence to ethical standards is inadequate. According to the findings, if we want the public to continue to respect the journalism profession, we need to ensure that journalists are held to high standards of ethics.

**Keywords:** Conformance, journalism Code, Journalists

### Introduction

Ethical adherence in journalism is crucial for maintaining integrity, credibility, and trustworthiness of the profession. Journalists as known, have a responsibility to report the news accurately, fairly, and without bias, while also upholding the rights and dignity of the individuals and communities they cover.

According to Odionyenma et al. (2023), ethical journalism involves following a set of principles and standards that guide the behaviour and decision making of journalists. To this, one would ask the place of the Nigeria Union of Journalist in enforcing disciplinary measures on journalists who trend on the unethical grounds and also, does it mean that Nigeria Union of Journalist do not play watchdog and surveillance role on the practice of journalism of in Imo State. Not minding whose ox is gored, if the Nigeria Union of Journalist should enforce disciplinary measures on the practice of journalism in Imo State, some of these observed excesses noted and observed in the practice will be ethically curtailed and controlled.

The regular neglect of the ethical codes for journalism in the practice, has succeeded by observation to create a double image and also a wish image of journalism in Imo State; where some persons see journalism practice in Imo State from different irreconcilable and non-corresponding viewpoints.

In corresponding views, Acholonu and Ibituru (2018) opined that professional journalists in Nigeria face difficult and delicate ethical challenges involving decisions on both their own ethical conduct and that of the several people with whom they inform. This work intends to assess ethics as key to sound

professionalism. Ethics is the principle and value a person (or group of persons) uses to govern the activities they perform and decisions they take. In an organisation, thus, a code of ethics is a set of principles that guide the organisation in its programmes, policies, and decisions for the business. The ethical philosophy an organisation uses to conduct business can affect the reputation.

According to Fab-Ukozor (2011, p. 294), the evolutionary phase of the struggle towards professional development in journalism practice shows that starting from the time of *Iwe Irohin* and *West African Pilot*, to the period of *Daily Times* marked an era of non-professional practice. Hence, it was the need to improve and enhance professional practice that inspired the *Daily Times* of Nigeria to establish the Times Training School in the early 70's. This was followed by the introduction of the Nigeria Institute of Journalism (NIJ) who with *Daily Times* of Nigeria Training wing did their best to impact basic reporting skills to Journalists. These efforts which came before the establishment of Mass Communication and Journalism departments in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions churned out a crop of Nigerian journalists between late 70's and early 80's who could meet with the information needs of the mass media audience in the country.

On the other hand, as an institution bestowed with the responsibility of protecting public interest, the mass media strive to play this noble role which the society bestowed on them. That is to be socially responsible (Nkwachi, 2015, p. 219); Therefore, with the entry recently of highly educated professionals, Journalists in Nigeria have insisted on certain ethical standards and accountability on the part of who would be a journalists. This means adhering to those codes ethics that will enhance professionalism. It also means being guided by a code of conduct that ensures professional integrity.

The worrisome state of media practitioners' attitude in the conduct of their activities necessitated the emergence of various regulatory bodies in order to curb the excesses of media practitioners (Tseguy & Asemah, 2014, p. 10). These are the Nigerian Press Council (NPC) and the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC). Later, a more comprehensive code of ethics for journalists was formulated in 1998 by the Nigeria Press Organization (NPO), comprising the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), Newspaper Proprietors of Association of Nigeria (NPAN), Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE), and the Nigeria Press Council (NPC) (Egbon, as cited in Tseguy & Asemah, 2014, p. 10). The Nigeria union of journalists plays as significant role in upholding the ethical standards and protecting the interest of journalist in Nigeria. The NUJ is a professional organization that represents journalist across the country and advocates for the press freedom, media independence, and the rights of journalists.

The NUJ is charged with the responsibility of providing training, support, and resources to journalists to help them uphold ethical standards in their works. The union also monitors press freedom violations, advocates for journalists' safety and security, and promotes professional development within the industry. Additionally, Odionyenma et al. (2023) posit that the NUJ has a code of ethics that its members are expected to adhere to, which includes principles such as accuracy, fairness, independence, and accountability. By promoting ethical journalism practices and supporting the professional development of its members, the NUJ, plays a crucial role in maintaining the integrity and credibility of the journalism profession in Nigeria (Alaekwe et al., 2024).

In conclusion, there is no doubt that effective and efficient practice of journalism lies in the principles of ethical values which set to regulate its activities towards professionalism. Every organisation or profession is basically guided and directed by a set of moral principles which oversee its general conduct. For the work to be effective, Odionyenma et al. (2021) argue, a journalist must adhere to the ethics of the profession. Ethical concerns are morally inspired and serve as a yardstick against which to evaluate the efficacy of the edicts of regulating authorities. According to Okunna (2003), a journalist who places a premium on ethics will work within the law. Journalists' unethical behaviour, such as accepting gifts (brown envelopes, gratification, etc.), has been blamed for the decline of journalistic ethics in the mainstream media. There are many things that go against the mass media's ethical rules and regulatory

policies, such as sycophancy, plagiarism, conflict of interest, concealing information, lying, participating in the news, sensationalism, moonlighting, etc.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Every profession, including the journalism profession has set rules for the practice of the profession. Therefore, journalists, all over the world, have to fulfil these set rules as to meet the expectations and moral obligations placed on them, as seen in (Odionyenma et al. 2023). Alete, (2022) observed media practice in Nigeria is generally controlled by the same ethics, as such all the media professionals in the country are guided by the same code of ethics. Unfortunately, a cursory observation implies that certain journalists in Imo State who are seen as professionals seem to operate and practise outside the bounds of the code of ethics. Thus, some journalists in Imo State write stories to express their sentiment and involvement; foul and strong languages are published in the media and such does not conform to the ethical demands of journalism whereby raising a problem to this paper as seen in (Odionyenma et al 2023).

### **Objectives**

1. To ascertain whether the comprehension of Imo State journalists on the Nigerian Union Of journalists' ethical code influences journalism practice.
2. To examine the extent to which of Nigeria Union of Journalist enforces adherence to the journalism ethical code of practice.
3. To determine the constraints that influence media practitioners in Imo State to engage in unethical conduct.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Journalism Practice in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges**

Although Nigerian reporters typically claim to adhere to professional standards of objectivity, neutrality, impartiality, etc., it is debatable whether or not they actually do so and can be considered members of a profession. According to Momoh (2005, p.11), a profession can be recognised as such provided it has a body of knowledge to be assimilated by individuals who would be its members, an official membership register, a code of behaviour that would find its monitors, and a disciplinary body to enforce the code. Odionyenma et al (2023) observes that reporters moonlight for a variety of reasons, but that doing so is necessary in order to make ends meet. Because of this, reporters and their employers end up with conflicting loyalties, which is bad for both parties. Since you wouldn't want to publish anything that would hurt the interests of both employers, working at two places at once can make it difficult to remain objective. She cites sycophancy, nepotism, waste mania, character assassination, extortion, brown envelopes, moonlighting, etc. as some immoral concerns plaguing Nigerian society and its media. Applying these standards to the state of Nigerian journalism today, one comes to concur with Adaja (2011) that the Nigerian media cannot be properly called a profession. The Nigerian Union of Reporters is both a professional organisation and a labour union, as stated in Article I (i) of the Union's Code of Conduct (Nnameka et al., 1989, p.276). The body of knowledge that its members are expected to absorb, however, was not specified or named in the Code.

Again, the membership requirement was so lax that anyone with a passing interest in the media could technically declare themselves a Reporter. Without specifying minimal requirements, the provision grants the title of "Reporter" to people who work in public relations, editorial positions, have served a 12-month probationary period, etc. Furthermore, unlike in other developed countries, Nigeria has not formed

a regulatory organisation to oversee the industry and ensure that its laws and regulations are followed. For instance, Britain's National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) was founded in 1952. The organization's mission included establishing baseline requirements for journalists. As a means of regulation and promotion, the organization soon instituted the qualifying examination, the proficiency test. According to Boyd - Barret (1980, p.323), the proficiency test was created to prove that its holders had received adequate training during their apprenticeships and were therefore eligible for senior Reporter positions and higher pay. In order to take the NCTJ's competence exam, aspiring court reporters must first demonstrate their mastery of four foundational topics: English language, law, public administration, and shorthand. Although apprenticeship was valued, it was expected that the on-the-job training would result in measurable outcomes such as improved performance on a test. At the same time, the 30-month apprenticeship was instituted to standardise journalism throughout the country. Once again, the shortcomings of Nigerian journalism have kept it from being recognised as a profession. In the beginning, those working in Nigeria's media landscape weren't thinking of themselves as professionals or acting in a professional manner. Reverend Henry Townsend, who never had the chance to go to journalism school, founded the first newspaper in Nigeria. It was called *Iwe Iroyin fun Awon Ara Egbaati Yoruba*.

He never worked as a journalist neither was a member of any academic organisation. He had "watched" his brother start a newspaper in a British colony before moving to Nigeria, and he considered that to be his equivalent of working in the field. Journalism in Nigeria appears to have been built on shaky ground from the start. And if the base is lost, the virtuous have no recourse. It's important to consider how the Nigerian reporters, both before and after independence, have floated indefinitely between political neutrality and partisanship. Before Nigeria's independence, the country's media landscape was divided along lines of ownership. A shared enemy, the colonial master, united Nigerian reporters together in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, but the division of the country into three regions sowed the seeds of ownership/party allegiance and association. Reporters and news outlets abandoned their traditional commitment to nonpartisanship in favour of a more political tone. Journalists switched allegiances from owners to regions to the ruling party or government. Reporters and news outlets began to take sides between the NPC, the NCNC, and the AG. As a result, journalists became so politically minded and partisan that they threw away any pretense of objectivity.

The liberalisation and commercialisation policies of the federal government of Nigeria in the 1980s and 1990s also posed serious problems to the ethics of Nigerian journalists. The strategy mandated a commercial-minded approach to assessing all forms of news reporting. Reporters' news judgment, particularly in broadcast, began to feel the effects of the policy. Unsponsored news events hardly ever made it onto the air. The reporters, as stated by Oso (2012), lack the independence and objectivity necessary to do their jobs effectively. There has been an impairment of his professional judgment. Professionalism in Nigerian broadcast journalism is dwindling as a result of the sale of news. Truth be told, the death of serious journalism on Nigerian broadcasts may be traced back to the industry's increasing focus on profit. Reporters faced several problems maintaining credibility in their work as a result of the commercialisation phenomena, as events were often retold to better fit the advertisers who funded the coverage. There is nothing Reporterically newsworthy about them (Oso, 2012) and the stories add nothing tangible to the quality of life of the people (Oso, 2012). Furthermore, role conflict (that is, dual responsibilities) has severely impacted the average Nigerian reporter's output. Journalism in Nigeria is in a constant state of flux due to the conflicting demands of professional standards (objectivity, neutrality, impartiality, etc.) and societal norms and values (most notably the social responsibility idea). A constant war of independence (i.e., between patriotic journalism (perspective) and "professional Journalism (perspective) is fought by reporters on a regular basis. For journalism, this crisis of identity" has been devastating to its credibility and reliability. Zandberg and Neiger (2005) cite research from Tsfaty and Libio. (2003). We see reporters as continually shifting between the professional group and the national hegemonic community, suggesting that reporters' identities are not solid in the traditional sense.

## **Empirical Review**

Udoakah et al. (2014) in their research looked at how regulations and codes governing the media affect journalists in Nigeria. Its stated goal was to evaluate the impact of the country's media regulations and journalistic ethics on the profession as a whole. The research involved a questionnaire. The population was made up of the 351 journalists in AkwaIbom State, Nigeria that are officially recognised as such. Using a census-based methodology, the study found that both the sample and the population were unchanging. Only 343 out of a total of 351 questionnaires items sent out were really filled out and returned. Simple percentages and a Likert scale were used to analyse the data collected. The research showed that journalists' adherence to media rules and ethics was low despite the relevance of media laws and ethics to journalism practice. The research also found that journalists break the law and ethical standards in the media due to sycophancy, security concerns, desperation, money, ethical issues, misunderstanding of media rules and ethics, and laziness. The research concluded that news organisations should make every effort to hire only professional journalists. Again, media outlets should set up legal sections to help their staff journalists stay within the law and ethical guidelines. Journalists in Nigeria should be encouraged to follow their code of ethics by the union's ethics committee, which should undertake frequent reviews of member journalists' practices.

Ismail et al. (2019) their research examined the theoretical foundations of journalistic ethics in light of recent criticisms of Nigerian journalists' purported lack of commitment to ethical practice. Experts are concerned that Nigerian journalists may soon be unable to perform their customary functions as a result of the proliferation of fake news and the budgetary restraints and economic downturns currently impacting the media industry. Instead, they risk becoming propagandists for falsehoods, half-truths, and outright fabrications, all in defiance of ethical norms, and they endanger the stability of states through their print and broadcast output. The researchers contextualised arguments presented in the theoretical literature on ethics and journalism ethics. According to their analysis, Nigerian journalists appear to be falling short of the standards set by their international counterparts. On the basis of their analysis, the writers propose remedies to the ethnic issues currently confronting Nigerian journalists.

Alete et al. (2013) their study evaluated the ethical problems plaguing the profession of journalism in three randomly selected states in south-south Nigeria: Imo, Bayelsa, and Delta. The study, which used a questionnaire and a survey research design to collect data from 744 journalists in Nigeria, concluded that the internal and external factors influencing journalism practice in the country are not consistent. The study also discovered that the public's perception of journalists and the credibility of the news industry are both threatened by administrative incompetence. Accordingly, the study's author suggests, among other things, employing expert services to evaluate Nigerian journalists' adherence to professional ethics and updating the country's journalism practices on a regular basis so that they can always measure up to the necessary standard established by professional best practice.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **The Absolutist Theory**

The absolutist theory proposes the existence of a set of universal moral principles that can be used as a basis for guiding individuals across time, space, gender, and social status. It also establishes that a good deed, wherever it may be relocated in time, will continue to be a good deed. This indicates that something that is good at point A will always have the potential to be good at point B. ukozor (2015): "it is also based on the fact that a good deed should be correct everywhere in the world, at all times, and under all conditions. Ukozor (2015) cites Merrill (1974) who says, "the ethics of absolutists believe that there is

one universal and eternal code that basically applies to everyone, in all ages, that changing opinions, traditions, and conditions make no significant differences to this absolute moral code."

"In the field of journalism, the professional who believes in this theory accepts in principle that there are absolute and universal Reporter ethics which should guide the practicing journalist," Ukozor (2015, p. 17) wrote. A universal and ethical norm in journalism should be articulated from the perspective of reporters from all over the world. Truthfulness, fairness, play, correctness, balance, and objectivity are the ethical moral universals. A reliable journalistic representative ensures strict adherence to the established ethics guidelines. So, journalism ethics will be the focus of this research.

### **Social Responsibility Theory**

The research is grounded in the second framework of the social responsibility theory in order to provide guidance and clarity in terms of the reality of connectivity to related concepts. (Angese et al., 2019) quote Tsegyu and Asemah's (2014, p.11) work, which traces its roots back to the Hutchins Commission of 1947 and rests on the premise that with freedom comes responsibility.

The media has a responsibility to the public and must fulfill key functions of mass communication. Nevertheless, the idea maintains that a free press is essential because it helps to scrutinize other social institutions and because it provides unbiased, reliable news reporting (Pepple & Acholonu, 2018). The media's responsibility to help build thriving, inventive communities is seen as social responsibility theory's crowning achievement. Angese, Okoro, and Etumnu (2019) quote (Baran & Davis, as cited by Tsegyu & Asemah, 2014, p.11). This idea argues why the media should be permitted to stay independent of government oversight on the condition that it provide certain public services in exchange.

These theories are important to this research because, according to absolutist theory, the media has an obligation to the public and must thus submit to the standards of professional journalism. On the other hand, the social responsibility paradigm requires reporters to act civilly, cautiously, and responsibly while they carry out their obligations. For the benefit of the profession as a whole, both the absoluteist theory and the social responsibility theory emphasize the importance of reporters adhering to a universal ethical code of behaviour (Angese et al., 2019).

### **Methodology**

The In-depth interview was adopted as design for the study. Since the study shall be carried out on the NUJ officials in Imo State, The population shall be drawn from three units of NUJ which are: The ethics council, the professional training committee, and the copyright committee and the study shall interview two persons from each of these units and such creates the population as (ten) 10. The choice of the Imo State for this study was necessitated by the fact that Imo State is one of the states with a reasonable concentration of mass media facilities and practising journalists. As the trend of journalism practice is fairly the same in Nigeria, the findings from this paper could be generalised throughout the country. The explanation building technique was used to analysed the data. The analysis was done in themes.

### **Summary of the In-depth interview conducted (Qualitative Data)**

The researcher ascribed code to the participants selected from the relevant authorities of media ethics in Imo state.

The interviews were drawn from the followings; media senior citizens (retirees) news editors and new managers/directors. This is so because in depth interviews was meant not for any employees of the media house to answer but for some purposive selected journalists who are in Imo state. Questions were asked in order to help balance the answers of the research question in the study. The researcher did not ask any lead or introductory question because the interviewees are already registered and practicing journalists in Imo state.

Interviewees were assigned codes to differentiate responses:

Interview 1	Ethics council	NECR1
Interview 2	Ethics council	NECR11
Interview 3	Professional training committee	SCPRI
Interview 4	Professional training committee	SCPRI
Interview 5	<i>copyright</i> committee	NMCC I
Interview 6	<i>copyright</i> committee	NMCC II

### **The Degree to Which Journalists Adhere To Ethical Codes Of Conducts**

In responding to the level of adherence NECR I responded that

The Nigeria Union of Journalists' Code of Ethics and the Nigeria Guide for Editors remained unenforced for a considerable amount of time. The process has been hampered by a lack of precision in the coding. The journalists who this code is intended to protect have voiced concerns about the importance of editorial independence and other ethical guidelines for editors maintaining the public's trust and confidence for quite some time. With a similar tone, NECR II went on to say that the above has really crippled the contribution of the code towards the maintenance of high professional standard in the offerings and outputs of the journalism profession. Almost all media produced for general consumption violates basic standards of decency. He went on to quote Andrew Belsey, saying that "journalism is an honourable practise, though many of those who should care for it, including its own professionals, have dishonoured it." When not actively represented, governments of all ideological stripes have used the media as a tool to exert control over journalists and the work they do. Journalists are regularly reminded that they should not take "brown envelopes" or other forms of bribery because doing so would be immoral.

### **NMCCII responded thus;**

The right of the public to know is being misused in Nigeria, and no effort is made to present a factual, accurate, balanced, and fair report of an event, in my experience as a journalist, as these are the provisions of the ethical code that seem to be most abused. NMCCII continued by saying that certain journalists and editors have trouble avoiding editorialising their reporting, which can lead to the appearance of half-truths or even exaggerations. In order to win and keep the public's trust, journalists and news outlets must adhere to the strictest standards of professionalism, as outlined in their separate style guides. But this is not the case with Nigerian journalists; in fact, many of them disregard professional ethics. Reporters in Nigeria have been seen repeatedly breaking the rules. In the world of journalism, the "brown envelope syndrome" has endured. Despite legal requirements to the contrary, journalists employed by government-owned media outlets have persisted in excessively praising the current ruling administration. The National

Broadcasting Commission (NBC) of Nigeria and the Nigerian Media Council have become a toothless tiger. No journalist who has made a public error has ever been publicly reprimanded.

SCPR I: I have found that journalists who have a high opinion of themselves are more likely to violate journalistic ethics. Permit me to remark that these ethical egoists consider their unethical behaviours to be appropriate if they bring about positive and advantageous outcomes for themselves. Regardless of the repercussions to others or to the integrity of one's vocation. These celebrated egoists in action believe that the end justifies the means if their actions will lead to private gain at the expense of society or their profession. SCPR II reiterated the position that ethical flaws have been observed in the practise of journalism in response to the non-compliance with journalism code of conducts. Journalists have asked for and received gifts and other forms of gratification from sources. Since news outlets have advertisements, readers should be sceptical of anything they read. When journalists violate ethical standards, it hurts the entire profession and the news outlets that employ them. If a news organisation loses its credibility, it won't last long. Reporters who are dishonest besmirch the profession from which they have received so much respect and honour because of the weight of the obligation that is placed on the shoulders of the person who carries the nation's banner. Since journalists serve the public, they should answer to it for their actions, and the public has a right to expect that information will be presented to them in a fair, honest, and competent manner, but unfortunately, this has not always been the case.

### **Knowledge Level of Journalists on Ethical Conducts.**

NECRI: It has been so devastating since observed and known that journalists who have adequate knowledge on journalist ethics are few among the numerous practicing journalists. One thing, is to have the knowledge and another thing is to put the knowledge into work or practice, often times, I think that these short falls in journalism ethics are perpetrated by journalists who are well armed with the do's and don'ts of journalism and yet choose to indulge in unethical practices with reasons best known to them.

NECRII: It is not to be argued that most journalists in Imo state are ignorant of these ethical codes of conduct. Some persons got themselves into practice of journalism for the right aim of making good fortunes and means of livelihood and not ready to practice in line and in accordance to the ethical code of journalism practice. I am trying to say that some practicing and registered journalists' inn Imo state missed their ways and gout into the practice without prior knowledge of the practice.

SCPR I: In responding to the knowledge level, he said, he would love to answer using an explanation as thus; many if not all profession has a process and stages to pass through before being inducted as a member of the professional body and these processes are to be passed through and true by an intending member. Looking at the medical profession, when a medical practitioner lacks the knowledge of practice, and goes into the profession through the back door, it is blessedly certain that such a one will sponsor the death of so many souls. If one gets into building without the fundamental and advance knowledge in building, such a person will help to construct and build structure that will collapse. These applies to journalism, when the journalists lack the ethical knowledge of the ethical codes, he will not only bring a bad image on the profession, but will contribute heavily to the death and collapse of the structure of journalism. This observe ignorance, would be said to be contributing factor to the unethical practice as observed among some journalists in Imo state.

SCPR II: Responded in similarity with NECR II, he said that journalists in practice mostly lack the knowledge of media ethics and such has made it look as though brown envelop and bribe and legitimate with the concept of media ethics, do not really know what ethics entails and good number of these journalists, did not study mass communication nor journalism and as such will see journalism as an all-comers affairs and field of play. As a retired journalist from the state government owned media house, I have questioned the knowledge of a particular journalist in Owerri on the ethical values of the profession.



Knowledge in journalism could be acquired either while in practice or before coming into practice but it is necessary and recommended to media houses to organise discipleship classes for their new intake as to guide them properly with a required knowledge.

**NMCC I:** Shared the same contribution with SC II though with different lines and sentences but same meaning was derived.

**NMCC II:** As regards ethical knowledge, I will make it simple and direct to a point. In the process and system of giving, no man had ever given what he does not have or possess. Every man gives what he has and not what he has not attained. These journalists have the knowledge on ethics they would have given it out in the practice. The pattern and system of employment in the station is opposite to what is expected when someone that studied language and linguistics is employed how will such a person know about fairness and accuracy, social responsibility, editorial independence, brown envelopes, decency etc. this is one of the major part of limiting factors on ethical knowledge.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Reporters' alleged habit has grown into a major issue for the media industry. In addition, Obeiri (2006) hypothesised that reporters' involvement in infamously unethical practices like brown envelope collecting, news tampering, Afghanistanism, character assassination, plagiarism, and sensationalism stemmed from their failure to adhere to journalism ethics codes. According to the theoretical framework that this study is grounded in, a journalist's social responsibility duty necessitates that he or she uphold the profession's moral standards and avoid displaying any immoral behaviour while on the job.

Analysis of finding revealed that there is an overwhelming knowledge level on code of ethics by reporters in Imo state. This finding is impressive and encouraging to the noble profession of journalism. However, it is worthy to bring to knowledge that it is worrisome that the knowledge level for acceptance of gifts and gratification and discrimination turned out low. Could this be that the system has legitimised brown envelope that journalists in Imo State do not regard it as unethical or could it be the reality of the truth of their knowledge on it? In such a case, journalists who are unaware of these ethics are likely to violate the established norms of their trade. Agnese et al.'s (2019) research backs up these conclusions; journalists who don't know the rules of their profession will inevitably break them, and journalists who don't know the rules of their profession will definitely do things that go against the theoretical principles of relativism theory and social responsibility theory on which this work is based. According to Pepple and Acholonu (2018), journalists can act unethically if they aren't aware of the rules they're supposed to follow. In this vein, Tsegay and Asemah (2014) argued that most media professionals enjoy breaking professional ethics.

From the findings in table three, it revealed that poor remuneration, personal interest, condition of employment, hierarchical influence and government interest are major factors that influence journalists to engage in unethical practice of journalism. This agrees with what Agnese et al. (2019) found. Researchers in one study said that several of the problems they found were major factors in pressuring journalists to engage in unethical behaviour. Alete (2013) corroborates these findings by noting that disparities between internal and external factors affecting journalism practice in Nigeria are to blame for both unethical practices and difficulties in the field. He also pointed out that the reputation of journalists and the quality of their work are both harmed by the stupidity of their managers. Journalists, by virtue of their profession, are obligated to do what is always and morally right, regardless of the circumstances; this obligation includes putting public interest ahead of individual self-interest when performing the media's social responsibility.

## References

- Abubakar, O.S. (2017). *Impact of Media Ethics in News Gathering and Dissemination among Journalists in Ilorin*. *Ilorin Journal of Humanities (IJOH)*. Vol. 10 (15). Retrieved <https://kwaracails.edu.ng/ijoh/papers/2017/Impact%20of%20Media%20Ethics%20in%20News%20Gathering%20and%20Dissemination%20among%20Journalists%20in%20Ilorin.pdf>
- Adaja, T. A. (2011). *The Nigerian media and the quest for probity and accountability in governance*. AAU: African Studies Review, vol. 10, 183 – 204
- Akinfeleye, R. (2003). *Fourth Estate of the Realm or Fourth Estate of the Wreck: Imperative of Social Responsibility of the press*, University of Lagos press pp 63-6
- Akinrosoye, A.I and Isamuko, B.J. (2018). Perception of Media Ethics among Newspaper Journalists and Its Implication for Journalism Practice. *Resreach Journal of Mass Communication and Information Technology*, vol. 4 (2), pp. 43-52. Retrieved from <https://www.iiardjournals.org/get/RJMCIT/VOL.%204%20NO.%202%202018/PERCEPTION%20OF%20MEDIA%20ETHICS.pdf>
- Alete, E. (2013). *Ethical challenges in journalism practice in south-south nigeria: a case study of rivers, bayelsa and delta states*. A Research Project Submitted to the Department of Mass Communication, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Retrieved from <http://repository.unn.edu.ng/bitstream/handle/123456789/1806/Alete%20Ednah.pdf?sequence=1>
- Alaekwe, K.N., Onyebuchi, A.C., Umoren, P.E., Okalla, F. Idih, N.M. & Etumnu, E.W. (2024). An assessment of journalists' compliance to the ethical precepts of objectivity and balance in reporting the 2023 General Election: A study of journalists in Imo State. *Communication Management Review*, 9(1), 84-101. <https://doi.org/10.22522/cmr20240195>
- Alexander, L. & Moore, M. (2020). Deontological ethics. *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. Retrieved from <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-deontological/>
- Angese, J.E., Okoro, L.N. & Etumnu, E.W. (2022). *Assessment of the Adherence to Journalism Code of Ethics by Journalists in Bayelsa State*. *IMSU Journal of Communication Studies*, 3(1), 170-183.
- Astor, J. J. (1991). *Art of Modern Journalism*. Delhi: Akashdeep Publishing
- Asemah, S.A, Mohammed, G, Daniel, O,E. & Ruth A,O. (2017) *Research Methods and Procedures In Mass Communication* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). Plateau:Matkol press.
- Balcytiene, A. (2005). Types of state intervention in the media systems in the Baltic States and Norway. In: Richard Baerug (ed.). *The Baltic Media World*. Riga: Flera Printing House, pp. 40-58.
- Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2022). *Deontological ethics*. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/deontological-ethics>
- Duyile, D. (2007). *Makers of Nigerian Press*. Lagos: Gong Communication Nigeria Ltd.
- Edegoh, L.O. and Ude-Akpeh. C.E. (n.d). *Ethical Standards of Fairness and Objectivity and Journalism Practice in Nigeria*. Views from Anambra State. Retrieved from file:///C:/Users/Admin/DownloadsAgbanu /0096-ude-akpehe-full\_text-en-v1.pdf

- Fab-Ukozor ,N (2011). *Ethical responsibility and professionalism in journalism practice: The Nigeria Experience*. In V. and C Nwabueze (eds), *Reading in mass communication: Global perspectives on communication issues* (pp. 291-299). Imo: Shelve Publishers
- Fab-Ukozor, N (2015). *Media ethics and law*: John Jacobs classic publishers
- Folarin, J. Adesina, K. And Ismail, B.A. (2019). *Ethical Compliance among journalists in Nigeria: A Theoretical Appraisal*. *Nigerian Communication & Information Technology Journal*, vol. 1 (1). Retrieved from <https://ncitj.com/journals/vol-1-no-1-harmattan-2019/ethical-compliance-among-journalists-in-nigeria-a-theoretical-appraisal>
- Gboyega, B. (1989). *Journalism in Nigeria - an all comers' profession*. Akure: Ajomoro Publications
- Harro, H. ;Lauk, E. (2003). Self-regulation: Watchdog's Collar or Shelter for the Guild?*In: NandoMalmelin (ed.)*.
- Lohner, J., Banjac, S. And Neverla, I. (2016). *Journalistic practices, role perceptions and ethics in democratisation conflicts*. *Media Conflict and Democratisation*. Retrieved from [https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/117301/1/Lohner%20Banjac%20Neverla%202016\\_Journalistic%20practices\\_findings%20from%20Egypt%20Kenya%20Serbia%20South%20Africa.pdf](https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/117301/1/Lohner%20Banjac%20Neverla%202016_Journalistic%20practices_findings%20from%20Egypt%20Kenya%20Serbia%20South%20Africa.pdf)
- McQuail, D. (2005). *Mass Communication Theory (5th ed)*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Nwana, O.C.(1981). *Introduction to education research for student teachers*. Ibadan. Heinemann Educational Books
- Nworgu, K.O (2010) *Mass media and society in a globalizing and digital age*: Imo :Ultimate books publishers
- Ochieng, R.K. (n.d). *Ethical Journalism: The case of the adherence to the Code of Conduct in the Kenyan Media*. *Academia*. Retrieved from [https://www.academia.edu/5046726/Ethical\\_Journalism\\_The\\_case\\_of\\_the\\_adherence\\_to\\_the\\_Code\\_of\\_Conduct\\_in\\_the\\_Kenyan\\_Media](https://www.academia.edu/5046726/Ethical_Journalism_The_case_of_the_adherence_to_the_Code_of_Conduct_in_the_Kenyan_Media)
- Obayi, P.M. (2022). Rethinking Balance and Fairness as Journalistic Ethical Precepts: A Survey of Journalists in Southeast, Nigeria. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Innovation (IJHSS)*. Vol. 11 (2), pp. 2319-77714. Retrived from [http://www.ijhssi.org/papers/vol11\(2\)/Ser-2/H1102025864.pdf](http://www.ijhssi.org/papers/vol11(2)/Ser-2/H1102025864.pdf)
- Odionyenma, U.C (2023) *Adherence to the journalism ethical code of conductby reporters in Imo State*. *Unpublished Masters degree thesis*.
- Ogundimu Folu (2008): *Press freedom, ethics, and sanctions in African ontological*
- Ogunsiji, M. A. (1993). *Introduction to Print Journalism*.Lagos: Nelson Publishers Ltd. systems in Ralph Akinfeleye (ed.). *Mass media and society-a multi-perspective approach*. Lagos. Integrity press limited.
- Okunna, C. S. (2003). *Ethics of Mass Communication*.Enugu: New Generation Books.
- Oladele, K. (2009). *The Journalist as a Failing Physician*.Nigerian Village Square, Lagos.
- Onyebuchi, C.A., Obayi, P.M. & Udorah, C.M. (2019). Evaluation of adherence of journalists to the codes of journalism practice in Enugu State. *African Journal of Social Sciences*. Vol. 9(1), pp. 13-37. Retrived from <http://eprints.gouni.edu.ng/2187/1/Code%20of%20Journalism%20Practice.pdf>

- Opubor, A. E. (2001). 'Civic Journalism and Community Media: Issues in the Ethics and Professionalisation,' in U. Chudi (ed.) *Handbook on Journalism Ethics: African Case Studies*. Amsterdam: Media Institute of South Africa Netherlands Institute of South Africa, pp 27-33
- Oso, L. (2012). News for sale! The challenges and implications of the commercialization of news in Nigeria, In L. Oso, D. Soola & U. Pate (Eds), *Media, Governance and Development: Issues and Trend*. Germany: LAP LAMBERT Academic, pp 83-104
- Osuola, E. C. (2005). *Introduction to research methodology* (3rd ed.). Onitsha: Africana-First Publishers Limited.
- Pachamama Alliance (n.d). Social Responsibility and Ethics. Pachamama Alliance. Retrieved from <https://pachamama.org/social-justice/social-responsibility-and-ethics#:~:text=Social%20responsibility%20is%20an%20ethical,of%20society%20and%20the%20environment>.
- Pepple, I.I.& Acholonu, I.J. (2018). *Media Ethics as Key to Sound Professionalism in Nigerian Journalism Practice*. *Journalism and Mass Communication*. Vol. 8(2), pp. 56-67. Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327795877\\_Media\\_Ethics\\_as\\_Key\\_to\\_Sound\\_Professionalism\\_in\\_Nigerian\\_Journalism\\_Practice](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327795877_Media_Ethics_as_Key_to_Sound_Professionalism_in_Nigerian_Journalism_Practice)
- Rachels, J. (2015). Ethical relativism. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/ethical-relativism>.
- Samphina (n.d).*The Influence of Journalism Code of Ethics on Journalism Practice*. Retrieved from <https://samphina.com.ng/influence-journalism-code-ethics-journalism-practice/>
- Shraddha,B.(2018).*NormativeTheory*. *Businessstopia*. Retrieved from <https://www.businessstopia.net/mass-communication/normative-theories-press>
- Tsegnyu, S. and Asemah, E.S. (2014). *An investigation of media practitioners' adherence to professional ethics in Minna, Nigeria*. *Review of Communication and Media Studies*. Vol. 1 (1), pp. 11-20. Retrieved from <https://professorezekielasemah.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Review-of-Comm-and-Media-Studies-1-converted.pdf>
- Udoakah, N., Senam, N. and Udoh, G. (2014). *Influence of Mass Media Law and Ethics on Journalism Practice in Nigeria*.*New Media and Mass Communication*.Vol. 31. Retrieved from <https://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/NMMC/article/view/17271>
- Velasquez, M., Andre, C., Shanks, T. and Meyer M.J. (n.d). *Ethical Relativism*. *Markkula Center for Applied Ethics*. Retrieved from <https://www.scu.edu/ethics/ethics-resources/ethical-decision-making/ethicalrelativism/#:~:text=Ethical%20relativism%20is%20the%20theory,be%20morally%20wrong%20in%20another>
- Uzuegbunam,C.E. (2015). *The social responsibility theory of the press: A contemporary review*. Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280310541\\_the\\_social\\_responsibility\\_theory\\_of\\_the\\_press\\_a\\_contemporary\\_review](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280310541_the_social_responsibility_theory_of_the_press_a_contemporary_review)