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Ethical Issues in Online News Reporting in Nigeria

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Abstract

The central narrative guiding ethical concerns in Nigeria's media landscape is the alarming rise of fake news, hate speech, questionable source credibility, quackery, and weak internal censorship—practices that contribute significantly to ethical lapses across online journalism platforms. In an era increasingly dominated by sensationalism and disinformation, there is diminishing emphasis on ethically sound and balanced reporting, which traditionally underpins objective journalism. This study investigates the ethical challenges associated with online reporting practices in Nigeria, with a specific focus on the proliferation of fake news across digital media platforms. Anchored in the Social Responsibility Theory, the research employs focus group discussions and key informant interviews for data collection. A systematic sampling technique was used to select 5,944 registered journalists, media scholars, and members of the Nigerian Union of Journalists'ethics committee from all six geo-political zones. Data were analyzed through detailed thematic probes and discussions. Key findings reveal a significant lack of comprehensive understanding of media laws among practitioners, many of whom are unaware of the legal implications tied to their professional responsibilities. The study highlights the critical need for clearly defined editorial policies to enhance source credibility and mitigate the spread of fake news and hate speech. Furthermore, ethical non-compliance is largely driven by the presence of

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untrained individuals posing as media influencers across various internet-based platforms. The study recommends deliberate efforts to improve awareness and enforcement of media laws, the establishment of a strong regulatory framework by both government and the Nigerian Union of Journalists, and ongoing training and retraining programs for digital media practitioners to uphold ethical journalism standards.

Keywords: Hate Speech; Online Reporting Platforms; Ethical Issues; Internal Censorship; Fake News

INTRODUCTION

The guiding and central narrative of ethical issues in an online reporting era in Nigeria is the alarming spread of fake news, hate speech, source credibility, trickery, poor internal censorship and other unpleasant practices resulting to serious ethical issues. As it is assumed, online reporting which is flourishing in the 21st century digital environment is given the task of cutting extravagances of those holding public offices in trust for the people through advocacy, information that enhance balance of power and keen awareness through a two-way flow of information.

In effect, the guarantee of the notion above is being driven by interactivity which is one of the value-added characteristics of reporting. As a recent type in journalism, interactivity affords online reporting platforms to have a powerful sense of user engagement with media texts, images, video or audio files in an interactive way. In this context, being interactive signifies that online reporting audience have ability to directly intervene in message content and change the images and texts that they access. Thus, online reporting provides an chance for a two-way communication and feedback process through Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) and enhances network connectivity which enables the audience to be more active to media messages.

However, a limiting factor to the numerous advantages of online reporting or journalism is the increasing spread of online reporting platforms operated by quacks with little or no training in journalism. Online reporting platforms often set up by high profile politicians, entertainment experts and business executives are tilted to rip the public of the core essence of journalism with serious ethical flaws. Idowu (2018,p.98) emphasized that the media parades all sort of players from the trained to the untrained; from the purpose

driven journalists to the intruders, the ethical and whimsical. Describing online reporting as hunters of ethical processes, he also stressed that online journalism practitioners discuss all manner of issues; the infantile, salacious, dignifying and useful, the draining and elevating. Their coverage ranges from politics, economy, religion, sports, real estate, music, fashion, lifestyle, horticulture and other aspects of coverage.

Undoubtedly, Ogbondah (2003, p.143) maintained that the responsibility to disseminate information which shall be exercised without unwarranted hindrance. In that process, those responsibilities are expected to be upfront and to have the nation's interest as the primary consideration. To this end, the series of communications in an online reporting era are usually controlled by many variables. Therefore, this paper studies the extent to which the variables give rise to ethical concerns in online journalism practice in Nigeria.

Statement of the problem

Ethical concerns have been the greatest burden to online reporting practice in Nigeria. Since attaining pervasive usage and acceptance two decades ago in the country, online reporting platforms have often acted contrary to ethical restraints in the guise of the much-affirmed press freedom to spread fake news, hate speech, lack of source credibility, quackery, poor internal censorship and other unwholesome practices resulting to serious ethical issues. Even though some media laws restrict the traditional journalist's right to secure information that may be detrimental to the sovereignty of the nation and the rights and privileges of the citizenry. Internet based journalism practitioners accentuate the act of seeking vital information about business executives, influential private individuals and government activities which are tagged official secrets or criticism of the government policies and programs in order to blackmail government officials for personal benefits as against the interest of the public.

In this light, Karikari (2018,p373) opined that internet based journalism as content formats emerging with the opening of the media space has been embroiled in ethical concerns in different degrees. It ranges from public complaints about impropriety of onlie journalism platforms have become increasingly widespread. Much of ethical concerns arise from incessant invective, blackmail, incendiary content, obscene scenes, intemperate and insulting manner of speech characterizing online reporting content and discussions arising from these contents. Kalikari also expressed that some online media platforms often times

attract public interest and unpopular style as a hired press which has no ideology, editorial philosophy nor editorial independence because some of these platforms are always at the service of anyone who can hire it. Ostensibly, online media platforms like; Sahara Reporters, Premium Times, Naijagists.com, Crossriverwatch.com, Ripples Nigeria, Periscope News Nigeria, Information Nigeria, Aproko247 News, The People's Gazette and a surplus of others have developed subtly innovative and effective strategy of ruling and controlling of public voices on several issues with the aim of hiding out objective voices within the social, cultural and political milieu in Nigeria. This is enamored by prevalent partisanship that dominate their area of coverage or where their contents are fancied. One therefore wonders why the proliferation of online reporting with no clear vision nor ethical consideration! One may also ask, why has the Nigerian Press Council, agitators of media rights agenda and other government agencies failed to develop an effective framework as a basic rule that would inculcate responsible and ethical policies in the operations of online reporting platforms in the country to simmer down occurrence of ethical concerns in their practice? Thus, these problems and the attempt to answer these questions therefore require this enquiry.

Objectives of the study

The main purpose of the study is to investigate the frequency of ethical issues in online reporting practice in Nigeria. Specifically, this paper requires to: determine the level of awareness of media laws among practitioners of online reporting platforms in Nigeria.

1.To ascertain whether online reporting platforms have editorial viewpoint and editorial liberation guiding their practice in Nigeria.

2. Find out the perceived adherence to media laws and ethical concerns among online journalism platforms in Nigeria.

3. Ascertain if there are fescue indicating that some online reporting platforms in Nigeria portray their activities as rented press which has no ideology

Research Questions

The following research questions were framed to guide this study:

1. What is the level of alertness of media laws among specialist of online reporting platforms in Nigeria?

2. How do editorial viewpoint and editorial liberation impact online reporting practice in Nigeria?

3. How does the professed loyalty to media laws impact ethical concerns among online reporting platforms in Nigeria.

4. What are the canes that some online reporting platforms in Nigeria portray their activities as rented press which has no ideology?

Significance of the study

This study will help practioners of online reporting in Nigeria to identify media laws and to know their rights and confines within the law and also curb and declare themselves within these limits and rights respectively.

It will also be helpful to students in institutions of higher learning offering Mass Communication and related courses who may wish to assume a study in this area or practice online reporting upon graduation.

This study will contribute to the existing literature in the area of ethical concerns among practitioners of online media platforms in Nigeria. Finally, it will further provide information that will help to review online reporting practice in Nigeria.

Review of Literature

1. **Reagents of online based Journalism**

Nigerian media scene has changed vividly over the years with online reporting news outlets competing for audiences with the traditional media organizations. This is worked by online reporting platforms, largely being coaxed by new media technologies resulting to the creation of many online media platforms such as Twitter, Youtube, Facebook, Tiktok, LinkeIn and other digital platforms that facilitate news production, spreading and consumption across the world. Ahmedu & Busari (2020,p.73) attributed online reporting platforms to social media which was developed through the web 2.0 coined to describe the new wave of internet modernization that enables users to publish and share contents online. The rise of online reporting platforms through improvement in communication technology, the news bionetwork has been transformed into another domain. With the

help of smartphones, online reporting platforms have reformed how people get and consume news (Udenze&Oshionebo 2020,p.115).

Also, online reporting platforms have employed the advantage of user generated content because this feature allows users themselves to develop the content on the social media platforms. For instance, practitioners of online reporting platforms can post any update on Facebook, upload video in YouTube and also create personal blogs. Therefore, it allows more participation and freedom of expression for the users in comparison to the conventional mass media such as television, radio, newspaper, etc. It is because; in social media your content is not sieved by any gatekeepers unlike the other forms of media.

Similarly, Schafer (2015, p.3) asserted that many scholars have interpreted the advent of online media as a second structural transformation of the public sphere. With the rise of individual websites and search engines in the early s, the increasing availability of information online, and with growing online audiences, scholars argued that these new media have the potential to fundamentally change societal communication and revive the public sphere. The advent of online reporting platforms has also encouraged ordinary citizens to produce and disseminating journalistic materials like (news, features, analyses, comments, photographs, cartoon etc.) Citizen's eyewitness accounts of events are now being relied on by many audiences as sources of news.

According to Yalaju (2001, p.185), the media is not only a collective propagandist and collective agitation, but also a collective organizer. In this respect, it can be compared with scaffolding put around a building under construction, it

indicates the shape the building will have and make communication between the various building works easier, helps the workers to distribute the work and to be aware of the general results jointly achieved by the organized works. Within this context, online reporting technology play vital role in establishing a good communication channel between the citizens and the government. For instance, nowadays citizens of a democratic country like Nigeria can have access to the information regarding any government policy as the information is digitalised and made easily accessible for the citizens.

2. **Online based Journalism as Commercial Journalism in an Era of Information Society**

New technology has enabled large number of participations in public discussions because a change in technology usage has shaped the communication process in which we

have formed a personal relation to the new media than what we had with the old media. The concept of virtual identity has become a popular idea for many researchers in order to understand the impact of new media in developing one's own identity. (Centre for Open and Distance Learning, Tezpur University, India). Accordingly, Ekwok, Ugo and Eja (2022), technological innovations and a climate of social media applications have encouraged multimedia communication, which incorporates video, audio, still photographs, chats, messages and graphics. With the aid of web links on different social media platforms, Nigerians with her multicultural political difference can access information in different forms. Interestingly, information society is the increasing influence of information in our daily life and also commercialisation of information in an Information and Communication Technology (ICT) driven global market. Information society emerged because of the advancement of information and communication technologies. In other words, information society can be considered to be the application of computers, information technology and telecommunication which facilitates communication in a much faster pace across the world. Essentially, these are key elements that propel online reporting which has raised ethical concerns. Idowu, (2018) posited that everything cannot be abandoned to the whims of commercial journalism as there remain legitimate public concerns and developmental issues that commercial journalism cannot adequately serve the core essence of the media as watchdog of the society.

Even though the advent of information age has brought about changes in the socio-economic lives of people in terms of information, dissemination and content creation; it has brought new form of digitalized products and services as well as new regulations on the information flow. Internet based platforms are digital technologies that allow people to share content, opinions, insights, experiences, perspectives and media among themselves. Even with myriads of advantages, digital media practitioners find it difficult to address ethical dilemmas associated with online reporting platforms because of competition and quest for higher traffic on their platforms.

3. **Media Laws, Tenets and Ethical Dilemmas among online reporting Platforms**

It is important to point out that some authors use media law, mass communication and press law interchangeably. This is because the mass communication domain has been stretched in recent times to include all forms of information and communicative processes and channels. The original mass communication domain consisted of the press (newspaper

and magazine), radio, television, film, public relations and advertising. But in recent times new forms and even old ones that were not in the original list have been included. Some of these new forms are; drama, phonographs, the internet which houses online reporting platforms, some authors have defined media laws to mean all the laws made to govern the activities of these wide varieties of media. For example, Malami (1999, P. 5) emphasized that;"media or press law, is the law governing the receiving and dissemination of ideas and information, the media of mass communication, the role of press and the writing public, their rights and their duties to the private individual and the state in general".

In the field of journalism which should ideally guide online reporting practitioners, media laws and ethics help journalists to determine what is right to be published on their platforms. The internet based journalist according to Rothstein 1979 as cited in (Udeze,2005,p.131) can use the platform to degrade, defame, shatter privacy, invade intimacy, stress the vulgar, the cheap and the grotesque. The online reporting practitioners have in most cases been confronted by ethical dilemmas. As a branch of philosophy, ethics makes it possible for media practitioners to subject their conduct to test in line with laid down procedures of the profession. It is instructive to note that media ethics are made by regulatory or journalism bodies but individually enforced.

Therefore, the following ethical issues have always confounded the advantages of internet based journalism practice in Nigeria.

4. **Fake News syndrome**

Fake news as described by Ogbette,Idam, Kareem &Ogbette (2019, p. 96) is a neologism often used to refer to fabricated news. This type of news found mostly among online reporting platforms have no basis, but is presented as being factually accurate. It ranges from, satire, false connection, misleading content, false context; genuine content shared with false contextual information, imposter content, manipulated content and fabricated content. Over the years, online reporting platforms have continued to aid and abate the popularization of fake news as a conundrum in the digital public sphere. It encourages false or misleading information presented as news which may damage the reputation of a person or entity.

The underlying fact as highlighted by Abiodun & Kayode (2018,p.403), the spread of fake news is very cheap on the internet."The invention of the internet has over the years given a new dimension to the operation of the media. The internet provides some form of

unparalleled avenue to the generality of the people trained and untrained, to disseminate information quickly and cheaply across the world". Ethical concerns like spread of fake news phenomenon on the internet by online reporting platforms is caused by the connected nature and the preference for speed over accuracy because internet content providers and distributors are constantly in a battle for attention and advertising revenue, they constantly flout ethical concerns to boost traffic. Unlike print publications that usually have reporters all over to authenticate facts before reporting a breaking story, internet based journalist are necessitated by the franticness of the world in which they find themselves (Ogbette, Idam, Kareem &Ogbette,2019).

Examining fake news as one of the biggest challenge online reporting platforms, Goode 2005 (as cited in Oso & Akanni, 2018) underscored that the persuasive role of computer mediated communication in contemporary social, political and cultural is however rarely in dispute. This argument was strengthened by the notion that media institutions and technologies such as online reporting platforms shouldered the burden of extreme hopes, expectations and fears throughout the twentieth century and this shows little signs of abating in the digitized twenty-first century.

In 2020, the spread of fake news on online reporting platforms like; Sahara reporters, Premium Times, NaijaGist.com, Pulse Nigeria among others created fear and anxiety in the lives of people across the country because many Nigerians who were confined in solitude depended on information gotten from online media platforms. Fear and wrong information resulted to the death of many innocent citizens who could not be rendered the help needed as a result of covid-19 fear. The COVID-19 pandemic heightened by fake news on different online reporting platforms caused massive disruptions in the normal life of the people, especially with several mitigating protocols rolled out to help curb its effects. As restrictions and containment protocols abound, the spread of fake news became a thorny issue that caused more deaths as a result of fear instilled on Nigerians by purveyors of fake news.

5. **Blackmail and Cyber bullying**

Blackmail and crimes against adult, teenagers, children using internet based platforms have in recent times exposed people to harassment and inappropriate communication with others. Increasing level of fake identity and fraud as a result of content from these internet platforms can be made available to anyone who is smart

enough. Most thieves only need a small amount of information to turn your life into a nightmare by forging your identity with the intent of blackmail. Information technology revolution associated with the use of online reporting platform has brought about two edge functions:

On one hand, it has contributed positive values to the world. While on the other hand, it has produced so many maladies that threaten societal order and also producing a new wave of crime to the world. Online media platforms which ordinarily should be a blessing as it exposes one to a lot of opportunities in various fields of life is fast becoming a source of discomfort and worry due to the blackmail being perpetrated through the platform.

6. **Ethical Dilemma of Hate Speech**

Emergence of hate speech as a serious ethical concern became rift because of raging proliferation of online or internet online reporting platforms which enhanced computer mediated communication that opened up discourse on several issues irrespective of location. Hate speech are words that are insulting to those in power, minority groups, ethnic stalk or demeaning of individuals who are particularly visible in the society.

At critical times such as during election campaigns like the 2023 general elections, hate speech was used to manipulate prospective voters; accusations of promoting hate speech may be traded among political opponents or used by those in power to curb dissent and criticism. Nemes (2002 p.193) considered the internet a very important channel for those who want to spread messages of hatred or incendiary remarks. In Nigeria today, practitioners of internet deliberately show callousness in discharging their roles as information platforms, rather they serve as the machinery for promoting disunity, igniting crises and triggering hatred among the members of the society (Ali 2013: 1).

Practitioners of online reporting platforms ought to have certain moral principles to be followed which could be termed as'professional ethics. Ethics may not be forced on any one but each profession carries a'Code of Conduct'to be seen as rules of practice. Ethical guidelines are peculiar to each profession and are designed to prevent abuse and unrestrained use of the powers and privileges of that profession. Many Newspapers in Nigeria have formulated their own code of ethics for their employees to follow.

However, hate speech is still prevalent among online reporting platforms in Nigeria. It is still being used by onlne reporting platforms to promote violence against

other people based on racial segregation, ethnicity bias, nationality, sexual orientation, gender identity, religious affiliation, age, disability, or diseases. Although several governments and social media sites are trying to curb the hate speech, it is still plaguing our society especially at the ongoing presidential elections petitions tribunal in Nigeria. All of these are manifesting on Twitter, Facebook, Tiktok, Instagram and others are social media that promote free speech. It allows users to post contents that may be hateful without any fear of repercussion, leading to suspension orders for violating its terms of service, namely, abusive or hateful behaviour (Fiberesima, Abomaye,Williams& George, 2022).

7. Ethical Issues of Source Credibility, Quackery and Brown Envelope Journalism

Ethical issues of source credibility, quackery and brown envelope syndrome have strayed consciously into online media platforms in the guise of"social media influencers". It is an outright disregard to the canons of professional journalism as long as these quacks have a platform to engage, share messages and receive feedback. These set of practitioners are not interested in facts or details; their sole aim is to generate constant traffic in order to top online charts.

Source credibility and attribution of sources is sacrificed in order to gain acceptance. Internet based journalism practice has popularized brown envelope journalism which is now a euphemism for bribe. (Idowu 2018, p.97) asserts that it refers to the purchasing of favourable mention in the media in the short term or cultivating favorable relationship in the long term through cash and material gifts. In situations like this, online reporting practitioners tend to water down principles of balance, objectivity and accuracy in order to sustain patronage.

At the heart of ethical issues is deceptive content packaging. Online media platforms form themselves into cartels in most cases shortchange their audience with excessively exaggerated or loud headlines which often times do not tally with the body of the story. (Idowu 2018) explained that quacks make depraved attempt to hoodwink audiences into patronizing media products that are otherwise undeserving and use of undue adjectives to qualify as news subject to whom trained journalists have less association with is supported by pecuniary gifts. In effect, ethical issues of source credibility, quackery and brown envelope syndrome contribute to the thorny issues inherent in the practice of online reporting in Nigeria.

8. Theoretical Framework

The contributions of communication theories in strengthening research of this nature can never be over-emphasized.

The theoretical framework is embedded in the Social Responsibility theory which was propounded by F. Siebert, T. Peterson and Schwann in 1968.Anaeto, Onabanjo & Osifeso (2008), the major principle of the theory is that freedom of the press including online reporting platforms must be done responsibly in line with global best practices. It also notes that every media including online media platforms which enjoys a principal position in the society is expected to be responsible to the society in carrying out certain essential functions of mass communication that informs, educate, mobilize, advocate, entertain and put facts in perspective.

Uzuegbunam (2013) regarded social responsibility theory as a western theory that incorporates part of the libertarian principle and introduces some new elements into media practice. The underlying principle of the social responsibility theory of the press is that the press should be free to perform the functions which the libertarian theory granted it freedom to perform, but that this freedom should be exercised with responsibility. If the media which also include online reporting platforms fail to meet their responsibilities to society, the social responsibility theory holds that the government should encourage the media to comply by way of controlling them. (Dominick 2009 as cited in Uzuegbunam 2013) wrote that:

"This approach holds that the press has a right to criticize government and other institutions, but it also has a responsibility to preserve democracy by properly informing the public and by responding to society's needs and interests. The press does not have the freedom to do as it pleases; it is obligated to respond to society's requirements. Since the media profession already have professional codes guiding them, it is very pertinent for regulators of traditional media journalism to simplify the activities of the practitioners of 0nline reporting platforms in order to conform to the basic journalistic codes such that issues of ethical concerns are common with these platforms which are contained through rigorous measures.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the qualitative research method because it is a methodology that does not employ mathematical or statistical summation. Qualitative research method allows the researcher the flexibility of probing deeper into his/her data set. As result of virtual characteristics of the study, the researcher adopted online interviewing method. Interview questions were sent to research participants through zoom meetings with 165 journalists systematically selcted from a pool of 5,944 registered journalists in Nigeria. This reflected reasonable spread across the six geo-political zones in the country. Journalists based in states like; Lagos in the South-West, Cross River in the South-South, Abuja in the North Central, Kaduna in the North West and Taraba in the North East were selected. Media scholars drawn across universities in the country were also selected and online consumers and the participants were given time to reply.

Besides, the researcher was a non-participant observer who worked with research assistants during the recorded zoom meetings and this gave the researcher a firsthand observation of what transpired in the group. Overall, the study methodology constitutes qualitative methods of online interviews and non- participant observation and data methods of themes, narratives, analysis and interpretation.

Table 1. Number and Features of Research Participants across six Nigerian States

Respondents	Cross River	Lagos	Enugu	Kaduna	Taraba	FCT	Total
Journalists	16	20	16	16	16	16	100
Communication Scholars	7	10	7	7	7	7	45
NUJ Ethics Committee	3	5	3	3	3	3	20
Total	26	35	26	26	26	26	165

Participants were clearly told that zoom sessions were being recorded and the potential benefits of their objective inputs were explained to participants so as to gain their cooperation and establish an interpersonal relationship between the researcher and participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After data were collected through online interview and none participant observation, four themes which aligned with the objectives of the study emerged. These include; awareness of media laws, editorial policy and editorial independence, adherence to

media laws and ethical concerns and portrayal as rented press. These themes are discussed below.

1. **Awareness of Media Laws**

Online reporting platform have become useful tools for gathering and dissemination of news on Twitter, Facebook, Telegram and other social media handles. Investigation reveals that the level of awareness of media laws among practitioners of online reporting platform in Nigeria is quite low owing to the fact that most practitioners that own the platforms are not trained journalists. Some are just in it for profit making because the virtual ecology of news reporting gives them leverage to harness different platforms in the twenty-first century.

As stated earlier, it corroborates the views of (Idowu 2018),"that quacks make depraved attempt to hoodwink audiences into patronizing media products that are otherwise undeserving and use of undue adjectives to qualify as news subject to which trained journalists have less association with is supported by pecuniary gifts". The ease of multimedia functionality alone cannot guarantee awareness of media laws, respondents opined that operators of internet based platforms should be subjected to some level of training on media laws to brace issues of litigations associated with internet based platforms. From the foregoing, dearth in comprehensive knowledge of media laws implies that most practitioners are not aware of the legal ramification of media laws which must be adhered in performing key role conceptions of the media

2. **Editorial Philosophy and Independence**

According to respondents drawn from newspaper journalists, broadcast media journalists, communication scholars and NUJ ethics committee. Editorial philosophy and independence have a way of influencing online reporting practice in Nigeria if properly adhered to by the practitioners. Accordingly, they asserted that if this is done, it would help reduce duplication of the same information in various online platforms and bring about source credibility in these platforms. Unanimously, discussants affirmed that source credibility occasioned by a clearly defined editorial policy would be very useful in addressing ethical issues of fake news and hate speech prevalent among practitioners of online reporting platforms in Nigeria. According to discussants, it would strengthen extant obligations of journalists across different media platforms to ensure balanced, objective, fair and accurate reportage in order to stem the tide of source credibility. Those

interviewed also revealed that there is a great impact of digital media on the news ecology but it must be done within the ambit of sound editorial policy.

3. **Adherence to Media Laws**

The research question sought to know the level at which perceived adherence to media laws is likely to alter the level of ethical concerns. Just like an experienced defender who is scared of making clumsy tackles to avoid conceding a penalty. Respondents indicated that as long as many quacks own several online reporting platforms in Nigeria, solving ethical issues remains a huge mirage. Therefore, it portrays that adherence to ethical concerns is being hampered by untrained practitioners parading themselves as media influencers on different online reporting platforms. They opined the concerted efforts in collaboration with regulatory agencies should be directed towards dealing with"erring"practitioners who flout ethical codes. According to discussants, adherence to media laws will help create an online platform devoid of legal issues in the form of law suits emanating from inability to adhere to the laid down media laws.

4. **Ethical Concerns and Portrayal as Rented Press**

Respondents revealed that one major area of concern in modern day press coverage in Nigeria is that in spite of clearly defined ethical codes in the media, several online reporting platforms have shown clear disregard for media ethics in the discharge of their responsibilities. Thus, the appellation as rented press places these platforms as cash and carry media outlets. Findings indicate that online reporting platforms are often caught in the web that does not allow them to effectively perform their traditional watchdog role as a result of skewed reportage aimed at profit making corroborates Idowu (2018) description of payola journalists. Most of these online media platforms operate without laid down journalism ethics and laws as most of them are operated by non-professionals who are not even interested in learning the ethical principles of the profession.

CONCLUSION

Arising from the findings which revealed that awareness of media laws among practitioners of online reporting platform in Nigeria is quite low owing to the fact that most practitioners who own these platforms are not trained journalists. It can be concluded that many online media practitioners are only interested in making profits rather than

ensuring ethical standard. It is also adduced that editorial philosophy and independence has a way of influencing online reporting practice in Nigeria if properly adhered to by the practitioners. If this is done, it will help reduce duplication of the same information in various online platforms and bring about credibility in these platforms. Similarly, adherence to media laws will help create online journalism platforms that are devoid of legal issues in the form of law suits emanating from inability to adhere to the laid down media laws. In spite of clearly defined ethical codes in the media, several online reporting platforms have shown clear disregard for media ethics in the discharge of their responsibilities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher therefore recommends that;

1. There should be a deliberate effort to increase level of awareness and adherence to media laws in order to create online news platforms devoid of legal issues in the form of law suits emanating from inability to adhere to ethical principles.

2. There should be a strong regulatory framework by government and the Nigerian Union of Journalists to ensure that online reporting platforms instill editorial philosophy and independence to influence their news treatment in line with ethical codes.

3. There should be constant training and retraining of practitioners of online reporting platforms in order to raise the bar against flagrant disregard for ethical principles of journalism.

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