

Media Ethics and Regulatory Mechanisms in Media Practices in Nigeria

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Abstract: *This paper investigates media ethics and regulatory mechanisms in Nigerian media practices. Media ethics entails the promotion and defense of principles like fundamental regard for humanity and the rule of law. The regulation sets minimum ethical principles to make sure that journalists maintain the highest professional standards which facilitate them in becoming accountable. In Nigeria, the media are confronted with political and constitutional restrictions that adversely influence the effectiveness of the mass media in Nigeria, as government and media operators have continuously enacted and exploited the law to their own advantage. The political class manipulates and influence media operation. This paper concludes that a closer attention must be given to the media in Nigeria in order to boost the reputation and regulation of its current performance.*

Keywords: Media Ethics, Regulation, Mass Media, Regulatory Mechanism

Introduction

Media is known as medium of communication via which news, entertainment, learning, information, or sales promotions are transmitted. The media involves all broadcast media like newspapers, magazines, television, radio, direct mail, telephone as well as internet. Media is the plural of medium and may use a plural or singular verb, based on the target meaning. The power and noticeable impact of the media has been recognized in for a long time.

Ethics is an aspect of philosophy which includes systematizing, protecting and advocating notions of right and wrong behaviour. Ethics is known as "moral standards" and as a "system of morals." Media ethics involves promoting and defending values such as a universal respect for life and the rule of law and legality. Everything done by a journalist to an extent has ethical considerations. That is because whatever a journalist reports or discusses or ignores to write has an effect on individuals in some or other form.

In the twenty-first century, the media industry is revolutionizing in ability to adapt to global trends of 24/7 news broadcasting, easy access to information, and the need to appease the general publics growing information pursuit. As a result, the revolution in the media industry, initiated by worldwide communication principles that aim to promote the flow of information across boundaries, has spurred evolving media activities.

Harvey (1999) indicated that regulation entails state interference in aspect of economic, cultural and social life based on whatever political standard are standard of such a nation. Regulation is known as the entire control or guidance procedure, by formulated rules and regulations, implemented by governmental bodies and other political and administrative institutions for various type of media operations. Therefore, regulation is often a possible interference in existing operations, typically for some of the specified "national benefit" purposes, but equally to satisfy market demands or for technological ideological purposes (for example, putting in place technical standards). Regulation takes various forms, varying from provisions in national constitutions and legislation to administrative processes and technical requirements. Regulation requires the issuing of approvals at the fundamental level of broadcasting, such that, the issuance of licenses to broadcasting firms. In certain nations, such as Nigeria, licenses are expensive for private institutions to procure. In 2006, for example, the cheapest license fee for private radio was Fifteen million Naira, compared to the cheapest for public radio stations: Ten million Naira (NBC; 2006).

The National Broadcasting Commission, NBC, is primarily responsible for regulating broadcasting in Nigeria. The organization was created by Decree 38 of 1992, which was subsequently modified by Decree No 55 of 1999 of the NBC under the government of General Abdulsalami Abubakar (MRA, 2001, p.10). It should be remembered that, with the ratification of the declaration of privatization, the state monopoly on broadcasting ceased.

Concept of Media Ethics

As indicated by the Advanced Learner Dictionary, the term, 'Ethics,' is the science of morality, the part of philosophy that deals with the character and practice of a system of ethics and behavioral laws. Udeze (2012) describes ethics as an area of philosophy which concerns with principles associated with human actions with regard to the correctness or inappropriateness of some acts and the wrongness of the intentions and outcomes of such behavior. Ethics can be referred to as what is good and what is bad. Ethics is not regulation in effect (Agbanu, 2011, p. 305), but is obligatory on all employees of the organization once it has been legally implemented. An individual may be fined or punished for violating his profession's ethics. He could also be banned from the

industry or dismissed. Amakiri (2010, p. 15) notes that being ethical requires being clear about the principles of good and bad behavior. It is known as embracing a moral stance mandated by a sense of morality in an individual's personal life and in partnership with the others. Ethics, as indicated by Philip (2010, p. 51), is the implementation by media practitioners or experts of reasoned views as they determine between two or more opposing moral decisions. It may also be perceived as that which binds together society or a discipline or offers social or professional consistency with consistency and protection (Tsegay & Asemah, 2014, p. 11). Okunna (1995, p. 1) indicates that ethics is the body of knowledge which deals with the norms of good and bad behavior or behavior as a moral principle.

In journalism, media ethics is known as making good moral choices that seek its place in social values (Nassanga Linda Goretti, 2008). Media ethics is an aspect of applied ethics that is governed by ethical standards in the media. It is a collection of rules to serve the local public or, at most, a country. Media practitioners often utilize their code of ethics as a means of defending themselves from assaults occasionally led by people from the government who are upset with the practice of a journalist. Media ethics focuses specifically on sincerity, precision, honesty, impartiality and editorial autonomy (BBC, 2010).

Concept of Self Regulation

Self-regulation is really about establishing minimal ethical principles so that journalists meet the highest professional standards which allow them to be held accountable. It is a professional media which can be entrusted by the public and could make reasonable public demands. A media which is distinguished by sanctions is also perceived as unethical and thus not trustworthy.

Self-regulation stimulates the media to react to genuine issues and thus effect corrections on the mistakes and shortcomings which are a significant public issues. It is a responsibility by value conscious media practitioners to behave themselves and build dialogue with the public professionally.

General Ethical Guidelines

Some of the common ethical concerns or guidance that can help media professionals provide the public with facts are as follows.

i. Accuracy

First of all, accuracy includes collecting all the necessary facts. This implies that, first of all, if a journalist ends up leaving out a crucial fact of a specific story, the report will not be credible. Also, focus just on all the facts that are appropriate. Not only would trivial information waste space (newspaper) and time (radio and television), it will equally skew the balance which is so crucial for precise reporting. In addition, accuracy includes carefully checking and confirming the information with more than one source. It is a breach of one of the fundamental standards of journalism to report facts without confirmation.

ii. Truth

The truth includes reporting a story based on credible proof. Any uncertainty in the narrative should be exposed. Accuracy is therefore one fundamental notion of fact. Promoting understanding is yet another fundamental notion of truth. The report should have relevant information to encourage the audience to comprehend the facts and the meaning of the truth.

iii. Balance and Fairness

One of the key principles in journalism is to recognize there is practically every time the other side of a story. Thus a professional journalist has the responsibility to provide balanced and detailed information. Not just two, but every sides of a story should be looked at.

Regulatory Framework

Regulations are official and mandatory guidelines on the media's framework, actions or information. For instance restrictions on monopoly control or cross-ownership of media; restrictions on the number of television ads; or criteria for television or radio stations to have an operating license. It is possible to define the standard system of frameworks for media regulation based on the extent of higher or lesser pleasantry with regard to the key aspect of media application. Formality applies to three key areas of the regulation concerned: it is possible to define the standard system of frameworks for media regulation based on the extent of higher or lesser pleasantry with regard to the key aspect of media application. Formality applies to three key areas of the regulation concerned: either or not it is provided for by law; either the regulations are subject to enforceable sanctions. Many of the unofficial regulation framework focus on traditional consent and voluntary conformity, however, apart from the legislation, there are strains towards adherence for instance from industry, sources etc.

Normative Media Theory

The Media theory is known as the concepts of social-political-standards that integrate concept on the association between the media and society. The 'normative theory is focused on what the media intend to do in society, instead of what they clearly do. Generally speaking, superior ideas about the responsibilities of mass media would be compatible with other norms and strategies in a particular society. As indicated by Siebert et al (1956) in their work on four theories of the press, "the press falls into the category and coloration of the social and political systems within which it functions".

Despite the fact that normative theory of the press is currently in a substantial difficult situation (Nerone, 1995), it still can recognize some general patterns of thinking about the duties and obligations of the media within the society and the extent at which 'society' can effectively interfere to serve the public interest, not only as a result of changes in the media and the emergence of new media types. The major relevant variations may be stated as follows:

Development Media Theory

The Development Media Theory comes in different forms, but ultimately suggests that media freedom must be subjugated to the demands of economic, social and political growth, even if it is desired.

Alternative Media Theory

Theory of alternative media. The predominant media of the developed nations are probably to be ineffective by design from a social vital viewpoint with regard to various groups within society and too often underneath the influence of the government and other institutions or officials.

Regulatory Mechanism of Media in Nigeria

The Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) Code of Ethics, endorsed in Ilorin in 1998, is currently the only policy mechanism for Nigeria's implementation of media transparency. It is an autonomous policy in which transparency and responsibility in the media industry within media professionals could be accomplished. Even though NBC Nigeria Broadcasting Code serves as a standard guide for regulating media content, instead of encouraging transparency, it corresponds more to regular broadcast material. Nonetheless, it is challenging to encourage transparency within the context of the NUJ ethical code. It is believed that only professional journalists accredited by the NUJ should comply to the standards of the code, but the code is not obligatory for all practicing journalists, because not everyone of them are members of the NUJ (Okwori & Adeyanju, 2006:9).

Main issues of Media Regulation

A brief description of the reasons why the media are targeted are as follows:

- i. The preservation of public order and the safety of the state.
- ii. Preserving respect for ethical conduct in affairs of taste and manners.
- iii. Accomplishing gains to the political square based on information flow, access, variability and public engagement.
- iv. Preserving cultural norms and promoting regional or national tradition and language.
- v. Respect for freedom of expression and preservation from insults and prejudices..

Conclusion

Media regulation and responsibility are critical elements of the independence of the media which have triggered lot of debate in Africa and Nigeria inclusive. The primary focus in media ethics is on truthfulness, precision, honesty, objectivity and professional integrity. The Nigerian media faces constitutional and political restrictions, which thus have an adverse effect on the effectiveness of mass media in Nigeria, as media operators and government have repeatedly generated and exploited unpleasant laws for their personal advantage. Media organizations' viability is partly related to the revenues that come from politicians. Likewise, news is the main production of the media, but the dominant source of news remains the political elite. Media stations private and publicly operated, are subjected to regulatory and political control. This paper concludes that a closer attention must be given to the media in Nigeria in order to boost the reputation and regulation of its current performance.

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