Brown Envelope Syndrome And Professional Performance Among Journalists In Adamawa State, Nigeria

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Abstract
This paper examines the brown envelope syndrome and its impact on professional performance among journalists in Adamawa state, Nigeria. Mixed methodology of quantitative and qualitative survey was employed. A total of 120 respondents were drawn from the population using simple random sampling for the quantitative survey and four other respondents were purposively selected for the qualitative survey (Interview). Social responsibility theory was adopted as a theoretical framework for this study. Findings revealed that there is connection between brown envelope and professional performance among journalists in Adamawa State. In addition to poor remuneration of journalists by their employers, lack of sanctions is another major contributing factor behind the prevalence of “Envelope Journalism”. Findings also revealed that brown envelope stifles the principle of objectivity, balance and fairness; equally, adherence to brown envelop undermines the social responsibility of journalists to their societies. The study recommends that, there is need for partnership between media stakeholders and the general public in order to end corruption in journalism. Also, imposition of punitive measures on erring journalists is recommended.

Keywords: Brown envelop, Professional performance, Journalism, Ethics

Introduction
A number of criticisms have been levelled against journalism and its practitioners. These criticisms ranges from junk journalism, fakery, deception, praise singing, sycophancy, brown envelope, to mention but a few. However, brown envelope has been the major angle where journalism profession receives stiff critical appraisal from the public and media
scholars. Though it is an anomalous act is clear violation of ethical codes guiding the profession, but in many instances, journalists are found to be wanting as far as the act of brown envelope is concerned. The concept of brown envelope has been variably defined, most of the definitions convey similar meanings, which is the acceptance of gratification by journalists from their source or interviewee.

This gratification comes in two forms: monetary and material gratifications. Brown envelope according to Nkwocha cited in Eke (2014), is the “money given to reporters or editors to persuade them to write positive stories or kill a negative story…” Eke further states that the unethical trend is widely practiced by reporters who demand it as a right; a situation that portrays the brown envelope syndrome as a journalism convention rather than a condemnable act. On the other hand, Okunna cited in Eke (2014), while describing brown envelope as probably the commonest type of bribe in journalism, defines it as “a monetary bribe handed out to an unethical journalist to pressurize him or her into doing what the bribe giver wants.” She adds that “once accepted, monetary bribes and other gifts tie the hands of journalists who then become incapable of being objective in reporting events and issues involving people who give the gifts”.

Akabogu (2005), notes that the practice stifles journalistic freedom in the exercise of professional judgement and evokes the idea of criminality in the minds of right-thinking people. Furthermore, Nwabueze (2010), describes this practice as a cankerworm eating deep into the journalism profession. Brown envelop is a clear instance of violation of ethics of journalism. It's against this background this study tries to sought out the link between brown envelop and professional performance among journalists in Adamawa state.

**Research Questions**

The following questions are formulated to guide this study:

1. What are the working conditions that lead to adherence of brown envelope by journalist in Adamawa State?
2. What is the relationship between brown envelop and professional performance of journalists in Adamawa State?
3. What are the areas needed to be improved in order to curtail brown envelope among journalists?

(a) Conceptual Review and Review of Related Literature

Brown envelope like many other concepts in social sciences has no single
universally acceptable definition. For instance, Nwabueze (2010), sees brown envelope practice as “accepting gratifications for performing journalistic task” (p.498). While Omanga (2015), maintained that brown envelope journalism occurs when news sources or news makers transfer rewards to individual journalists with the intention of appealing to the local decision-making in exchange for positive or uncritical media coverage. Nkwocha (2004), cited in Eke (2016), defines Brown Envelop as the “money given to reporters or editors to persuade them to write positive stories or kill a negative story…” He accented that the unethical trend is widely practised by reporters who sees it as a right; a situation that portrays the brown envelope syndrome as a conventionally acceptable rather than a condemnable act in journalism (p.68).

Nwabueze (2010), and Skjerdal (2010), stressed that one indication that points at the prevalence of the uncanny “Brown Envelop” is the incredible range of local terms used to denote hidden monetary contributions to journalists in Africa. For instance, gombo (Cameroon), soli (Ghana), gatu (Liberia), coupe (Democratic Republic of Congo), camora (Congo Brazzaville), mshiko (Tanzania), ndalama yamatako (Zambia), bahasha (Kenya), chipondamthengo (Malawi) and buche (Ethiopia); not to mention Nigeria where, the terminologies around 'pocket-journalism' is richer than anywhere else. Keske, kola, goro, chope, jewu and kwa among other are used to refer to the brown envelop. Because the practice is alive and well nurtured, new terminologies are recurrently emerging to add to the endless vocabulary, for example, in Zambia, where ndalama yamaatako ('money of the buttocks') is being replaced by nchiekeleko, literary meaning 'cut a piece for me' (Gondwe, 2014).

Journalism ethics stemmed from the broader concept of 'Ethics' which was derived from the Greek ethos, meaning “custom,” “usage,” or “character.” It is often thought of as a rational process applying established principles when two moral obligations collide (Day, 2006), equally, Bowless and Borden (2004), defines ethics as a set of principles of conduct governing an individual or group. Ethics is the science of rightness and wrongness of conduct. Conduct is purposive action, which involves choice and will. Similarly, Pate cited in Nasidi (2016), opined that ethics means morality or study of morality, ethics is a branch of philosophy that involves systematizing, defending and recommending concepts of right and wrong conduct, often addressing disputes of moral mixture.

The codes of ethics succinctly stated that:

- A journalist should neither solicit nor accept bribe, gratification or patronage to suppress or publish information.
b. To determine payment for publication of news is inimical to the notion of news as fair, accurate, unbiased and factual report of an event.

Relating these provisions as encapsulated in journalism Codes of Ethics in Nigeria, with the literatures so far documented by researchers it is crystal clear that journalists most times do not abide by the aforementioned provisions. Also the idea of giving out brown envelopes to journalists by the news sources is very rampant in the Nigerian Media. The integrity of Journalists has been bought by the bribes and incentives of politicians and other members of elite's class, especially those in decision making position. Monetary bribes and other gifts holds journalist at ransom who then become incapable of being objective in reporting events and issues involving people who offer them such gifts. Also, some publishers are in the habit of getting contracts from the government, such publishers always try to discourage their newspapers and magazine from publishing stories that are critical of the government and its policies (Eke, 2013).

Ethics are important because they prescribe acceptable codes of professional behaviour (James, 2007). Despite its importance, in itself, an ethic code of conduct can do nothing. The responsibility for serving the public rests squarely on the shoulders of the individual reporters and their editors. Obviously, the challenges facing journalism today has less to do with failure to abide by the ethics of the profession. The challenge has to do with lack of commitment by the journalists to consider themselves as custodians of the society and that they don't need to be paid or promoted to carry their onerous responsibility (Folarin, 2005). Folarin furthers that the good job of informing and educating the Nigeria public should be the priority and not personal fulfilment. To do this, journalists must commit themselves to public service.

Brown envelop has been cited to have adverse effect on the credibility of journalism in the eyes of the publics whom it serves. For instance, Ndangam (2006), narrates that the patronage system, where the giver (source) expects certain services in return from the receiver (journalist), has become institutionalized. Journalism “cannot be practised outside the culture and political system in which it is practised” (p.167). Thus, in the case of Nigeria, which has a strong tradition of clientelism, journalism practice adopts a habit of creating and maintaining ties between reporters and sources to the extent that investigative reporting will be subdued because the reporter and the source have a mutual interest in not exposing the scandal; the reporter for financial reasons, and the source for status reasons (Yusha'u, 2009).
Professional performance can be defined as a level at which the practitioners of a particular profession abide by the stipulated norms guiding their profession (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Professional performance of journalism as skilled endeavour is determined by the autonomy of the profession, the public service orientation and the relationship between the media, the government and other social institutions in the society in question. Also the economic stability and viability of a country is an important factor determining the professional performance of journalists in any society: The professional performance of the media operating in economically and politically developed societies (for example, the USA) tend to be higher than the one operating in a third world countries like Nigeria (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). A number of studies have been carried out by different researchers in the field of mass communication to ascertain the menace of brown envelope in journalism. A study was conducted by Oberiri (2016), titled “The perception of Taraba media practitioners on brown envelop in journalism practice”, wherein the researcher draws 75 out of the 293 registered journalists in Taraba as the sample population for the study. The findings of the study revealed that the practice is highly prevalent in the area, and equally revealed that brown envelopes affects the social responsibility as well as objectivity and balance in journalism practice/reporting. At the end, the researcher recommends that to reverse the menace of brown envelope, the media professional bodies should be serious in maintaining ethics in the media industry by sanctioning erring journalists to ensure that journalism practitioners abide by the laid down codes of ethics of the profession.

Ogbole (2012), studied perception of Benue media practitioners on brown envelope syndrome and found that majority of the respondents see brown envelope as a gift from news sources, rather than bribe and that acceptance of brown envelope do not make them less objective in news coverage. As far as these groups of journalists are concerned, brown envelope is not bribe and does not deter their objectivity, but rather is a gift a news source wishes to give out in appreciation of journalistic work. In the same study, He found out that even if Journalist salaries are improved they will still partake in brown envelope journalism as they see it as a normal routine.

A study conducted by Denis Mpagaze (2010), on “Corruption in The Media: Perceptions of Tanzanian Journalists” confirmed that corruption was rampant in the Tanzanian media. According to his findings, journalists in Tanzania admitted taking money from their sources of
information which they called mshiko, kitu kidogo, mkukuta and many others. Forty respondents “strongly agreed” that the brown envelope practice was rife in Tanzanian media with 32 and 10 stating “agreed” and “neutral” respectively while 3 disagreed and only 2 respondents strongly disagreed. In the study, the researcher asked the journalists to mention by number and not by names who they think were corrupt journalists since it was assumed it could be difficult to find journalists in a position of accepting bribes. Sixty-one respondents said that they personally “know” corrupt journalists whereas, 26 respondents said that they “do not know” of such journalists. When asked whether they had personally taken any form of bribes, only 12 out of the 87 journalists admitted to have taken bribes.

Theoretical Framework
Social responsibility theory was adopted as a theoretical binding for this research. According to McQuail (2005), the theory emerged because the press abused the freedom which they enjoyed as a result of the free press. Among the abuses of the free press are: The excesses and distortion in yellow journalism, sensationalism, invasion of privacy, defamation of character, among others. It was as a result of these that the Hutchins commission was set up in 1947 to look into the criticisms of the press. The committee concluded that freedom and responsibility goes hand in hand and that the press should be periodically reminded of its responsibilities to the society it serves. The view of social responsibility theory is a view of media ownership as a form of public trust or stewardship, rather than an unlimited private franchise” (McQuail, 2010).

This study premise on the assumption of the social responsibility theory. The theory suggests that “Freedom comes with concomitant obligations, therefore, the media (journalists) who are given a privileged position to watch, monitor, comment, expose and even criticise the activities in their societies (as backed by the constitutional provisions of several countries across the globe) are equally saddled with the “Responsibility” of being the custodians of their societies. Therefore, journalists and the mass media being socially responsible as implied by this theory means: Developing ethical norms and strictly abiding by them in the everyday journalistic routine activities and refraining from corruption. Accepting brown envelop, as postulated by Siebert, Peterson & Schramm (1978), in this theory, is inimical to the social responsibility of the press and equally undermines the professionalism of journalism.
Methodology
The study adopted mixed method of data gathering where both qualitative and quantitative methods were used: The survey and in-depth interview methods. Questionnaire and interview guide were designed and used in soliciting data. The population of this study comprised of registered journalists in Adamawa state. Based on the information obtained from the president of NUJ Adamawa State chapter, the total number of registered journalists as at June 2019 is 172. A multi-staged sampling procedure was adopted in drawing respondents for the study. For the qualitative aspect of the study a sample size of 120 was drawn from the population using an online sample calculator. 120 questionnaires were distributed and retrieved. Purposive sampling techniques was employed in selecting respondents for qualitative method. Four seasoned journalists who have spent not less than fifteen years in journalism (and rose to the level of at least principal reporters) was purposively selected because they are in a better position to explain all that is need about the subject matter.

Data Presentation and Analysis: Quantitative Data
Table 1. Distribution of responses of journalists regarding poor salary and remuneration of staff as a major factor behind the prevalence of envelop journalism in Adamawa state.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agreed</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>64.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agreed</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagreed</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagreed</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field survey (2019)

About 64.2% of the respondents agreed that poor salary and remuneration of journalist is responsible for the prevalence of envelop journalism. This aligns with the findings of Oberiri (2016) which shows that poor remuneration of journalists is the reason cited as being responsible for brown envelop.
Table 2: Distribution of respondents’ views on whether Brown envelop has negative impact on professional performance of journalists.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agreed</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>28.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agreed</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>45.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagreed</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagreed</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field survey (2019)

Table 2 also shows that 45.8% of respondents strongly agreed that brown envelop is inimical to professionalism of journalists while 28.4 % also agreed brown envelop has negative impact on professional performance of journalists. The total number of strongly agreed and agreed scored 74.2% (28.4 + 45.8). Based on the result obtained we can conclude that brown envelop has negative impact on journalism.

Quantitative Data

In an attempt to answer research question three, the study used In-depth Interview (IDI) to solicited data from experienced journalist on the areas needed to be improved in order to curtail brown envelope among journalists. The respondents shared their views and presented using explanatory model.

Respondent 01. “…There is first of all the need for a favourable working condition for journalists. Most of journalists are grossly underpaid and that some of the media organisations especially the private media, do not pay even the meagre salaries on time”. He added that “To end brown envelop all hands must be on deck. There is need to move beyond ethics, there must be stiff punishment for journalists who collect envelops” … “the media client should also desist from offering journalists such bribe, because sometimes it is temptation of the clients that lures journalists into taking gratification”.

Respondent 02: “Journalists on themselves needs to understand you don't need any gratification for doing what you are supposed to do because you are a watchdog.” He furthers, “if you look at the issue critically journalists are not well paid and that they are human beings who have responsibilities
needs and wants”. “brown envelop syndrome may be ended if media proprietors are up and doing, paying journalists their entitlements as at when due, and most importantly quacks must be fished out”.

**Respondent 03**: “…actually if you look if you look at the kind of remuneration, salary given to journalists, there is imbalance between the salaries journalists collect and the risks involved in the work. If salaries and entitlements of the journalists are improved, at least it will reduce brown envelop patronage among journalists”. Also, “There is need for the journalists and media owners to have a kind of round table and draw some kind of in-house rules and regulations to make sure that who so ever involve in this act is punished”.

**Respondent 04**: Anonymous journalist. “…For instance, if you look at all the advanced media organizations, their reporters are well paid and covered by insurance in an atmosphere of uncertainty, as a result you hardly see their correspondents taking bribe or whatever you call it, why? Because they see it as a disgrace to their organizations and even themselves”. The journalist furthers that, “also proliferation of media organization should also be checked by the government…”.

All the four respondents hold similar views about the areas needed to be improved in order to end envelop journalism in Nigeria. Increment of salaries alone is not enough to discourage envelop journalism in Nigeria, they suggested the need for journalists to be 'Insured'. They opined that stakeholders in journalism should introduce an insurance scheme that will cover the journalists and their families in the atmosphere of uncertainty like what is obtained in the western world. The interviewees furthered that in order to end brown envelop and indeed all sorts of ethical violations in journalism, policing the affairs of the profession should not be left in the hands of the journalists and their professional bodies alone; all hands need to be on deck. They stressed on the need for massive public orientation aimed at raising public awareness about the dangers of offering journalists the 'token of appreciation'. In essence, media clients need to desist from offering journalists anything in the name of appreciation because sometimes the journalists are being tempted by their clients. The interviewees also noted the magnitude of offering media practitioners a 'timely' 'take-home-pay' (salary) that will actually take them home (cater for them).
References


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