SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY MEDIA THEORY AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR MEDIA PROFESSIONALISM IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between the Social Responsibility Theory and media professionalism in Nigeria. The paper amongst other things ascertained the origin and basic assumptions of the theory, the specific functions of the theory, professionalism and media practitioners, the prevailing professionalism status of journalism practice in Nigeria, the preconditions to be identified as a profession, the processes of professionalism and ascertained the relationship between media professionalism. The paper provided a cursory look at the mass media landscape in Nigeria amongst others. The study was anchored on Aristotle's Golden Mean principles and the social responsibility media theory as theoretical framework. The researchers are convinced that several unprofessional and unethical practices abound in the Nigerian press which include sycophancy, bribery, character assassination et cetera and recommended a more professional, responsive and responsible approach to news reportage.

Keywords: Social Responsibility Theory, Professionalism, Media Ethics.

Introduction

For healthy, meaningful, harmless and sustainable functioning with maximized benefits, every media theory has reiterated that the intricacies of media practices should essentially be compatible with the social and cultural structure of the society where the media operate. This is owing to the fact that subject of mass media is incomplete without reference to media and society. Some stalwarts of communication studies such as Schramm (2006) defined communication with the relevance of society entwined in it. According to Schramm (2006), “Communication is that part of social activity wherein there is dissemination of information, entertainment, and educative exchanges intended for positive development of the society”. Most of the texts here declare that socialization is one of the functions of communication. Also, as the study of mass communication is classified under social science, and aptly so, the responsibility of society adjoins according to theorist like Simmel- “individuals interact with one another at a social level and therefore mutually influence one another. As this interaction and influence carry on, society is created”.

Also, as one of the definitions of society by Collins English Dictionary 12thed(2014) goes, “A system of human organizations generating distinctive cultural patterns and institutions and usually providing protection, security, continuity and a national identity for its members”. Communication which is an act of interaction and interplay of emotions and information between individuals is an intrinsic and integral part of society. Every societal
activity is based on communication. Both communication and society are intertwined. No society can exist without communication. Mass media are the important and chief carriers of mass communication. The factor of responsibility is closely related to society. Societies anywhere in the world consist of individuals of varied kind—the less responsible, the average kind and the highly responsible. While the less responsible constitute a huge chunk of the societies, the average lots are few and the highly responsible are meager. In fact, sociological studies have proved that the highly responsible individuals who constitute a minority are indeed responsible in nation-building and developmental activities.

Mass media at the outset, looks like composed of large number of people involved in it, however, its proportion compared to the masses, particularly in less developed nations like Nigeria is miniscule. Opinion leaders, those individuals who attend more to the mass media than do those whom they influence, pass on information gained from the media long with their own interpretations of media content. Only if this minor set of vocationaries (and not occasionaries) can be truly professional in their functioning and genuinely concerned with the societal progress and upliftment of the downtrodden, then the latter and spirit of democracy will acquire complete meaning.

The theory and philosophy of social responsibility is an extension of the libertarian philosophy in that the media recognize their responsibility to resolve conflict through discussion and to promote public opinions, consumer action, private rights, and important social interests. This theory has its major premise that freedom carries concomitant obligations. The press has an obligation to be responsible to the public. If it is not so, then some agency of the public should enforce it. Public opinion ad consumer action can guarantee that the press behaves. This theory led to the establishment of Press Councils, drawing up of Codes of Ethics and antimonopoly laws in many countries.

Statement of the Problem

Media professionals are the conscience of the masses. Audience members have invested enormous trust and confidence in them, indicating their output (the entire spectrum of media reportage).

Unfortunately, audiences appear to receive or view media reportage with reservations because of some unprofessional, unethical and irresponsible and irresponsible journalism. This has brought about a growing fear and concern that media practitioners have mortgaged their conscience and abuse the trust and confidence reposed in them by the audience. Hence, the question of media professionalism and actual conducts is brought to the fore. Thus, it becomes necessary to ask if Nigerian journalists are socially responsible based on the principles of impartiality, objectivity, balance and fairness. This paper is poised to ascertain the extent to which journalists in Nigeria are socially responsible.

Objectives of the Paper

Broadly speaking, this paper is set to ascertain the extent to which media professionals in Nigeria are socially responsible. In most specific terms, the paper has the following objectives.

I. To ascertain the professional conduct of Nigerian media practitioners

ii. Identify some unethical and irresponsible practices of Nigerian media practitioners

Theoretical Underpinning

This discourse borders on media ethics which necessitates the consideration of the contributions of scholars in the area of media ethics which are pertinent to the application of this discourse. This discourse adopts Aristotle's Golden Mean, categorical imperative and of course, the Social Responsibility Media theory as framework on which to anchor the study.
Aristotle's Golden Mean Principle propounded in 1893. This principle says that moral values lie between extremes and stresses moderation as opposed to extremes or excesses. Aristotle believed that individual could obtain strong moral character, but would necessarily face difficult choices. By adopting a middle position, one could avoid with excesses and differences. The implication of this principle is that a journalist has to exercise practical reason in the conduct of his journalistic duties by setting high standards. The Golden mean stresses proper emotional response to situations rather than proper action. The Golden mean principle also stipulates that one way to learn ethics is to select heroes and to try to model individual cults and character on what they would do. This means that journalists should model practice after experts or role model or professionals in the field of journalism to ensure that ethical reasons are rightly adhered to. The journalists adhere to the Golden mean principle; it means that they will act socially responsible.

Social Responsibility Media Theory

The basic assumptions and components of the social responsibility media theory includes the fact that: media have obligation to society, media ownership is a public trust, news media should be truthful, accurate, fair, objective and relevant, media should be free but self-regulated, media should follow agreed codes of ethics and professional conduct. The Social Responsibility Media Theory was propounded in 1956 by F. S. Siebert, T. B. Paterson and W. Schramm. The major premise of the theory is that freedom carries concomitant obligations, and the press, which enjoys a privileged position under the government, is obliged to be responsible to society for carrying out certain essential functions of mass communication. Social Responsibility theory of mass media is relatively a new concept which started in the mid-20th century and is used mostly by developing and least developed countries. The theory started from Europe and took shape with the Commission of the Freedom of Press that was commissioned in the United States in 1947. It encourages total freedom of the press and no censorship, but it should be regulated according to social responsibilities and external controls. Content is also filtered through public obligation and interference. The theory replaced libertarian theory with the view that libertarianism was outdated. After the emergence of this theory, professionalism in the media started to be taken seriously. The Hutchins Commission on Freedom of the Press was set up to re-examine the concept of press freedom as enunciated in the Libertarian or Free Press Theory. This was because the so-called free market of ideas had failed to guarantee press freedom and to yield the expected benefits to the society. Instead, the commercial development of the press and the unforeseen developments in media technology had tended to limit access to the media for individuals and groups. Thus, media power was concentrated in the hands of a few businessmen (advertisers) and media professionals who had the means to set up media empires.

In general, socially acceptable press behaviour was to be anchored on self-regulation, but if the press would not voluntarily give them, they must be certain social structures to ensure that it behaves in compliance with recognized social standards.

The theory changed the way the press published news from objective reporting to interpretative reporting. Before this theory, facts were presented without any interpretation. The audience interpreted it the way they wanted to. This caused problems as interpretation was not based on reality and it affected the social order. Interpretative and investigative reporting started to uncover the reality behind every case. In this theory, the press is taken to be for the people and society. The tasks of the press is to make a code of conduct and follow it, to develop a standard in journalism, to make journalism better, to protect journalists and to have penalties if any journalist violates the code of conduct.
This way, the facts provided by the press are analyzed and interpreted so that the people get true information and understandable news. This helps maintain social harmony by revealing social evils like corruption and discouraging other bad conducts. The media is taken as a place for the voiceless to have a voice and develop public opinions where each and every person has the right to speak, express and publish. It is considered not an end, but a tool for social development. Therefore, the objectives of the media are stated to inform, document, analyze, interpret, mediate and mobilize by creating and finding solutions.

Comment: are the two paragraphs above part of literature review or your discussion? Why not review the theory and take your views to discussion.

**Basic Assumptions of the Social Responsibility Theory**

McQuail (2005) one of the foremost communication scholars summarized the basic principles of Social Responsibility Theory as follows:

i. Media should accept and fulfill certain obligations to society

ii. These obligations are mainly to be met by setting high or professional standards of informativeness, truth, accuracy, objectivity and balance.

iii. In accepting and applying these obligations, media should be self-regulating within the framework of law and established institutions.

iv. The media should avoid offensive content triggering crime, violence or civil disorder or harm to minority groups.

v. The media as a whole should be pluralist and reflect the diversity of their society, giving access to various points of views and rights of reply.

vi. Society and the public have a right to expect high standards of performance, and intervention can be justified to secure the public good.

vii. Journalists and media professionals should be accountable to society as well as to employers and the market.

Society expects journalism to serve the interests of the people. Towards this it is expected that journalism not only informs, educate, but also entertains. In the recent past the expectations of the society has grown to include a forum for discussion, watch dog functions, leadership to the community, empowerment and many emerging functions of the press. In fact, one of the added canons of journalistic functioning after the famous report by the commission on freedom of the press headed by Robert Hutchins in 1947. The immediate conflicting point however is that who is the journalist responsible to? It is the media house owners, editors or people? Man is subject to manipulations at the hands of media owners. Due to the emergence of big businesses in the field of media, there is a threat of monopoly which may lead to control on information. Journalists are obligated to the same society that gives them freedom of expression-provides the laws that brings about a free press. They function as the trustees of the public-promotes public interests.

Norwegian scholar Johan Galtung (2002) said:

'There is more elitism, personism, and negativism than ever before' ....in the media content throughout the world.... The front page of the newspaper degrades itself, its journalists, its readers and all those concerned, when it represents rape and murder as the major constituents of world society and this is sometimes called the personal touch.
The Nigerian media, like media in many developing countries of the world love controversy and indulge in 'statement journalism'. They print or broadcast opposing statements without attempting to investigate and bring out the truth. Statements from various self-styled 'spokespersons' create a smokescreen and confuse media users who do not have the will or the time to sort out all the statements. The main issues are thus forgotten: side issues, unwanted arguments, unimportant sidelights and even trivial appeared centre-stage.

The media reports or cover mostly politics or government activities. Their surveillance of the political and socio-economic environment is quite useful to the business and industrial sectors. Their interest is restructuring the Nigerian society in accordance with the goals set out in the constitutions is purely incidental. Priorities change according to the agenda set elsewhere by global financial institutions.

**Functions of the Social Responsibility Theory**

As a result of the shortcomings of the libertarian theory of the press, the Hutchins Commission of Freedom of the Press set up in United States of America in 1947 recommended that, apart from ensuring and preserving press freedom, the press is also expected to observe certain social standards and responsibilities in performing their professional functions. Thus, the emergence of the social responsibility theory, according to Siebert (1956) as cited by Folarin in (1998) was premised on six functions:

i. To serve the political system by making information, discussion and consideration of public affairs generally accessible.

ii. To inform the public to enable it make self-determined actions.

iii. To protect the right of the individual by acting as watch-dog over the government.

iv. To serve the economic system, for instance the bringing together buyers and sellers through the medium of advertisements.

v. To provide good entertainment, whatever “good” may mean in the culture at any point in time.

vi. To preserve financial autonomy in order not to become dependent on special interests and influences.

Thus, the theory presents the media institutions as central and germane to the existence of the society. and, for the media institution to perform its social responsibility function, it must be peopled by professionals who understand and can uphold central media tenets such as impartiality, truthfulness, balanced reporting, fairness to all parties, it is only through this that the media institution/journalism can live up to the expectations of the profession.

**Media Practitioners**

According to Ansari (2011), media practitioners are the professionals who are different, in the sense that they are users of information as communicators. Ansari (2011) further stated that their requirement of information is very vast and diversified. They are very time conscious. For satisfaction of their needs, they interact with varied types of information system and personal sources. They are the one who writes the newspaper articles and also play your favourable music on the radio.

Basically, one may be tempted to regard media practitioners as the totality of persons working in a mass media outfit. This, using for example a newspaper industry, will include the gateman, typist, reporters, editors, production office among others. However, the definition
provided by Answers.com., tends to limit media practitioners to reporters and editors only (those who write articles in the newspaper). This, to a large extent corroborates the earlier definition provided by Ansari (2011), which sees media practitioners as users of information. The users of information in mass media industry are the journalists. To this extent, mass media practitioners in the context of this paper are interchangeably used with journalists.

**Professionalism and Media Practitioners**

The term professionalism needs to be defined for us to operate on the same frequency. According to Random House Dictionary of the English Language, the word professionalism means professional character, spirit, or method. The standing practice, or methods of a professional, as distinguished from an amateur professionalism, has been variously defined and a number of criteria of professionalism abounds in the research literature. Onah (1992), Volimer and Mill (1966) cited in Onah (1996) defined it as the ideology and associated activities that can be found in many diverse occupational groups where members aspire to professional status. But Fab-Ukodor (2011) defined professionalism simply as the process of change (as opposed to ideological principles) by which the professional and minded occupations go about achieving those characteristics that will gain for them the professional status that they desire.

According to Bel-Molokwu and C.DeAguomba (1990), professionalism among media professionals or journalists stands on nine major pillars:

i. Recognition of the sacredness of truth and freedom

ii. Avoidance of libel, sedition, deliberate distortion, bad taste and fallaciousness.

iii. Displaying the spirit of retracting facts when wrong

iv. Balanced reporting and presenting both sides of the coin

v. Burying personal biases or sectional interests

vi. Respect for societal norms and laws of the land

vii. Keeping clear of corrupt practices

viii. Protecting your source of information at all cost

ix. Spotting a good personality.

Similarly, when we speak of professionalism, we are also reminded of McLead and Hawled Jr. study on professionalism conducted in 1964 in the USA among some American newsmen (cited in Odumegwu 2000). In the study, they stated the eight criteria that must be satisfied for an occupation to be called a profession, namely:

i. It must perform a unique and essential service

ii. It must emphasize intellectual techniques

iii. It must have a long period of specialized training to acquire a systematic body of knowledge based on research.

iv. It must be given a broad range of autonomy

v. Its practitioners must accept broad personal responsibility for judgment and actions.
vi. It must develop a comprehensive self-governing organization, and

vii. It must have a code of ethics which has been clarified and interpreted by concrete cases, (McLead & Hawley Jr., 1964).

**Professionalism and Professionalization in Media Practitioner**

Volmer and Mills (1966), cited in Nwosu (1996) aver that professionalism refers to the ideology and associated activities that can be found in many diverse occupational groups where members aspire to professional status. It has also been defined as “A set of principles, ideas, attitude, and activities that characterize and guide the behavior of members of any occupational group which is anxious to gain and maintain both in group and out group acceptance of its professional standing (Nwosu, 1984).

Professionalism is therefore more or less a state of mind, a world view, an aspiration backed up with specialized activity and an approach to our jobs that makes us to be recognized and respected by the society as professional groups, as opposed to just another occupational group. It bestows pride on members of the group, and makes them stand out from the crowd of other occupational groups. It also brings with a lot of duty, responsibility and societal expectations which makes the true professional to always be on their toes, on their guard and always ready to fight and protect the ideas for which the profession is known. Professionalism, on the other hand can simply be described as a process of change through which members of the professionally minded occupational group, like advertising, go about achieving those characteristics and objectives that will gain for them the improved professional status they desire and work for. So, while professionalism can be seen as an ideal term, professionalization is the practical process through which we keep working towards the attainment of reasonable high level of ideal. Professionalization is also a continuous process through which we can achieve improved professionalism. Since professionalism is an ideal term, it can never be achieved by man who is an imperfect animal, true professionals must continually engage in the process of professionalization to remain relevant and effective.

The process of professionalization include, among other things, continuous education, continuous acquisition, and updating of professional skills, active belongingness, and participation in the activities of relevant professional bodies and association, transparent honesty and ethical/responsible performance of our professional duties. Media profession must therefore embrace these tenets of professionalization in order to ensure that media practice in Nigeria remains truly professional. And to remain truly professional, media practitioners should not only possess the following characteristics but must be seen by the society and the world as possessing them (Nwosu, 1996).

i. Must be seen to be performing a unique and essential service in Nigeria and beyond.

ii. Must emphasise acquisition of broad knowledge and intellectualism

iii. Must have a specified period of specialized training to acquire systematically a unique body of knowledge based on research and skills acquisition in mass media.

iv. Must ensure that media practitioners in Nigeria gain and retain a broad range of autonomy.

v. Must accept broad personal responsibility for other judgment and actions.

vi. Should place greater emphasis on service than on private economic gain, in line with the business of social responsibility concept.

vii. Must encourage professional bodies and agencies to grow into comprehensive, self-governing and self-reliant organizations.
viii. Must abide by our codes of ethics and ensure that they have practical applications.

These eight-points index for the attainment and sustenance of professionalism in mass media practice in Nigeria, according to Nwosu (1996) were developed, synthesized and contextually modified from the 24-points professionalism index introduced by Jack McLeod and SearlHowley (1964) and modified by others (Windahl, 1975). Mass media practitioners should look at these eight points as cardinal signpost for continued improvement of the mass media profession in this country. Individually and collectively, they have a duty to ensure, that the professional ideals inherent in each of these eight-points continue to guide media practice in Nigeria.

Media Ethics

Media ethics are self-regulating rules, principles and morals self-imposed by a professional group, organization or establishment in the conduct of duties or responsibilities. Ethics are imposed from within than from outside. It is a sort of self-check or censorship that guides a professional group in the conduct of her duties. Media ethics are hinged on the fact that there is need for internal mechanisms to check the moral conduct of media practitioners so that their excesses can be contained to avoid the media profession does not bring itself to public odium. It is a measure designed to raise the professional integrity of members so that the conduct of members do not bring to ridicule, shame or embarrassment to the corporate integrity of media practitioners. Baran, (1999, p. 391) stated that media ethics specifically refers to the application of rational thought by media professionals when they are deciding on what should be the right or best answer or response to a challenging professional problem. Baran further averred that the application of media ethics almost always involves finding the most morally defensible answer to a problem for which there is no simple correct and even best answer. This implies that media ethics are hinged on conscience, discretion and immorality. Media ethics are journalistic standards which serve as a benchmark for assessing conducts of members of the media profession. By such set standards members can then judge between right and wrong, bad or good in the course of carrying out their professional duties.

The purpose of media ethics is to stipulate the highest code of conduct encapsulated in rules, guidelines, norms and principles that would guide media practitioners in taking moral decisions. Perhaps, one of the reasons why media ethics are essential is because they serve as self-public relations image laundering so that members can indirectly market themselves to the public. This would persuade members of the public to have confidence in the profession.

Factors Responsible for Unethical/Unprofessional Practices in the Nigerian Media

Like every profession, unethical issues and practices abound in the Nigerian media environment. These unethical issues have raised a lot of concerns among media practitioners and outside the profession. Perhaps, out of professional zeal and public interest, media practitioners go out of their way to seek vital information and report same to audience members. Some of these constraints in gathering and publishing legitimate information may be legal, personal or self-centered.

Asemah, (2009, pp. 402-404) advanced certain reasons responsible for unethical practices to include:

1. **Pressure:** Pressure here has been understood as any force or influence which makes a journalist to feel strongly compelled to act in a manner desirable to the source of such force or influence. Pressure can be internal or external. While internal pressure is the type that comes from within the organization that the journalist works, external
pressure comes from the wider community or society in which the journalist finds himself. Pressure can cause a journalist to act irresponsibly or unethically in spite of his knowledge of what is good or what is bad.

2. **Poor Remuneration**: A journalist who is not well paid is likely to be unethical. He might be tempted to collect brown envelopes, free gifts and even embark on moonlighting so as to make ends meet.

3. **Greed**: It is certain that no matter the amount of money that a greedy man has, he is not satisfied so as a result of this, most journalists go against the ethics of journalism they have subscribed to uphold. This will also manifest in the collection of brown envelopes, free gifts or open demand for one form of gratification or the other which can compromise his professional integrity.

4. **Expectations from society**: The society expects certain things from people once they are working; such expectations could be houses, cars, good dresses etc. In order to meet up with these expectations, the journalists go against the ethics of the profession so as to satisfy them or meet the expectations of members of the society or immediate families.

5. **Unprofessionalism**: This is occasioned by lack of professional training on the part of the journalist who is susceptible to engage in unethical practices. He relishes in this because he lacks the knowledge and the implication of engaging in such acts. It is rather unfortunate that most media practitioners in Nigeria are graduates of physics, chemistry, economics and other disciplines where the rudiment of journalistic training is completely absent.

6. **Lack of Principles**: Journalists who lack principles are the ones who do anything provided such practices are in their interests. Other reasons why journalists breach codes of ethics of journalism profession according to Galadima and Enabu and cited by Asemah (2009, p. 404) include money, failure of religion, clash of interest, poor economy, lack of facilities, ownership of media, African culture of reciprocal gesture, knowledge of the power of the press, love for favours and the love for sensation.

**The Need of Journalist Ethics**

The need for journalistic or media ethics is anchored on self-censorship or self-restraint which aims at assisting media practitioners to be moral professionals. Since ethics are laid down rules and regulations that govern the conduct of groups, organization, society or profession to perform effectively, it therefore implies that media practitioners who base their conduct on high ethical standards will invariably perform in accordance with societal expectation of what is generally seen to be good and acceptable by society.

The importance of ethics lies in the fact that the journalist who has concern for ethics is wary of good or right actions and such concern motivates him to attain the highest good in the practice of journalism. The purpose of journalistic ethics is to stipulate rules, guidelines, norms and principles that would guide the journalist in making moral decisions. Therefore, media ethics keeps journalists or media practitioners on their toes, and self-control is the key to discipline.

Imbibing journalistic or media ethics by members of the profession earn public acceptance or prevent public outcry and would help sustain the confidence of the audience in the media.

Asemah, (2009, p. 378) summed up the purpose of journalist ethics as instilling in the journalist a continuing sensitivity of his every action, decision, and integrates or blends with his total search for truth. It also gives any general consciousness of himself of other and the
consequences of interpersonal relationship.

**Ethical Concerns and Media Practice in Nigeria**

The burden of Nigerian public has been whether journalists in Nigeria are discharging their duties in line with prescribed code of conduct as subscribed to by members of the fourth estate of the realm. More often than not, there has been public outcry about unethical practices among media practitioners in Nigeria. Some of these unprofessional acts range from blatant disregard for the truth, distortion of facts, invasion of privacy, and sensationalism et cetera. Many ethical problems exist in the Nigerian press, but a few ones that must often lend themselves to public odium shall be considered in the discourse.

**Policy Implication**

Again the liberalization and commercialization policy of the federal government of Nigeria of the 1980s and 1990s threw a lot of challenges to the professional standard of journalist practice in Nigeria. The press made all forms of news coverage to be evaluated from the commercial point of view. The impact of the policy became noticeable on journalists' sense of news judgment, especially in the broadcast media. News events not sponsored were hardly aired. According to Oso (2012): The journalist is Not allowed the autonomy and detachment required for the practice of his trade. His professional judgment has been compromised. The sale of news is killing professionalism in Nigeria especially broadcast journalism. Of a truth, commercialization of broadcasting has contributed to the dearth of serious journalism in Nigeria broadcasting. The commercialization phenomenon posed a lot of challenges to the credibility of the news stories reported by journalists because stories of events are usually arranged to suit their sponsors. Usually, the stories “add nothing tangible to the quality of life of the people and there is nothing journalistically newsworthy about them” (Oso, 2012).

On the other hand, the social responsibility theory rests on the concept of positive freedom, “freedom for” which calls for the presence of the necessary implements for attainment of desired goals. Under the theory, freedom of expression is grounded on the duty of the individual to his thought and conscience. It is a moral right. Freedom of expression is not something which one claims for selfish ends. It has value for both individual and the society. It is the society's sole source of intelligence, the seeds from which progress springs.

**Unethical Problems in the Nigerian Media**

The Nigerian journalists or media practitioners in general face certain ethical challenges in the course of discharging their professional duties. These, according to Asemah (2009, pp. 397-402), include the following:

1. **Plagiarism:** This problem goes beyond the confines of the Nigerian press and has greatly beams dominant in the academic circle. When journalists and other professionals in academic assume false authorship of the printed word when in actual sense the origin of the material is the product of another person; that is plagiarism. According to Asemah (2009) citing Horuby (1984) that plagiarise means to take somebody else's words, ideas etc. as if there were one's ideas. In journalistic parlance, (Okuma 1995, p.58) lent credence to this view when she stated that plagiarism occurs when a journalist publishes somebody else's information in such a way as to give the impression that the information was originated by him. This becomes a common place when journalists are lazy and make no efforts to pursue legitimate information rigorously and follow up the to authenticate or verify from sources information that would have been received through, hearsay (rumour) or third party without making
conscious efforts to get to the root of the issue.

2. **Acculturation:** This is described as the tendency of journalists or media professionals to accept the ideas, beliefs, attitudes, opinions etc of the group that they cover or with whom they have a great deal of contact. When a media practitioner becomes so used to people, it becomes difficult for such a journalist to maintain the ethics of the profession.

3. **Sensationalism:** This problem occurs when the tendency of the journalist is to add unnecessary colour and glamour in order to create excitement in the eyes of the audience. Sensationalism occurs when a journalist allows emotions to blur his sense of judgment and gives unnecessary attention to trivial issues with the intention of drawing attention and creating a desired intention in the minds of the audience. The danger of sensationalism by journalists is that the audiences can engage themselves in unmitigated reaction. There is no gainsaying that certain reactions by the public by way of protest and violent demonstration in the country can be attributed to the hand work of sensational journalism. Such sensationalism become a common place in democratic dispensation.

Sensationalism can manifest by way of bold headlines placed at strategic position to attract attention and making news out of non-news worthy event or issue.

4. **Sycophancy:** Sycophants are praise singers, booth lickers, political hangers-on who do everything possible in order to please their principals and get ultimate benefits from them. Their ultimate goal is to gain favour or undue advantage over their opponents or colleagues in the same profession. They do all kinds of jobs, including showering of encomiums on their principals who may be politicians, top businessmen and other elites so as to sustain their patronage. Sometimes they are hired by their principals to engage character assassination, name calling and bad label of rivals or opponents of politicians, top business executives to promote their interests.

A sycophant is blinded by his greed for gratification in such a way that he sees nothing wrong with the master he is out to please. The only concern is to satisfy his belly. Most of the columns of our newspapers are filled with such sycophancies in advertorials, personal opinion columns, editorials and news analysis.

5. **Afganistanism:** It is a term used to describe the situation whereby the journalist tends to focus on far away issues to the neglects of local issues. This practice is carried deliberately to divert attention of the public from burning national and local issues, simply because they want to shy away from tackling such issues. This is a mark of irresponsibility.

6. **Ethnicity/Nepotism:** Nigeria is a multifarious society with many Ethno-ethnic cultural and diverse groups and linguistic composition. Journalists find it difficult to put themselves out these diversity in the reportage of news events and issues. Because Nigeria has an ethnic and cultural diverse composition, journalists reflect these tendencies and unable to be neutral when one’s ethnic group or blood relation is involved in a news situation. Thus, the tendency is to attempt to protect such relative even in the face of glaring anomalies. It is wrong for the press which has a social responsibility to society to base its reportage on tribal or ethnic sentiments. When the reportage of news events and issues occupy the front seats, then the press cannot isolate itself from being socially irresponsible.

7. **Moonlighting:** This refers to a situation where a journalist maintains two jobs
This brings about divided interest and loyalty which impinges greatly on the quality of service delivery. When this happens, objectivity is highly compromised.

8. **Character Assassination**: The smearing of the good name of an individual is contrary to responsible journalism and highly unethical. During electioneering some journalists are heavily paid to castigate and bring into disrepute political opponents so that they can have an undue advantage.

9. **Brown Envelope**: Media practitioners sometimes base their reportage on the level of gratification obtained from news sources. These gratifications can be in the form of bribery, gifts, Christmas presents, sponsorship of trips and other favours in return for favours. This explains why journalists are more interested in covering and reporting political events and they scramble for crumbs that fall from the politician pockets. This has brought a lot of shame and embarrassment to the profession. This is a serious ethical issue which has to be dealt with.

10. **Bribery Freebies, Junkets**: This ethical problem manifests in the form of bribery, and acceptance of gifts by journalists. They include Christmas presents, offer of free train ride or air travels. Journalists are offered trips with expenses borne by someone who may expect favour in return while freebies are gifts for which the giver may expect favour in return.

11. **Confidentiality of Source**: The basic canon of journalism is not to reveal sources of information when the deal has been agreed upon. Unfortunately, some journalists go contrary to this rule and disclose sources of information when pressurized to do so. When this occurs, news sources will refuse to speak out or disclose vital information to journalists. This is a break of trust and constitutes a serious ethical problem in journalism. At times, it is more reasonable to use information as background and protect sources if it will affect the authenticity of news.

Conclusion

Evaluating the social responsibility theory and the Nigerian media practice, as presently constituted, with the requirement of professionalism, one would not but agree with the view expressed by Adaja (2011) that “the Nigerian media cannot fully be referred to as a profession”. Although the Nigerian Union of Journalists parades a code of conduct in which in its article 1 (i) referred to the union as a professional body as well as a trade union, the code however failed to state or identify the body of knowledge to be imbibed by its members. Again, the membership provision was so loose that anybody that has anything to do with media organization can call him/herself a journalist. The provision provides for Public Relations Officer/Practitioners, those who are employed as editorial staff, those who had completed a probationary period of twelve months etc, to be called journalists, without stating any minimum qualifications. Also no acceptable body of stakeholders was created or established to regulate the practice of journalism and enforce its rules and regulations in Nigeria as done in other advanced countries of the world.

Again, the practice of journalism in Nigeria has been characterized by flaws that had prevented it from being referred to as a profession. At inception, the Nigerian media space was occupied by practitioners who neither saw themselves as professionals nor made professionalism their watchword. It is instructive to note that the Nigeria journalists have been in perpetual fluid of drifting from neutrality to partisan politics both in the period proceeding independence and after. Most journalists and media organizations have jettisoned their
professional tenets of neutrality, objectivity, impartiality etc., to look on the grab of partisan politics. Journalists have shifted alliance to their owners, region as well as the dominant party or government of the region.

Recommendations
This article has attempted to take a holistic view at the social responsibility media theory and implication for professional media practice in Nigeria. Arising from the foregoing, it has become pertinent to make the following recommendations that would advance an enduring media professionalism and high ethical standards in Nigeria.

1. It is a moral obligation on the part of society and media practitioners to encourage the propagation of freedom of expression by reflecting pluralistic viewpoints and shades of opinion on controversial viewpoints.

2. Free expression being a moral right, media operators and practitioners are obligated to make sure that all significant viewpoints of the citizenry are represented by the press. They need not publish every idea, however preposterous; but they should see that “all ideas deserving a public hearing shall have a public hearing”. The publics as well as the editors and owners of media organizations in Nigeria should decide what ideas deserve a hearing.

3. Media practitioners in Nigeria under the umbrella of Nigeria Union of journalists should strive to have a functional press council that would enforce high ethical standards for the journalism profession. This would eliminate quacks and guarantee high ethical code of conducts for the profession.

4. Media ethics should be binding on the practitioners so as to ensure sanction and instill discipline among journalists.

5. Media practitioners should shun greed, personal aggrandizement which are at the forefront of unprofessional ethical practice so that Nigeria can have a press of our

References


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