

Assessing Entertainment Given to Journalists Covering Events in Nigeria, Through the Prism of Ethical Consideration

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Abstract: The Paper examined entertainment given to journalists covering events in Nigeria, through the prism of ethical consideration. The study was predicated on Social Responsibility Theory (SRT), whilst, the objectives centered on determining whether or not entertainment given to journalists covering events constitute a breach and violation to the Nigerian journalism ethical code, as well as, to ascertain whether it (entertainment) contributes to slanting of news stories, and affects journalism in Nigeria, amongst others. Interview schedule was used to elicit information from 10 journalists, from different media establishments, (5 practising journalists and 5 former journalists, who are now lecturers). The respondents were purposively selected, based on reach, experience, knowledgeable of subject matter, and visibility. Findings indicates that journalists in Nigeria are evenly divided as to whether entertainment constitute or breaches the ethical code of the journalism profession, even though the Code (Article 7) states otherwise; and that entertainment contributes to slanting of the news stories in favour of the entertainer, amongst others. The study thus, recommends, among other things, that entertainment be stopped, at all cost, and a sensitisation campaign be carried-out so as to debrief and sensitise journalists on the effects; and an amendment to Article 7 of the Code, with a bid to, expressly, reflecting receipt of entertainment as a gross violation to the journalism code.

Keywords: Entertainment, Journalists, Events, Ethical Consideration.

INTRODUCTION

Journalism, as defined by the American Press Institute, is the activity of gathering, assessing, creating and presenting news and information. Oxford English Dictionary defined Journalism as the activity or profession of writing for newspapers, magazines, or news websites or preparing news to be broadcast. Journalism is the production and distribution of reports on current events based on facts and supported with proof or evidence. The word journalism applies to the occupation, whilst journalistic media include print, television, radio, internet, amongst others. Scholars assert that, even though differences exist in the journalism profession, the most share common elements include, truthfulness, accuracy, objectivity, impartiality, fairness, and public accountability – as these apply to the acquisition of newsworthy information and its subsequent dissemination to the public (Fourth Estate and others). In agreement, Kovach & Rosentiel (2006) opine that journalists' first loyalty should be to the citizenry, that journalists are obligated to tell the truth, and must serve as an independent monitor of powerful individuals and institutions within society.

Further, and in agreement, Section 22 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, as amended, provides and empowers the press, by extension - journalists, to hold government accountable to the people. In the light of the above empowerments, adhering to journalistic standards and ethical provisions, which requires acceptance of no form of inducement,

become imperative, and in order to provide citizens information or tools germane to their participation in the political process, amongst others.

On the other hand, Ethics, defined as the moral principles that govern a person's behaviour or the conducting of an activity, and a branch of knowledge that deals with moral principles, come handy, if journalism profession is to tower and maintain the esteem, often, ascribed to it by several scholars, practitioners, law, and leaders of governments. All professions have ethical principles that are expected to be followed in order to, effectively, carry out their duties, while being morally upright. Journalism as a profession has its own ethical principles that journalists must adhere to, in order to provide trustworthy information to the public. The ethical principles of journalism are truthfulness, accuracy, objectivity, impartiality, fairness, and public accountability, amongst others. Scholars agree that compromising these principles will erode and obliterate the confidence and trust citizens reposed on the media.

Available data, unfortunately, indicates that journalists in Nigeria compromise these ethical principles, due to one reason or the other, and this has led to proliferation of ethical issues, such Brown envelope syndrome - where journalists receive favours or bribes in various forms, in exchange for news articles, often, slanted to favour the giver of such bribe (Arowolo, 2018). In Nigeria, of recent, there has been clear indication that points to astronomical increase in slanted new

stories published in the media, which, scholars agree, dissipates the trust and confidence citizens have on the media. This may be very-well connected to unethical issues perpetuated by journalists covering beats and events, who, often, ostensibly on claims of paucity of funds and adequate remuneration, engage in activities antithetical to the ethics of the journalism profession, particularly, receipt of gratification, such as entertainment, amongst others.

This has germinated and festered the belief that journalists in the country do not care about the news value of a story, and only show up at events to get whatever entertainment offered by the celebrants, organizers, or officials - A move, several scholars agree influences their news judgment and blurs their vision on ethical news reporting. To this end, this study seeks to ascertain whether or not entertainment offered to journalists during events is against the ethical considerations of the profession, thus, blurs and inhibits reportage of news stories devoid of slanting and other incendiary considerations, amongst others.

Statement of the Problem

Available data indicates that several ethical issues abound in journalism practice or journalism as a profession. This issues include, receipt of gratifications, which, scholars assert has, continuously, plagued the journalism profession and has affected the credibility of news stories and media articles, especially here in Nigeria. To some journalists, tokens given at events or at social gatherings are not against the ethics of the profession, as these tokens are simply refer to or seen as 'entertainment', or 'appreciative gifts', or 'small change' or 'transport fare', from the host to the gentlemen of the press. To many others, the tokens given at events and social gatherings are ethically wrong, as it influences the objectivity of the journalist and further leads to the dissemination of slanted news stories in favour of the host. This entertainment, which come in form of food and drinks of all kinds, has continued unabated despite discordant tunes and disagreements from scholars and the citizens, on whether it constitute or offends the ethical provisions of the journalism profession in Nigeria, hence the need for this study. Also, given the above elucidation, it is unclear whether the entertainment (Food and drinks of all kinds) extended to, or given to journalists, who cover events violates the ethical principles of journalism, and by extension, help to curry favour from journalists in their reportage. In other words,

pushes the journalists to slant their news stories in favour of the entertainer.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To determine whether entertainment (Food and drinks of all kinds) given to journalists covering events breaches or violates journalism ethical code.
2. To find out whether the entertainment (Food and drinks of all kinds) given to journalists covering events contribute to slanting of news stories in favour of the entertainer.
3. To identify the effects of entertainment given to journalists covering events on journalism in Nigeria
4. To ascertain the disposition of journalists towards entertainment (Food and drinks of all kinds), when covering events.

Research Questions

1. Does entertainment (Food and drinks of all kinds) given to journalists covering events constitute breach of the journalism ethical code?
2. To what extent does entertainment (Food and drinks of all kinds) given to journalists covering events contribute to slanting of news stories?
3. What are the effects of entertainment given to journalists covering events on journalism in Nigeria?
4. What are the disposition of journalists towards entertainment (Food and drinks of all kinds), given to journalists when covering events?

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

This study is predicated on the Social Responsibility Theory (SRT) propounded by Siebert, Schramm and Peterson (1956). The theory, amongst others, enunciated that the media's obligation to the society is to serve as a watch-dog, and to ensure that information is accessed and disseminated to the society, so as to ennoble and enable them to participate in the governing process of the society. Peterson (2005) asserts in relation to SRT, that freedom carries obligation, and that the press which enjoys privileged position under the government (Constitution) is obliged to be responsible to the society. He (Peterson) considered the following as the social responsibility of the press: Servicing the political system by providing information, discussion and debate on public affairs; Enlightening the public so as to make it capable of self-government; Safeguarding the rights of the individuals by serving as watchdog against

government. Further, Nwachukwu, Asak and Asadu (cited in Chukwu 2019) described SRT as a 20th century theory, which emphasizes phrases like ‘the public right to know’ and ‘the public responsibility of the press’.

Given the above, journalists are, in order to perform these onerous functions, to ensure that they keep to the ethical codes of the profession, abhorring anything that will make them to prevaricate, and/or succumb to filthy-lucre that blur journalistic-vision.

Scholars agree that, for journalism profession to blossom and continue to hold the esteem, acclaim, and prestige ascribed to it by the society, journalists should ensure that accessing and dissemination of information must be in accordance with the journalism’s ethical code, which, amongst others, requires journalists to abhor gratification in any form or shape, so as not to be lured into the murky-water of corruption, bedevilling the Nigerian society. On the esteem of the media, Burke, (cited in Chukwu & Ihejirika 2018), notes thus: sited yonder are the fourth of estate of the realm...greater than them all (other realms – Executive, Legislature and the Judiciary). In the same vein, the media is seen and characterized as the barometer and the conscience of a just society. Ekeanyanwu (2017) validates the above, thus, that the mass media not only provides information, but also confers status and legitimacy on political leaders and issues. Whilst, scholars agree that a proactive press would expose corruption, keep the political process honest, flourish democracy and engender a virile state.

The research quips that the essence of journalism is to provide citizens with reliable and untainted information, through the discipline of adherence to the journalistic ethical code, and verification, in order to ensure that information disseminated meets the standard outlined in the Code. Okunna (2003), concluded that meaningful contribution to national development can only be achieved by a disciplined press. Hodgins (2019) asserts in support, that information should be conveyed with accuracy, insight and dispatch, in such a manner that the truth is served, and the rightness of things is made slowly, even if not immediately, more evident. Kovach and Rosentiel (2007), in the light of the above, outlined the following as the elements and essence of journalism – Obligation to tell the truth; first loyalty is to citizens; discipline of verification; practitioners must maintain an independence from those they cover; must serve as

an independent monitor of power; must provide a forum for public criticism and compromise; must strive to keep the significance, interesting and relevant; must keep the news comprehensive and proportional; and practitioners must be allowed to exercise their personal conscience.

On the other hand, ethics is often thought of as a rational process applying established principles when two moral obligations collide (Day, 2006). Bowles and Borden, (2004) see ethics as a set of principles of conduct governing an individual or group. Ethics, according to Ekeanyanwu and Obianigwe (2012) captured the term, succinctly, as an integral part of human existence that is primarily concerned with the personal duties of an individual to himself and to others”. This suggests that ethics is, intrinsically, a part of the human existence that requires a group or individual or individuals to discharge duties it owe to himself, groups, and the society creditably. It is, also, indicates, by extension, that an individual or group’s survival is predicated on the performance of these duties. In agreement, Day (2006) identified the following – need for: social stability, social hierarchy, promotion of a dynamic social ecology, resolution of conflicts, and clarification of values, as the reasons why every society needs a system of ethics.

In journalism, ethics regulate the behaviour of journalists and guard them against the abuses of their power as gatekeepers and watchdogs of issues (Ahmed et al, 2020). The universally accepted ethical principles in journalism are truth, objectivity, fairness and accuracy. Nwodu (2006) and Udeze (2012, observed that the ethical code prescribed for journalists are; fairness and accuracy, avoidance of discrimination of any kind, maintaining decency, protect the confidentiality of sources, exhibiting a high level of responsibility in deciding what should be news and shunning the act of soliciting for or accepting a bribe and all forms of gratifications as a precondition for publishing information. The journalism ethical code further provides in Article 7, under Reward and Gratification, that a journalist should neither solicit nor accept bribe, gratification or patronage to suppress public information. The research quips that herein lies the kernel of this study. Also, Article 10, under Access to Information, that journalists should strive to employ open and honest means in the gathering of information. Exceptional method may be employed only when public interest is at stake.

Empirical Review

Okoro and Chinweobo-Onuoha (2013) conducted a study on the perception of journalists on the brown envelope syndrome and its implications for journalism practice in Nigeria. The study revealed that brown envelope was practiced by most journalists due to greed and it concluded that the giving and acceptance of brown envelope in whatever form is a corrupt and unprofessional conduct that negatively influences journalism practice in Nigeria. The study further concluded that this leads amplification and exaggeration of unimportant issues to the detriment of the important issues, so as to satisfy the brown-envelope-givers.

Similarly, Arowolo (2018) conducted a study on the negative effect of brown envelope in the practice of journalism in Nigeria: a case of the Vanguard Newspaper. The study revealed that most journalists are now accustomed to the practice of brown envelope due to a number of factors such as meager salaries received by these journalists, level and standard of education of some journalists, and lastly, the view that such gifts which comes in different forms are tokens of appreciation. It also revealed that such practice has negatively affected the reportage of events by these journalists and most of the time, slanted information written to please the hosts is what is made available for public consumption.

Further, Ahmed et al (2020) studied the implications of corruption in the media on ethical and socially responsible journalism in Nigeria. The study revealed that the issue of brown envelope is as a result of poor journalistic training and lack of professionalism, amongst others.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted qualitative research approach. Interview schedule was utilised to elicit responses from 10 journalists (5 practising journalists and 5 former journalists, who are now lecturers), purposively selected, based on reach, experience, knowledgeability of subject matter, and visibility. Further, the respondents were from different media establishments. The mix of private and government-owned media were also taken into cognisance, whilst selecting the journalists. Further to the above, code of the Nigerian journalism profession, research works and extensive literature pertaining to the subject were, studiously and nomothetically, perused, with the bid to ascertaining its position on breach of the extent journalism code.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Responses from the interview with the respondents regarding question one:

Table 1: Entertainment breaches journalism ethical code

Questions	Respondents' responses
Whether entertainment given to journalists covering events constitute breach of the journalism ethical code.	The respondents, evenly, disagree
Do you know that receipt of entertainment is against the ethical code of journalism?	Half of the respondents agree, whilst the remaining half disagree that entertainment is against the journalism ethical code.
On whether they have read the code of ethic of the journalism profession?	Half of the respondents said Yes, whilst half said No
Have you participated in the entertainment given to journalists covering events?	All the respondents said Yes

The table shows that half of the journalists have not read the ethical code of Nigerian journalism, do not know whether receipt of entertainment and entertainment breaches the ethical code of Nigerian journalism. It also shows that all the respondents had partaken or participated in the entertainment, whilst covering events.

Responses from the interview with the respondents regarding question two:

Table 2: Extent entertainment contribute to slanting of news stories

Questions	Respondents' responses
Does entertainment (Food and drinks of all kinds) given to journalists covering events contribute to slanting of news stories?	All the respondents said Yes
How often does entertainment lead to slanting of news story?	Seven (7) respondents said Not Often , whilst, the rest said Very Often

The table indicates that entertainment given to journalists covering events contribute to slanting

of news story. It also shows that entertainment does not, very often, lead to slanting of news story.

Responses from the interview with the respondents regarding question three:

Table 3: Effect of entertainment given to journalists covering events on journalism

Question	Respondents' responses
Does entertainment given to journalists covering events effect journalism in Nigeria?	All the respondents said Yes
State the ways in which entertainment given to journalists covering events affect journalism in Nigeria?	They listed the following as the effects: compromised journalistic practice; belittles the media; causes slanting of news stories; obliterate investigative journalism; affects gatekeeping process.

The above table indicates that entertainment given to journalists covering events affects journalism in Nigeria, and by extension, compromise journalistic practice; belittles the media; causes slanting of news stories; obliterates investigative journalism; and affects gatekeeping process.

Responses from the interview with the respondents regarding question four:

Table 4: Disposition of journalists towards entertainment given to journalists

Questions	Respondents' responses
Do you look forward to entertainment when covering events?	Six of the respondents said Yes , whilst 4 respondents said NO .
What is your disposition towards entertainment of journalists when covering events?	All the respondents indicate favourable disposition.
Do you like the entertainment part of journalists' events-covering?	All the respondents said Yes

The table indicates that journalists are favourably disposed to, look forward to, and like entertainment extended to journalists, whilst covering events.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Data from the study indicates that half of the journalists have not read the ethical code of Nigerian journalism, do not know whether receipt of entertainment and entertainment breaches the ethical code of Nigerian journalism. The implication of the above is that journalists in Nigeria are evenly divided regarding to whether entertainment constitute or breaches the ethical code of the profession. Even though, Article 7 of the Nigerian Journalism code, expressly, abhors, and designated entertainment as a form of gratification journalists should avoid. This, clearly, justifies and leans towards the school of thought that believes and feels that journalism in Nigeria is not a profession, but rather a quasi-profession.

The above results contrast, sharply, with the assumptions of the theoretical framework upon which this work is predicated. In that a media with the above discordant tunes (such as the results elucidated above, cannot, in the true sense, reflect the tenets of social responsibility theory, which demands the media to, amongst others, be the watchdog of the society. Further, the data, also, shows that all the respondents had partaken or participated in the entertainment, whilst covering events. This result tandem with the outcome or result of the studies empirically reviewed in this work, particularly, the study conducted by Okoro and Chinweobo-Onuoha, and Arowolo, which, respectively, indicated that 'most journalists engage in brown envelope syndrome' and most journalists are now accustomed to the practice of brown envelope – another form of gratification.

Similarly, data elicited in response to question indicates that entertainment given to journalists covering events contribute to slanting of news story. The implication of the above result is the media have negated one of the most important code of the journalism profession, which requires the media to, always, disseminate information balanced-information. In other words, the media must ensure that Information disseminated are factual, truth, accurate, and balanced, devoid of any form of bias. This result agrees with the works empirically reviewed in this study, but quips that a press run, organised, and constituted in this form cannot perform the role highlighted by Peterson, as fundamental to social responsibility theory; and

Kovach and Rosentiel's essence of journalism, expressed in the literature review of this study.

The result also shows that entertainment does not, very often, lead to slanting of news story. The implication of the above result is the media pick and chose the event or events the news story would be slanted. This is antithetical the code of journalism, which abhors selectivity and accordance of subjective privileges and preferences to events based on gratification.

Further, data from the study indicates that entertainment given to journalists covering events affects journalism in Nigeria, in so many ways. The study further identified compromise of journalistic practice; belittling or de-esteem of the media; slanting of news stories, most times, in favour of the entertainer; obliteration of investigative journalism; and erosion of the gatekeeping process, as the possible effects of entertainment extended to journalists, whilst covering events. The above result implies that entertainment to journalists covering events hydra-headed and has the propensity to de-esteem and destroy the age-long noble profession, described, aptly, by Burke, as the fourth estate of the realm, (after Judiciary, Legislature and the executive). It will, also, by extension, countermand scholars view of the press as the watchdog and the barometer of the society.

In the same vein, the study outcome also indicates a positive disposition towards the entertainment offered journalists. The outcome also, shows that journalists, apart from the above, like and look forward to the entertainment, whilst covering events. This implies that journalists are now dependent on this form of gratification, before they can execute the dictates of the profession, the researcher asserts that this positive disposition is antithetical to what the press or the media stands for, and/or requires, in order to exercise, discharge, and perform its role to the society.

In all fours, this result negates scholars' assertion, that a proactive press would expose corruption, keep the political process honest, flourish democracy and engender a virile state. Further, this outcome contrast with the assumptions of the social responsibility theory, and cannot enthrone honest political system conversed and promoted by the theory.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study, consequent on its findings, concludes that entertainment given to journalists covering

events contributes to slanting of news story, and affects journalism in Nigeria in so many ways, particularly, as enunciated in the discussion of findings of this work. To that extent, it is recommended that entertainment be stopped, at all cost, and a sensitisation campaign be carried-out so as to debrief and sensitise journalists on the effects and danger of engaging in the hydra-headed entertainment.

The study also concludes that entertainment is a form of gratification, which must be obliterated by all possible legal means. Therefore, it is recommended that Article 7 of the Journalism code be amended to, explicitly, reflect and include food and drinks of all kinds (entertainment) to journalists covering events, as gratification, which must be abhorred.

Further, the study concludes that half of the journalists have not read the ethical code of Nigerian journalism – a reprehensible act, that must not be allowed fester and thrive. Flowing from the above, the study recommends compulsory training for journalists in this regard, and for the adoption of the journalism code as the primary document utilised for interview of would-be journalists, and/or those seeking employment as journalists.

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