

Dilemma of the Nigerian Press and Difficulties in Adherence to Journalism Ethics: A Survey on Prescriptive and Situational Ethics in Journalism Practice

RESEARCH ARTICLE

*Dayo Duyile

Department of Mass Communication, Wesley University, Ondo

 dayoduyile@yahoo.com

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the difficulties facing journalists during the process of news gathering, news framing, news reporting, and news editing. It focuses on their considerations on what to report and how to report it in conformity with their work ethics and journalism ethics. The survey research method was adopted, and interviews and questionnaires were used as data gathering instruments. Using the purposive sampling technique, a sample size of sixty respondents was selected from among journalists in ten media establishments with a 220-journalist population. This study was anchored on framing theory and cognitive dissonance theory. Findings reveal that journalists adopt both forms of ethics in their approach to news framing and in their news judgements. They are of the view that adopting situational ethics does not constitute unethical behaviour and that using the two types of ethics should be acceptable in journalism practice. The study recommends that journalists should strictly adhere to the prescribed ethics of journalism in order to guarantee objectivity in journalism practice.

Methodology

Survey research with interviews and questionnaires, using purposive sampling of sixty respondents from ten media establishments.

Key Theories

Framing theory and cognitive dissonance theory to understand journalism ethics dilemmas.

Main Finding

Journalists adopt both prescribed and situational ethics, viewing this dual approach as acceptable in journalism practice.

Keywords: Prescribed ethics, situational ethics, journalism practice, dilemma, news **judgement**

INTRODUCTION

Background

Journalism is ethical when its code is professionally applied, ensuring objective news content for audience information. Conversely, it becomes unethical when personal interests introduce bias and subjectivity, or when the code of ethics is disregarded for personal preferences in reporting, editing, or headline casting.

The Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) code of ethics comprises five sections: Publication of Truth, Questions of Corruption, Questions of Free Access to News, Questions of Confidentiality, Plagiarism, and Errors of Fact. This study focuses on the 'Publication of Truth' section, which stipulates: "The public is entitled to the truth and only correct information can form the basis for sound journalism and ensure the confidence of the people. It is the moral duty of every journalist to always have respect for the truth and to publish or prepare for publication only the truth to the best of his or her knowledge. It is the duty of the journalist to publish only facts and never to suppress such facts as he/she knows; never to falsify either to suit his/her own purposes or any other purposes."

01

Publication of Truth

The moral duty of every journalist to always have respect for the truth and publish only correct information to ensure public confidence.

02

Ethical Challenges

Journalists face increasing dilemmas between personal interests, proprietor demands, and professional ethics in news production.

03

Professional Standards

The need for critical reporting, accuracy, fairness, and objectivity as essential elements of ethical journalism practice.

Alade Odunewu (2000), a former Chairman of the Nigerian Press Council, emphasised that "an ethical code is without doubt a sine qua non in any profession. Journalism today faces an increasing need for critical reporting, accuracy, fairness, and objectivity." He concluded that a code of ethics is a document of acceptable standards of human behaviour for all professionals, a postulation that extends to Nigerian journalists.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines ethics as the moral principles governing or influencing conduct. The Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary (3rd ed.) defines "ethics" as a system of accepted beliefs which control behaviour, especially such a system based on morals, and the study of what is morally right and what is not. Duyile (2011) observes that problematic ethical issues are mounting rapidly, with uncomfortable consequences for media practitioners, particularly journalists in broadcast, print, and online media.

Duyile (2011) summarised Continental and global media ethics, noting that many journalists often perceive media proprietors (of newspapers, radio, and television stations) as creating ethical dilemmas for their employees. Governments, particularly those funding public media for publicity and public relations, are also accused of hindering professional ethics in journalism practice.

Many writers have addressed journalism ethics, often recommending solutions to reduce dilemmas for practitioners and their media outlets. Agbanu (2011), for instance, concludes: "anyone preaching Western media ethics in Nigeria and indeed other African nations that share a similar media environment with Nigeria is engaging in a wild goose chase," attributing this to media owners (private and public) and the operational environment subtly encouraging or failing to eliminate unethical practices.

While Agbanu (2011) and Duyile (2011) agree that media owners encourage unethical behaviour, this researcher disagrees with advocating for a home-grown media ethics philosophy in Nigeria and other African nations. Historically, Nigerian media has adopted a code of journalism ethics formulated after Western practices. Ethics remains universal; mass media globally adhere to professional codes, with nations following principles similar to the first media code of ethics adopted by the American Society of Newspaper Editors in 1923.

LITERATURE REVIEW

What are the ethics of journalism? What is news framing? What is Cognitive Dissonance?

Kieran (1998) highlights media's strong and complex influence on how we understand and shape the world, stating: "From news reporting and investigative journalism to the broadcasting of soaps, dramas, and films, they provide us with information, entertainment, and seek to enhance our understanding of the world. Hence, in often indirect ways, the media engage with and affect our beliefs, values, and fundamental commitments."

Nsikan (2009), in "Ethical and Legal Issues in Journalism Practice in Nigeria," observes that journalists face dilemmas hinging on law and ethics, suggesting compliance with professional ethics as a solution.

Kayode and Akashoro (2010), citing Day (1991, pp. 2-3), define ethics as a branch of philosophy dealing with the moral component of human life. Citing Stoner, Freeman, and Gilbert (2002, pp. 107-109), they further define ethics as the study of people's rights and duties, and the moral rules people apply in decision-making.

In their treatment of ethical values and issues in news coverage in Nigeria, Kayode and Akashoro (2010) established a connection between excellent and ethical journalism practice. They stressed the imperativeness of ethical practice in journalism, noting widespread criticism regarding corruption in Nigeria's journalism.

Ethics and the Media

There are two main types of ethics: "Prescriptive Ethics" and "Situational Ethics," both employed by the media. Journalists often face a dilemma regarding which philosophical approach to follow when presenting news. "Prescriptive Ethics" involves strict adherence to formal, approved codes of conduct, whereas "Situational Ethics" denotes a journalist's inconsistent behavioural approach to ethical issues. The latter is an informal, non-prescribed version, reflecting how a journalist prefers to approach and report news or portray newsmakers to suit their subjective interests.

Vivian (2011) observed that with Situational Ethics, the same journalist might act differently in similar situations on different days.

Another scholar, Biagi (2003, p. 313), posits:

Ethical choices in many journalistic situations are not exquisitely simple. What is predictable about journalistic ethics is their unpredictability. Therefore, journalists generally adopt a philosophy of situational ethics: Because each circumstance is different, individual journalists must decide what is best in each situation.

In their treatment of ethical values and issues in news coverage in Nigeria, Kayode and Akashoro (2010) averred that there is a connection between excellent journalism practice and ethical journalism. On the need for more ethical practice, the two scholars state that hardly anyone will argue against the imperativeness of ethical practice in journalism, adding that there are widespread criticisms concerning corruption, which, they observe, currently exists in Nigeria's journalism practice.

Ethics, Communication and Democracy

Ethical journalism, when professionally executed, promotes democracy. However, when journalists, responsible for communicating objective information, fail to adhere to guiding rules, negative consequences for the democratic process arise.

Odionye (2016) observes: "by situating communication, information dissemination, and dialogue as key components of governance, a positive correlation between communication and good governance is tacitly assumed".

Discussing the role of journalists in investigative reporting, Adaja and Talabi (2016) affirmed: "it is the duty of journalists to hold the government accountable to the public. Journalists should continuously remember that they are the eyes and ears of the public."

Okunna (2003), concluding on "The Press, The Law and Society," recommended that journalists fully understand their profession's ethics and laws, and confidently express opinions even against official opposition.

Duyile (2011) explains that the ethics of a profession has to do with discipline, the ability to control one's own behaviour and working habits. He adds: "In the journalism profession, the journalist is obliged to discipline himself or herself by adhering strictly to the code of ethics as handed down by the professional unions."

Dominic (1996) and Odunewu (2000) share common views on ethics, agreeing that ethics is the study of standards of conduct and moral judgement.

Two Newspapers and the Dilemma of Two Editors

Using a participant observation approach, the researcher recalls two different incidents that fall under the pattern of "situational ethics." These involved The Daily Sketch, a defunct government-owned daily newspaper established in 1964 in Ibadan, Western Nigeria, and National Concord, a private newspaper established in 1980 and published in Lagos, Nigeria. The then editor of The Daily Sketch in the 1960s assigned a reporter to Sagamu Town, Ogun State, Nigeria, to conduct an investigative news story on the conflict between the paramount ruler of the town and a famous politician who was the Honourable Speaker of the Western Region's House of Assembly at that time.

The king of the town and the politician were from the same town but held different political views. The king had allegiance to the former Premier of the region, Chief Obafemi Awolowo of the Action Group Party, while the Honourable Speaker of the Region's Legislative Assembly supported the then-incumbent Premier, Chief Samuel Ladoke Akintola, and his party, the NNDP.

The reporter's assignment was specifically to investigate whether the king had been rightly dethroned as claimed by the Honourable Speaker, whether he (the king) had lost the confidence and support of his subjects and chiefs, and if the king had received a vote of no confidence from them.

The findings of the investigation revealed that the Honourable Speaker's claims were untrue and unfounded, and that the king was still on his throne with the support of all the traditional chiefs. The paramount ruler was enjoying the confidence of his subjects, and he was comfortably seated on his throne in his palace when the reporter visited and interviewed him.

Difficulty of Ethics

The reporter submitted his report and followed "prescriptive ethics" by delivering an objective, balanced, and fair account. However, the editor chose to take a "situational ethics" approach and opted not to publish the objective and fair report because it was at variance with the Honourable Speaker's point of view on the issue. As a result, the reporter tendered his resignation rather than rewriting the news report to suit the editor's interest.

In the second case, the National Concord and the Sunday Concord Newspapers, which belonged to the wealthy businessman, M.K.O. Abiola, published an investigative report on the Ikoyi-Victoria Island property of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, insinuating an "unfair deal."

The publications, which came in a series, were criticised by adherents of Chief Awolowo's political party as "unfair and distasteful." Observers noted that the two newspapers published the story about Awolowo to discredit his ambition to become President of Nigeria.

The proprietor of the newspapers had political allegiance to the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), which was the ruling party in Nigeria at the time, with Alhaji Shehu Shagari of NPN as the then President of Nigeria.

Prescriptive Ethics or Situational Ethics?

The two news judgements fall within the framework of situational ethics. Though the public has the right to know what goes on in their environment through objective and fair media reports, in the two narratives, the interests of the two media owners were the concern of the newspapers' editors. Neither of the two examples sided with prescriptive ethics.

From the discussion and narratives above, it is explicit that the two newspapers held tightly to the famous dictum popular in many media newsrooms: "He who pays the piper dictates the tune."

This may explain why some journalists take the "situational ethics" approach when issues concerning the publication of truth and performing their duty to the audience clash with their duty to media owners. Hence, situational ethics has become the de facto journalism philosophy and not the de jure journalism ethics as stated by NUJ's code of journalism ethics.

The question which arises and needs to be resolved is whether journalists should tilt their news judgements in favour of their employers' interests (media proprietors) or to serve the public interest.

Who Are Their Employers?

For whom is journalists' reportage meant? The assumptions that have been formulated since journalism began as a profession are that the public has the right to know and be adequately informed; that journalism should serve the public interest and not the narrow-minded interest of some individuals.

Scholars and journalists are supposed to understand the meaning and functions of the audience in mass communication. The audience consists of all people who are often acted upon by the media and who always react by sending feedback to editors, and who contribute to the growth of publications through their readership size, letters to editors, and articles.

The sociological nature of audiences and their extensive readership phenomenon, coupled with their advertisements and commercial patronage, all these give media audiences an edge over those who own the media.

McQuail (2010) observed that the function of information means that mass media ought to give citizens the information necessary to form opinions on current issues in society.

Mass media, according to McQuail, should provide representatives of various social strata with current information about political opinions and societal developments. In his view, there is often a considerable imbalance in the flow of information within newspapers; it is rare that journalists provide adequate context or depth that enables citizens to participate meaningfully in democratic decision-making. A large percentage of published news concerns public authorities and top influentials in politics, business, religion, academia, and other elite sectors.

By this observation, McQuail (2010) maintains that the imbalance of information served to the public by newspapers reflects an ethical deficiency in journalism practice, which restricts the public's ability to engage fully in the democratic process.

This is akin to Noelle-Neumann's (1973) theory in which she postulates that, despite surface appearances, the media work against diverse, robust public consideration of issues by giving opportunities to some highly placed individuals to express their viewpoints and giving such viewpoints massive publicity while making such minority views dominant and neglecting the viewpoints of the majority but non-outspoken citizens whose views are not featured by the media. She concludes that in such situations, the dominant views can snowball through the media and become consensus views without being sufficiently challenged. One observes that codes of ethics for journalism have been put together for journalists to adopt and to assist them on how they should frame their news reporting and information dissemination work; and that these codes of ethics are useful for fair, objective, and ethical journalism. But the problem lies in when the canons of journalism are not strictly followed by media practitioners. This is the difficulty of ethics. Hence, Vivian (2011) observed that media ethics codes are well-intended and they are often helpful guides, but they are simplistic when it comes to knotty moral questions.

Where do journalists go from here? Should they not submit fully to their codes of ethics and not be partially obedient to the code by being selective in their news judgements? Whichever way, the situation in Nigerian media-newspapers and broadcast media-makes prescriptive ethics a difficult journalism problem.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Journalists have sometimes been accused by prominent citizens in public and private sectors of Nigeria's economy and politics of exhibiting unethical behaviours in their journalism practice. Such accusations often conclude with the advice that journalists should be guided in their work by their professional ethics. However, such advice has not been fully acted upon, as portrayals in much media content are biased and lack objectivity, while others serve proprietary interests rather than the public interest. This study was undertaken to ascertain factors militating against journalists' non-compliance with prescribed codes of ethics and why journalists prefer situational ethics over prescribed ethics.

Core Problems

- Biased and non-objective media content
- Serving proprietary interests over public interest
- Non-compliance with prescribed ethics codes
- Preference for situational ethics

Research Questions

- What factors influence editors' news judgements?
- Do journalists adhere strictly to prescribed ethics?
- Why do journalists prefer situational ethics?
- What factors inhibit ethical compliance?

What factors inhibit them from strictly adhering to their professional ethics, or what influences an editor's state of mind in his/her news judgement? Should journalists be exempted from their ethical responsibilities, such as telling the truth, being objective, and not serving their personal or their proprietors' interests? Given the importance of journalism and the media to society, and in light of arguments concerning matters of impartiality, objectivity, public interest, and journalists' personalised ethical considerations favouring public figures in their framing of news and editorials, a load of ethical questions needs to be addressed. Hence this study. It seeks to uncover some of these difficulties facing journalists and their media in serving the public interest.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

These research questions have been set to guide the research process.

1. Who makes decisions regarding headlines for news stories in the media?
2. Do they craft news and feature headlines in strict adherence to prescriptive ethics as contained in the Nigerian journalism code of ethics?
3. What factors influence editors' news judgements on the portrayal of newsmakers and on the framing of news reports?
4. Do they subscribe to the idea of adopting prescriptive ethics or situational ethics while framing news headlines?

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study are:

1. to identify the journalists, referred to as gatekeepers, who are responsible for news placement and headline crafting in newspapers, news magazines, and radio/TV newsrooms.
2. to ascertain whether they adhere strictly to prescriptive ethics or adopt situational ethics in their news placements and news judgements during critical decision-making processes.
3. to determine what factors influence them in their news judgements, news framing, and ethical considerations.
4. to recommend solutions that could alleviate ethical difficulties confronting journalists in adopting prescriptive ethics and working according to journalistic ethics as prescribed by professional associations of journalists.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored in Framing Theory and Cognitive Dissonance Theory. Framing Theory was first propounded by Goffman (1974). He argued that people interpret their surroundings through their primary framework. He saw "framing" as a schemata of interpretation, which, according to Asemah (2010), enables individuals to locate, perceive, identify, and label occurrences or life experiences. Cognitive Dissonance Theory was propounded by Leon Festinger (1957). He submits that people have an inner need to ensure that their beliefs and behaviours are consistent. Linking framing with cognitive dissonance, the scholar holds that people strive to justify their behaviours by reducing the dissonance or inconsistency between their cognition (perceptions) and reality.

Framing Theory

Framing theory is clarified by McQuail (2005), who states that framing is a philosophical postulation that explains the way in which news content is typically shaped and contextualised by journalists. Asemah (2010) corroborates McQuail (2005) when he explains that framing theory is applicable to communication research and that there are individual and media frames. He emphasised that an individual's cognitive understanding of a given situation relates to the individual frame, while a media frame deals with words, images, phrases, and presentation styles used in media outlets concerning an issue.

Cognitive Dissonance Theory

Another scholarly observation on the issues of framing and dissonance would make framing clearer. Vaidis and Bran (2019) argue that cognitive dissonance arises when individuals hold conflicting cognitions and that methodological clarifications are required to properly study this phenomenon. The two scholars buttressed their explanations, stating that when an individual has cognitions that are not in agreement, a state of tension (dissonance) is created. Therefore, to reduce the dissonance, the individual either rejects the conflicting thought or rationalises it and absorbs it into his or her attitude.

Framing Theory (Goffman, 1974)

Explains how news content is shaped and contextualised by journalists through their cognitive understanding of situations and choice of words, images, and presentation styles.

Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger, 1957)

People have an inner need to ensure beliefs and behaviours are consistent. When conflicting cognitions occur, individuals either rejects conflicting thoughts or rationalises them.

Application to Journalism

Journalists use framing to reduce cognitive dissonance when faced with conflicts between prescriptive ethics and situational pressures from media proprietors.

METHODOLOGY

In-depth interviews and survey interviews were employed to assemble data for the study. One editor each from five print media and five radio broadcast media establishments was interviewed, while 50 line editors and senior journalists were interviewed through open-ended questionnaires. Five research assistants were employed for this study. They were given pre-study tutorials on the administration of the questionnaires.

Scope of the Study

This study was conducted and limited to a total of ten newspaper and radio establishments in five South-West state capitals in Nigeria: Akure, Ibadan, Osogbo, Ado-Ekiti, and Lagos.

Sample Size

- 60 respondents total
- 10 editors (5 print, 5 radio)
- 50 line editors and senior journalists
- Journalist population: 220

Data Collection

In-depth interviews with editors and open-ended questionnaires for line editors, administered by five trained research assistants.

Geographic Scope

Five South-West state capitals in Nigeria: Akure, Ibadan, Osogbo, Ado-Ekiti, and Lagos.

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

A total of 50 questionnaires were distributed to the respondents, comprising senior journalists and line editors, and all were returned. The response rate was 100%. The ten editors selected from the newspapers and radio broadcast stations, who are answerable to the proprietors for their actions, were intensely interviewed using an in-depth interview approach. Hence, their responses were used for analysis and interpretation in this study.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: Who makes decisions for casting headlines for news stories in your medium?

To this research question, all ten editors and fifty respondents attributed the responsibility for headline casting and corrections to the line editors, comprising sub-editors and heads of various editorial desks (e.g., political desk editor, economic and business desk editor, sports editor, foreign news editor).

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: Do they cast news and features headlines in strict adherence to prescribed journalism ethics as contained in the Nigerian journalism code of ethics?

The ten editors who were respondents to the in-depth interviews made different remarks about their attitudes and cognitive dissonance. All ten executive editors were unanimous regarding their thought processes when framing headlines or news stories pertaining to important personalities and news events. They agreed that they often encountered problems in their news judgements, but such issues were frequently resolved using situational ethics.

Editorial Decision-Making

Line editors (sub-editors and desk editors) are primarily responsible for headline casting and news placement decisions across print and radio media.

1

Influencing Factors

Editorial policy directions, media owner interests, and political and social affiliations significantly influence ethical decision-making processes.

2

Ethics Application

Editors unanimously reported problems in news judgements, often resolved using situational ethics rather than strict adherence to prescribed codes.

3

Professional Justification

The majority of respondents claimed that adopting situational ethics does not constitute a violation of professional ethics and should be acceptable.

4

They argued that the prescribed ethics do guide their decisions on the portrayal of newsmakers and news placement; that is, either giving prominence to news reports or alternatively making them obscure. However, this depends on other factors such as editorial policy directions, the interests of the media owner, political and social affiliations, etc. All these factors contribute to why they do not adhere fully to some aspects of journalism's prescribed ethics. Nevertheless, they claim that professional ethics have not been jettisoned. They were also unanimous in their views that to avoid dissonance or a clash of interest that could disharmonise their news judgement, it would be safer to adopt situational ethics.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3: What factors influence editors' news judgements regarding the portrayal of pictorial illustration of news and/or the framing of news reports?

From their responses, the majority mentioned factors inhibiting objectivity in news portrayal in their media. Both print and radio media respondents mentioned "proprietorial interests, editorial policies or philosophies, sensationalism, and public interest." The ten editors and the majority of the line editors elaborated on these factors as the major ones influencing decision-making in their news judgements and framing of news reports, as well as casting headlines for stories and photo illustrations.

RESEARCH QUESTION 4: Do you subscribe to the idea of regularly adopting prescriptive ethics or situational ethics while framing news headlines in your news broadcasts or in your publications as an editor?

This question aimed to ascertain the respondents' opinion on Research Question 2 and to test their consistency in their professional attitudes about which form of ethics they prefer to adopt when faced with ethical problems. The majority of the respondents affirmed that they still hold prescribed ethics in high esteem. However, they stated that in many circumstances, such as those involving political, social, and personal interests, it becomes impossible to adhere strictly to prescribed ethics. Hence, the option of situational ethics is preferred, according to the dictates of their minds and their preferences, to justify their actions in their news judgements.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study examined journalists' non-adherence to some aspects of the prescribed ethics of the journalism profession and the factors that contribute to their preference for adopting situational ethics in their news judgements, news reporting, news framing, and portrayals of information that are of public interest in their media. The study also examined those factors inhibiting their strict observance of ethical codes, vis-à-vis the challenges of cognitive dissonance among journalists in the performance of their professional duties.

Journalists and their media owners (media proprietors) operate their media business inseparably. They profess to be serving the public interest, or at least media philosophies or editorial policies claim to be doing so. From the data presented in this study, all respondents, without exception, acknowledged the importance of adhering to prescriptive ethics in journalism practice. Though none of them agreed to breaking their professional rules in their news framing, illustrations, and photo portrayals, they affirmed that they regularly adopt situational ethics in some of their news judgements when they considered it necessary.

100%

Response Rate

All 50 questionnaires were returned, and 10 editors were interviewed.

60

Total Respondents

From a population of 220 journalists across 10 media establishments.

100%

Ethics Acknowledgement

All respondents acknowledged the importance of prescriptive ethics.

They claim that adopting situational ethics does not amount to a violation of their professional ethics. In follow-up questions during the interviews, a majority of them claimed that it is acceptable to adopt situational ethics at critical times and also maintain obedience to prescribed ethics simultaneously. However, findings reveal that though line editors perform the actual editing of news and cast headlines, it is evident that senior editors have the final authority.

This situation corroborates Festinger (1957) and MacLeod (2008) in their treatment of Cognitive Dissonance Theory. Festinger (1957) reasons that people have an inner need to ensure that their beliefs are consistent with their behaviours; while McLeod's (2008) perspective is that people have an inner drive to hold all their attitudes and beliefs in harmony to avoid disharmony or dissonance. The views of the line editors were no different.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that journalists combine both prescribed ethics and situational ethics in the performance of their journalistic work. It is also concluded that many journalists make use of situational ethics in their news judgements to portray newsmakers and frame stories of news events, especially during the reportage of political stories and economic crises. It is also concluded that journalists, especially the line editors and the executive editors, whose responsibilities are to decide which news should be published and who do the editing jobs of the newspapers or the radio news bulletins, do not always follow the doctrine or tenet of journalism ethics as prescribed by their professional unions, the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), and the Nigeria Press Organisation (NPO).

01

Strict Adherence to Prescribed Ethics

To ensure complete objectivity in news framing and dissemination, journalists should stick to professionally prescribed ethics to sustain media credibility.

03

Appropriate Use of Subjectivity

Journalists should use feature articles and radio programmes to accommodate their inner needs and preferences, rather than news reporting, which must remain objective.

The study also concluded that some journalists have inner needs which they often satisfy; hence, they abandon their prescribed ethics in their news judgements and prefer situational ethics.

It is assumed that this always happens in their efforts to avoid feelings of dissonance. Journalists working for either print media or broadcast media tend to turn to situational ethics to relieve themselves of an obvious conflict with their professional ethics, which opposes a unilateral and unethically guided news judgement approach.

Finally, the study concluded that situational ethics is an unwritten journalism document which provides alternative routes for journalists to escape from the compulsion to adhere strictly to professional ethics or prescribed ethics in their professional practice.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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This research received no funding from any agency.

02

Sacred Treatment of News Reports

Media audiences have the right to know what goes on in their environment; journalists should treat news reports as sacred without unnecessary colouration.

04

Professional Integrity

Despite working for proprietors, journalists should maintain professional integrity and regard news content as sacred and inviolable in terms of ethical adherence.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR(S)

Dayo Duyile

 dayoduyile@yahoo.com

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