Issues in Journalism Practice and Mass Media Survival in Nigeria

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Abstract

Any profession that cannot guarantee the safety and well-being of its members would almost not be able to impose professional ethics and bring erring members to book. This is true with respect to journalism practice in Nigeria. This paper examined the current state of journalism practice in Nigeria to determine how journalists are responding to the numerous professional challenges they face. Journalists in Nigeria appear caught between the impact of new technologies and the harsh reality of the environment in which they function, which some evidences from current literature suggest is badly affecting the profession. The paper, among others, found that commercial consideration has now become a major deciding factor of what is reported in the media. It also argued that since most media have turned to full profit-making outfits, their ability to professionally carry out the traditional watchdog role remains doubtful. The paper equally discovered that, in a multi-ethnic country as Nigeria, reporting public affairs ethically and professionally with absolute sense of objectivity may be difficult to accomplish because of certain variables such as reporter's personal history and experience, language use, an attempt to investigate and interpret news on the part of reporter and journalistic convention. Other variables include ownership influence, politics, religion and ethnicity all of which place journalists in a dilemma as they attempt to stand on the side of objectivity. To ensure ethical and professional conduct, and stay afloat and relevant in this economic circumstance, the paper recommended that the media in general and prints in particular should take advantage of the windows of opportunities in the digital arena. It also recommended that the media professional groups should sponsor and pursue vigorously a bill that will adequately protect the rights of journalists while in service.

Introduction

The advent of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and the transformation they produce in the practice of journalism profession is significant. The most important is the accelerated changes that go with journalism today. Journalism profession is being transformed through the digitalization of the work process.
While acknowledging that new media technologies such as social networking and information-sharing websites as well as the use of various digital and mobile information gathering, processing and disseminating devices hasmade information more readily available to people, there are pertinent issues evolving from this development. For example, Joyce (2007) notes that the standards of becoming a journalist are being lowered as no formal training isrequired, thus fuelling the potential for unethical journalistic behaviour and practices.

Moreover, contemporary issues resulting from the functions of the media coupled with other recurring ones have generated unending controversies among professionals and academics to the extent that the survival of media profession is now at risk. It is against this background that this paper attempts to examine these issues within the context of the emerging socio-economic and political changes in Nigeria. This is with a view to seeing how the issues have combined to alter our views about journalism practice with respect to their traditional role in the society.

Universally, the media are central to the provision of ideas and images which people use to interpret and understand a lot of their everyday experience. Beyond the four traditional functions of mass media (information, education, entertainment, and surveillance), new responsibilities of increasing understanding of development issues; building up solidarity in a common effort; and enlargingthe capacity of the people to take charge of their own development needs have been assigned to the media (McBride et al.,1981 cited in Lanihun, 2008).The media are also known to possess the power and the tools to sift through the various occurrences in the society and

bring essential issues to the public domain through its information gathering and reportorial functions otherwise known as gatekeeping and agenda setting power. The more access people have to the news from the media, the more their conduct and moral values are affected either for good or bad. Although mass communication scholars have accepted the mass media as agents of social, cultural, economic and political changes in the society, the controversial point is in how the media play these roles in the midst of diverse contending challenges, yet facilitate the expected changes. This paper therefore examines some of these issues and how they have constituted an enhancement to or a cog in the wheel of journalism practice in Nigeria.

Gate Keeping and Agenda Setting Functions

Gate keeping is the process of selecting, writing, editing, positioning, scheduling, repeating and messaging information to become news. In carrying out these editorial functions, journalists must be objective. In spite of the immense professional value attached to objectivity in journalistic practice, the concept has come under severe criticism. "Some say that journalism is not objective; others believe that it cannot be objective; and still others, that it should not be objective" (Lichtenberg, 1996, p.225).

> Controversy arose when some scholars observed that objectivity is an unattainable ideal while others believe that insisting on objectivity is an attempt by a group of people to oppress other members of the society (Lichtenberg, 1996, p.226).

They base their argument on the fact that mass media owners and those they appoint as gate keepers regulate and determine the volume of local and international information that gets to the people. This means that the more information is denied the people, the less power they have, therefore maintaining hegemonic hold on them, which confirms the views of some scholars that there is information lop-sidedness against the developing nations (Soola, 2008).

The information imbalance at the international level is similar to what obtains at the national level. The few rich and powerful who are based in the urban centres control the media and the information sharing channels while the poor, who mostly are based in the rural areas, are denied access to information and the right to use the media.

The basic principle of agenda setting involves the transfer of object and salient matters from the media to the public. Umuerri (2008) further states that agenda setting power of the media implies that the media do not only influence the reportage of issues and events in the society but also pre-determine what issues are regarded as important at a given time.

Gate keeping and agenda setting function of the media have been criticised in contemporary times for introducing news slant and biases into news reporting. McChesney (2000, p.42) identifies three different biases. The first is associated with story selection which most times regarded anything done by government official as newsworthy, thus conferring agenda setting power on political office holders by what they said or decided not to say. In Nigeria, most newspapers, television and radio news headlines are filled with government news whether significant or not, without giving the same attention and coverage to feedbacks especially from the grassroots. This is why Owolabi and Okafo (2011) classify most Nigerian media as government megaphone.

The second bias is due tothe journalism tenet that associates news reporting of an event to news peg. By this, an issue is not considered newsworthy until there is a striking development. For instance, in Nigeria, the need for constant and strict enforcement of aviation safety laws and professional ethics did not attract serious media report until such tragic occurrence involving Dana airline in year 2012 that claimed 153 lives including some top government officials. Third, journalists usually allow commercial consideration and political interests of their owners to dictate what they report.

This truth is further reinforced by Hulteng (1979) that, for the press to perform its traditional responsibilities in the present society, the media must first establish itself economically as viable ventures. How the mass media can achieve this without an element of bias remains to be seen? Commercial consideration has become a major deciding factor of what is reported in the media. Presently, media houses seek every opportunity of generating funds, and this confirms the UNESCO's (2012) assertion that "news has become commercial product." This also explains why insignificant news item such as birthday or burial ceremony photo splash of a celebrity from the city centres can displace important development news from the rural communities (Adejola& Bello, 2014). It is also for this reason that media houses give undeserving meritorious awards to Governors and political office holders who have been indicted by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission.

Surveillance Role: Matters Arising

The surveillance role according to Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956) stemmed from the principles of social responsibility theory of the media, which expects the mass media to serve as informant and watchdog to the society in order to safeguard the fundamental right of individuals.

The most significant watchdog role of the media to the society is to the political and the business class. Mass media, through rigorous investigation, ensure openness and accountability in political and economic governance thus checkingcorrupt practices, abuse of power and violation of the social contract (Meijer, 2010). According to Alao, Ugwom and Alao (2013), the media investigate the environment; warn about impending threats and dangers such as flood-prone areas, hurricane and earthquake as well as providing information on health issues, stock market and other windows of business opportunities inherent in a particular policy of the government.

The watchdog role of the media has, in recent time, become a subject of inquiryamong media scholars who perceive this traditional role of the media as questionable. According to Curran (2000, p.122) cited in Owolabi (2014) the watchdog role is stale and not as straightforward as it presently appears in the prevailing socio-economic and political clime. Curran believes that assigning such role was done based on the traditional assumption that the government is the seat of power, corruption and tyranny which the media must check, forgetting that the media itself has also become big corporate businesses that must be watched. If that assertion is true, then who watches the watchdog? There are diverse opinions on this. While some argued in line with the principle of development media theory that "in the interest of national development, the state or a constituted body has the right to intervene in media operation" (McQuail, 2005); some others believe that doing so will restrict the press freedom and make a mockery of development idea. Instead, according to Wasan (2013), before an external force points accusing fingers at the press, it should look inwards to self-regulatory mechanism.

However, this study believes that with the present structure and working of the media industry globally, self-regulation might be an impossible task. This is because there are various factors affecting the media practice such as ownership control, commercialisation, personal experience of the editors and reporters and of recent, ethnicity and religion (Oso &Tijani-Adenle, 2014). In view of this circumstance, it has been observed that rather than leaving the media to regulate itself, a neutral and impartial body can assume that responsibility. In that case, the civil society, NGOs and social activists can collaborate to play watchdog role on the press using new tools of social media.

As Thomas (2013) argues in a recent study, the Internet and the social media platform which gave birth to citizen journalismcan empower the civil society to join forces, coordinate and offer voice to the voiceless to expose and criticise any perceived unethical conduct of the mass media or a part of it. Recently, two Nigerian

prominent media organisations, *Thisday* newspaper and African Independent Television (*AIT)* were allegedly fingered by the nation's anti-corruption agency on matters that borders on bribery. Their proprietors as a result were asked by a Court that sat in Abuja to refund various amount running into millions of Naira to the Federal Government. The two media organisations received series of castigation through citizen journalism.

Curran (2000) has therefore called for immediate review of the perception that the media are watchdogs on both political and the business groups. The thrust of his argument is that since most media have turned to full profit-making outfits, their ability to carry out the traditional watchdog role remains doubtful.

The Political Economy of Nigerian Media

The mass media in Nigeria have been operating in a difficult economic atmosphere most vividly exemplified by high cost of production, constantly dwindling advertising and sales patronage among others as a result of the encroachment of the new media. Running and sustaining the media houses especially the prints have become an uphill task as most newspaper proprietors depend mostly on personal resources from other businesses and limited advertisement and sales proceeds which oftentimes are inadequate to guarantee the continued sustenance of an organisation as financially demanding as the media.

The present economic state of the traditional media industry globally is generally appalling. According to Owolabi and O'Neill (2013), the competing influence of new media and the harsh reality of distress economy foretell a gloomy future of the media industry which has experienced steady cutback in circulation rate (The State of the News Media, 2009). Data obtained from the United States reveals that over 15,000 people have lost their jobs out of 56,000 employed in the industry in 2008 (Paper Cuts, 2009). The *Detroit Free Press* and *New York Times*, two leading news media in the USA were worse hit by the economic downturn thus necessitating

downward restructuring of their home delivery service to thrice a week while some of their unviable subsidiaries were wound down (Sanders-Ware, 2009).

The situation in France is equally horrible as the former President Nicholas Sarkozy had to embark on a bail out strategy to prevent some badly affected newspapers from closing down (Chrisafis, 2009). Available statistics in the United Kingdom also shows that many newspapers including the *Guardian* were reported to experience about 5 percent drop of their circulation and *The Times*, 1.57 percent within a space of one year (World Press Trend, 2008).

An outcome of a general survey of the state of newspaper industriesin the United States and Europe is all that is required to have the correct view of the world of the news media globally. In Africa, particularly in Nigeria, the harsh reality of economic meltdown has dramatically changed the outlook of the media industry indicating high debt profile, downsizing, retrenchment and drop in circulation and high mortality rate. Findings revealed that a total of 51 newspapers were established between 1880 and 1937, a period of 57 years. This consisted of 11 dailies, 33 weeklies and 4 monthlies. Except 15 provincial weeklies, all these newspapers were established in Lagos. Of all the 51 newspapers, only one (1), *Daily Times* of Nigeria survives till date; all others, except *West African Pilot* and the *Daily Service* that survived till early 1960s were rested (Omu, 1978).

Owolabi (2014) also notes that between 1937 and 1960 a period of 23 years, 39 newspapers were established of which only *Nigerian Tribune* is still publishing. Between 1960 and 2008 a period of 38 years, 168 newspapers and 48 magazines were established. Only 43 newspapers and 15 magazines are still operating and they are all based in Lagos and Ibadan axis of Nigeria. Also between 2000 and 2013, 12 newspapers and 7 magazines were established.While only five newspapers and two magazines are still operating epileptically, others are out of circulation. To further depict the worrisome picture of the media industry in Nigeria, we also note with consternation the

sudden disappearance of *Tell* and *The News* Magazines and *PM News*, three foremost Lagos–based prints that used to sell copies in thousands every week.

In order to remain afloat, some of the newspapers took advantage of the advent of ICTs to quickly start online publication. A good example is the *PMNew*s earlier mentioned. Some otherstook the option of taking the company to the capital market for the general public to buy into it. *Tribune* newspaper published by African Newspaper Limited is a typical example of how proprietors can recapitalise existing medium through the stock market. According to Owolabi and O'Neill (2013), there can also be merger and acquisition of media organisations with similar editorial focus to strengthen their capital base. The Media Works (NZ) Limited, a New Zealand television broadcast group was once in financial crisis and in 2004, a Canadian broadcast group through the capital market acquired 100% shares of the group, renamed it as Can West Media Work (NZ) Limited and eventually sold 30% of its share interest to the public. The same method was adopted to bail out PBL Media, an Australia media group that owns stakes in nine broadcast networks and ACP Magazines.

Ethical Discourse in Journalism

The issue of journalistic ethics has in recent years started to receive increasing attention in journalism education programmes, textbooks, journals and other literature on mass communications. Modern journalists are also found to be pulled between what they consider to be 'rights' as journalists and their responsibilities to the society. Journalistic ethics is a swampland of philosophical speculation where extraordinary fogs of judgment hang low over a sloppy terrain. Notwithstanding the poor visibility and unsure footings, one cannot but proceed in the journey as there will always be some solid spots to walk on as one manoeuvreshis way out to safety.

"Ethics has been defined as that branch of philosophy that helps journalists decide on the right thing to do while practicing"(Merril,

1982, p.9). In the manner of religious dogma, ethics provides the journalists with certain principles or standards by which he can discern between right and wrong, good or bad, responsible or irresponsible journalism. Against the above ethical perspective therefore, ethics are moral obligations which are hinged on professional standard of practice acceptable to a group of professionals in a particular trade.

For a journalist to be perceived as being ethically conscious, there are six qualities that must be noticed in him. First, a journalist must have respect for, and tryto live by the cardinal principle of uprightness. This is partly a product of wisdom which is a combination ofinnate ability and acquired knowledge derived from family upbringing, education and exposure. This, perhaps, is the basis of Awolowo's (1958, p.56-57) observation that a specialised reporter must be sufficiently educated. To be educated is to be knowledgeable, instructive and constructive to discern between right and wrong.

Second, a good journalist must not indulge in destructive criticism, and bringing odium and derision on another person. Third, he must be courageous. This will sustain him as he constantly pursues the goals which wisdom has enabled him to set personally. It is courage that helps a journalist to resist temptations that can lure him out of the pathway of wisdom.

Fourth, a journalist of conscience must be temperate. This demands reasonable moderation in journalistic practice. It is this virtue that makes a journalist to avoid fanaticism in pursuit of any goal. Fifth, he must be able to dispense his actions with justice. By justice, it means considering a man's 'deservingness'. Every political figure must be entitled to media coverage though this may not be at equal proportion. The degree of coverage is determined by the level of involvement in newsworthy activities. Sixth, there must be deep loyalty and commitment to the truth. How journalists can function ethically and professionally amidst these contending forces of

various gatekeepers as well as economic and social media incursion remains to be seen.

Journalism Objectivity Dialogue

Objectivity as a concept is not restrictively peculiar to journalism practice. It is rather perceived as a general term that is applicable to various fields of study. This is why Tuchman (1972, p.42) declares:

> The social scientist's frequent insistence upon objectivity is not peculiar to only his profession. Doctors and lawyers declare objectivity to be the appropriate stance towards clients. To journalists, like social scientists, the term objectivity stands a bulwark between themselves and the critics. Attack on a controversial presentation of "facts", newspapermen invoke their objectivity almost the way a Mediterranean peasant might wear a clove of garlic around his neck to ward off evil spirit. Newspapermen must be able to invoke some concept of objectivity in order to process facts about social reality.

Objectivity which is the opposite of subjectivity or being biased is a principle in journalism practice which denotes abstinence from prejudice. Many other scholars perceived objectivity in different perspectives. Gulyas (2010) perceives it as manner of reporting the verified facts devoid of personal opinion or interpretation. Journalism of objectivity is meant to inform and enlighten readers and not to advocate or persuade them through news interpretation, surmising and slanting.

Adejola and Bello (2014, p.103) sees objectivity as "the prevailing ideology of news gathering and reporting that emphasises eyewitness account of events, corroboration of facts with multiple sources and balance of viewpoints." The Freedom of the Press Commission (1947) summarises journalism objectivity as "a truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day's events in a context that gives them meaning." Going by the above definitions, the concept of objectivity has in-built elements of truthfulness, neutrality, fairness and balance.

It is important to note that living up to the dictates of these elements is what makes the practice of objective journalism difficult to attain. This is also why objectivity has remained a contentious issue in journalism practice. While a school of thought believes that it is attainable, another school reasons otherwise. For instance, Dennis (1996) observes that objectivity is possible if the methods that lead to decisions are systematic. While supporting the possibility and desirability of objective journalism, Berth Alan of the *Washington Post* notes that the practice of objectivity is the height of American journalism which deserves to be sustained globally.

While advancing reasons why objectivity is not possible, McDonald (1989) cited in Owolabi and Okafo (2011) notes that some elements often constitute serious challenges to journalistic objectivity especially when covering public affairs beat and these include reporter's personal history, language, and attempt to investigate and interpret news on the part of the reporter. For example, every reporter in practice is guided by some personal traits when he selects a story for use and attention given to it from among the varieties of events. The personal qualities also influence him as he tries to investigate and ask questions to clarify any issue. This is usually evident in the degree of attention he gives to each event and the kind of questions he asks on various elements observed in the story.

In a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural country as Nigeria, reporting public affairs with absolute objectivity may be difficult to accomplish. For instance, issues of resource control and political restructuring are few among others that often constitute ethical dilemma for reporters. The reason is that when a reporter tries to sift through series of related events and startsasking questions that seek to know whose interests those issues are, readers/viewers may begin to perceive him as subjective and biased. Obviously in Nigeria of today, the way people understand issues is clearly different from yesteryears. Issues are perceived with the eyes of politics, religion and ethnicity. Since reporters are also parts of the society, they are not immune against these ideological traits, which may play out in their reports. This is why Walter Lippmann cited in McDonald

(1982, p.70) surmisesthat "the facts we see depend on where we stand as well as the experiences we bring to the scene." This can also be confirmed by the fact of two reporters giving different accounts of an event.

Another element in the reporting process that often affects objectivity is journalistic convention which believes a matter is not worth reportinguntil it becomes an event. Various important events happen in the society daily which is never reported in the media. If reported at all, it is either slightly mentioned and the story tucked in an obscure part of the newspaper or just as passing word in the radio or television broadcast. For example, in the incident of Dana Airline earlier mentioned, one wonders why the unenviable state of most domestic airplanes flying our airspace in Nigeria was hardly reported by major news media (prints and electronic) until the tragic air mishap. Where were the aviation correspondents and why did they wait until the tragic incident happened before doing what they were supposed to have done? How objective have the media been in this circumstance?

Language use has also become an important element that can seriously impair journalistic objectivity. Margaret Gorman cited in McDonald (1982, p.79-80) observes that "language and meaning depend on the past experiences of men; that different words can mean different things to different people; and that neither language nor knowledge is identical with reality." Language is an indispensable tool of a reporter and much self-control and great care are needed for him not to fall victim of misusing it. This explains why Huxley (1965) notes that "a man who habitually speaks and writes correctly is one who has cured himself of deliberate lying and unconscious mendacity." Language use is so complex that it is an imperfect medium of expression of truth. For instance, words can be inexact when precision is required; ambiguous when univocal meaning is needed; connotative when definition and denotation are demanded; allusive when identity is sought.

Ownership Influence and News Reporting

The history of Nigerian mass media cannot be traced without a reference to the pioneer proprietors most of whomlaid the foundation of an industry that has contributed immeasurably more than any others to the socio-political and economic development of the nation.

Universally, there are three main types of media ownership. These include public, private and mixed. The public media are those funded and managed by the government either at the federal, state or local governments. Private ownership means ownership by individuals and groups while mixed ownership connotes government/private partnership. Nigeria operates a mixed media ownership pattern largely controlled by government and private individuals or group. Since inception, the ownership of broadcast media was monopolised by the Federal and State government until 1992 when the monopoly was broken and private participation was allowed.

All things being equal, ownership status of news media need not compromise the efforts to produce journalism of integrity but, in reality, the contrary is the case. Ownership of the media plays critical role in determining the editorial contents of the media. Journalists oftentimes are in a dilemma when it comes to standing on the side of objectivity as against obeying their pay master. This is because the owners who are either card-carrying members of a political party, contractors to the ruling party or both may force the editor or reporter to drop a particular story that may be perceived as anti-establishment. The advertiser may also influence editorial decision through the owners, thus limiting journalists' editorial freedom.

Press freedom connotes that a reporter should have unrestricted right to report any story without fear of molestation or being sacked by employer. There have been many instances when reporters and/or editors were sacked by State governors for carrying reports believed

to be critical of his government's policy. Similar things do happen in privately-owned media. In most cases, the full right to determine what goes into newspapers and what is transmitted in the radio or television does not reside in the editor but the proprietors.

It amounts to an understatement to say that the condition of service in most media houses is appalling. The condition under which most journalists in Nigeria work today is largely discouraging. Salaries are small and yet not paid intime. There is no welfare plan, no insurance package yet they are exposed to all kinds of risks, lack of severance allowance and no job security among other woes that have become the lot of most journalists. In Nigeria, except *The Punch*, *Guardian* and few broadcast media outfits, others owe workers' salaries ranging between three to 12months. The horrible condition of service explains why most reporters resort to unethical behaviours and are unable to practice objective journalism. For those who cannot endure the ill-treatment, and do not want to compromise, many hard working and experienced hands have migrated to other allied fields. Worse still, in recent years, the population of students graduating from journalism colleges has drastically reduced to about 20percent (Owolabi, 2014).

Globally, the commercial influence has been a recurring problem confronting the mass media. It is a known fact that the opportunity, desire, and ability to make enormous profits in the communication media most times result in unobjective reporting. This is the reason why, nowadays, editors do not want to suppress any story that can offend their advertisers. It is therefore not surprising to note that media houses have not been publishing and airing stories condemning cigarette smoking and alcohol consumption on regular basis despite the fact that they constitute potential harm to consumers' health.

Exploring Professionalism in Journalism Practice

It is almost impossible to discuss the issue of journalism ethics exhaustively without a mention of the concept of 'professionalism'

because according to the African Union Commission on Human and People's Rights (2002), ethics and self-regulation is viewed as the best method of promoting professionalism in the media (Berger, 2009).While contributing to discourseon professionalism in relation to the media, Scrutton (1982) describes the term 'profession' as includingthe three-old-learned professions of divinity, law and medicine but has now extended to teaching, engineering, accountancy and journalism among others. For any individual to be perceived as professional in any of these fields, Willenesky and Etzioni (1975, p.14) outline five essential conditionsto be met:

- He must have gone through a period of certificated learning and knowledge acquisition in a polytechnic or university,
- Option of practicing the profession on fulltime,
- Prospect of acquiring more knowledge while practising;
- Chance to advance career from one level to another, and
- Possibility of forming and belonging to local and international professional association.

Against the above backgrounds therefore, for anyone to be a qualified journalist, he must have obtained diploma or degree certification in journalism or mass communication. Most media proprietors are more comfortable employing trained and certificated journalists who are well-grounded in the act of reporting and editing and possess the knowledge of the universal laws and ethics guiding journalism practice (Hudson & Oboh, 2012).

It is disheartening to discover that most people parading themselves as journalists today have neither gone through journalism training nor possess any certification to practise the profession. Many people came into the profession from different other fieldsof study only with a flair for writing. Nigerian Union of Journalists, the umbrella professional association which is expected to be a regulatory body, is at best a social group that accommodates both the trained and untrained into its fold. Worse hit is the new media where every Tom, Dick and Harry is free to be a reporter, editor and publisher regardless of their background training. The invasion of journalism

profession by quacks and charlatans has constituted a serious threat to journalismprofession as the information being disseminated for public consumption is becoming less and less accurate and credible because it is lacking in depth and truth. This makes the public to think twice about the reports of Boko Haram activities in Nigeria.Some of the 'unfolding news' are more of speculations and comments rather than hard facts.

New Media Technology and Emerging Complications

The intervention of the new media technology has altered, albeit positively, the communication environment across the world. Communication scholars have also noticed this early enough and called the attention of both media practitioners and news consumers to the fact that we are living in an era of "communicative turbulence"-a cultural turmoil precipitated by a proliferation of internet-propelled media channels dishing out assorted newswhich in most cases are fake (McNair, 2005).

The media world now witnesses significant shift from what it used to be. The typical manner by which people used to access information and express opinion is fast changing. News sources like newspapers, radio and television are being replaced with new media such as Websites, blogs, podcast, and other social networking sites such as Facebook, twitter, You Tube, LinkedIn among others. Apart from reading, listening and viewing, there is unrestricted opportunity to browse, send e-mail, chat and network through various innovative internet-driven technologies. New media is an emerging field of new generation electronics, digital, computerised, networked information and communication system powered through computer technology (Morah & Uzochukwu, 2012).

More recently, the new media have broken the monopoly of traditional media and opened the public sphere to many voices which were once muffled and marginalised and pushed further the tradition of immediacy in news reporting (Oso & Tijani-Adenle, 2015). Besides marginal cost for senders and receivers, it also paves

way for interactive communication as against one-way flow (Pavlick, 2001). New media allow the grassroots activists to network and mobilise the civil society in support of or against government policies and programmes. This is why it can be likened to community media in orientation and practice. The implication of this is the emergence of citizen journalists who although they are not professional journalists yet played active roles in the process of gathering, storing, reporting, processing, analysing and disseminating information.

Notwithstanding the great benefits of new media technologies, the general assumption is that while the need for professionalism and ethics isincreasingly being advocated in the traditional media in general and journalism practice in particular, the reverse is the case in the new media domain (Hudson & Oboh, 2012). The reality now is that you do not have to be a trained journalist to practice citizen journalism. All it takes is just to have the digital device that can give you access to the social media platform. This therefore explainsthe recent increase in unprofessional and unethical practices such as phone hacking scandal, invasion of individual privacyand quackery which give birth to fake news, which is deficientin depth, credibility, objectivity and accuracy.

Conclusion

It is no longer in doubt that journalism profession is going through difficult time. The mass media in general and journalism professionals have been operating in a very hostile environment most vividly illustrated by high cost of production, constantly dwindling advertising patronage and infrastructural inefficiency while most journalists are poorly paid. This portends graveconsequences for a once noble and respectable profession. It leads to exodus of seasoned and experienced hands from the journalism profession into other areas leaving behind green horns and quacks who cannot keep the flag of professionalism and ethics flying as expected.

Expectedly, a reporter working without job security, and enough motivation would hardly be able to stand uncompromisingly on the grounds of objectivity and truthfulness. It also gives birth to high mortality rate in the media industry. Most media proprietors are observed to depend on government patronage to sustain their establishment. The death of such proprietors usually leads to the demise of their media outfit because they are not rooted in the market. The advent of new media has also exacerbated the problem of traditional media in that it has diminished the popularity and public trust people have in it, thus reducing their advertisement patronage considerably.

Notwithstanding the observable negative effects, the new media technologies have come to breathe lives into the process of communication while it gives voices to the voiceless among other emerging advantages.

To enhance ethical and professional conduct, and stay afloat and relevant in this economic circumstance, this paper recommends that the media in general and prints in particular should take advantage of the windows of commercial opportunities in the digital arena.

The Nigerian Press Council and Nigerian Broadcasting Commission in conjunction with the Nigerian Guild of Editors and the Nigerian Union of Journalist should come together to vigorously sponsor and pursue a bill to guarantee an acceptable condition of service for practising journalists in Nigeria as it is done in other professions.

For Nigerians to enjoy the full benefits of new media, there is the need for government to put in place appropriate measures to check individuals against excesses. There must be a policy framework to guide the activities of the people who send and receive messages using on-line platforms. The government must also mandate the

National Communication Commission to compel the Internet providers to upgrade their internet services and to scale down the cost of data purchase which at present is very high compared to what obtains in other countries.

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