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Assessing the Adherence to Ethical Principles of Accuracy and Fairness by Journalists in Rivers State: A Cursory Look at RHYTHM 93.7 FM

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Abstract

Journalism codes of ethics provide normative principles to guide media practice, requiring journalists to act ethically, independently, fairly, and respectfully while reporting verifiable facts. However, the principles of accuracy and fairness are among the most frequently violated, leading to omission of crucial details and dissemination of misinformation that may trigger unnecessary public anxiety. This study examines the level of adherence to professional ethics, particularly the principles of accuracy and fairness—among journalists in Rivers State, Nigeria, with specific attention to Rhythm 93.7 FM Port Harcourt. Anchored in Absolutist and Social Responsibility theories, the research adopts a mixed-method design combining survey and in-depth interviews. The population comprises 500 registered journalists in Rivers State, approached using the census principle, with questionnaire schedules and in-depth interview guides as primary instruments for data collection. The findings indicate that a majority of journalists in Rivers State do not consistently adhere to the principles of accuracy and fairness in their reportage,

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partly due to pressures of strict deadlines that limit opportunities for thorough data verification. The study concludes that, although absolute accuracy may be difficult to attain under time constraints, media organisations must institute stronger editorial control mechanisms and support systems to enhance ethical compliance. It recommends that media organisations regularly organise training programmes, seminars, and workshops to reinforce journalists' commitment to professional ethics, thereby strengthening the media's responsibility to the public and improving the quality of news reporting.

Keywords: Journalism; Journalistic Ethics; Accuracy; Fairness; Rivers State Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Societies World over have set of rules and regulations guiding the ways and manners they do things and the absence of these rules and regulations may lead to anarchy and lawlessness in such society. Consequently, every profession has set of rules and ethical standards guiding the practitioners, including Journalism profession (Ngwu, 2017).

Ethics here are simply set of moral principles that guide the actions of practitioners in a given situation. To be ethical is to be pay particular attention to the standards of good and bad behaviour. It means adopting a moral position dictated by a sense of right and wrong in one's personal life and in relationship with others. The Center for Journalism Ethics (2024) defines Ethics as "the science of morals, the branch of philosophy which is concerned with character and conduct a system of moral and rule of behaviours. Ethics controls individual behaviour not controlled by law, since law cannot take care of every aspect of human behaviour.

In field of Journalism, there exist a set of ethics guiding its practice, of which the first and second are Accuracy and Fairness. According to Akabogu (2005), the Journalist as a member of the society is expected to maintain these ethical codes of conduct in discharging their duty or responsibility of informing members of the public objectively and accurately. Unfortunately, some Journalists have thrown these ethical standards to the dogs. Most journalists have been doing their work in a manner inconsistent with their professional ethics. Egbai, et al. (2025) noted that this is despite a commendable level of awareness of their professional ethics, which in most cases do not translate into compliance or adherence.

As such, Ngwu, et al (2025) noted that Ethical dilemmas in journalism practice arises when journalists violate their codes. Unethical practices such as corruption, bias, sensationalism, and manipulation of facts erode the integrity of the profession and diminish public trust. These challenges are compounded by systemic factors including corruption, inadequate remuneration, work pressures, and political, social, and religious influences that compromise professional independence.

In a time when reputations are at stake, it is imperative that a reputation for accuracy and farness be exhibited. Nworgu (2010) opines, the public has a lot of faith in the news media. That's why it's so important for every reporter and news outlet to reach the highest levels of professionalism and uphold the highest standards of ethics. Since the Journalism practice relies on the public's trust, it becomes imperative that every journalist work very hard to verify facts before publishing them. Journalists, according to Chimaraoke (2013), must always act with a healthy regard for the public interest.

Jamiu and Bolanle (2013) brought attention to the charges leveled against Journalists for their unethical practices of lying, innuendo, and blatant falsification in violation of the ethical code of conduct, and for posing a threat to public order and national security with their media contents. They further stated that when reporters cross the line into unethical behaviour, it hurts the entire profession and the news companies they work for. When readers lose faith in a news organization, advertising revenue drops and the business collapses. Wilson (2011) observed that the public's perception of journalism as a profession has deteriorated to the point where it’s credibility is called into question. Corroborating this, Boyd-Barret (as cited in Onyebuchi, Obayi, and Anorue 2019), stated that it "could weaken the possibility of public recognition of the occupation as a profession or indeed as an occupation of high status."

The ability of any media outfits to produce credible, factual, balance and objective news, either in the form of editorials, features, opinions, interviews depend on accuracy and fairness which remains the tool for effective Journalism practice. These codes of ethics as stipulated by the NUJ, if not adhered to can breech the trust of the public, affect the reputation and productivity of any media organization. However, a study by Geetali (2020) on the importance of Media Ethics found out that Media ethics are important for proper broadcasting, avoiding misrepresentation of information, to avoid conflict of interest. It is important to promote universal values, truthfulness, accountability and rule of law. Hence

the focus of this study assesses the consequence of non- adherence to Accuracy and Fairness by journalists to public and media organizations, with a cursory look at Rhythm 93.7 FM Port Harcourt.

Statement of the Problem

One of the most significant responsibilities journalists have is to verify the accuracy of their reports and to communicate the truth so that media organizations can give out credible information to the public. Journalists must convey the truth in every format and provide context to avoid misrepresenting information. As false information may distort people's beliefs, cause panic or discredit a news organization.

Unfortunately, most journalists do not obey the ethics of the practice. In Rivers State, as it is elsewhere in Nigeria, a violation of ethics of journalism seems to have become the rule, rather than the exception, because of the long-standing issues seen among journalists. However, despite the existence of multiple oversight groups, such as the Nigeria Union of Journalists NUJ, journalists seem to have persisted in violating the industry's code of ethics.

For instance, On 23 December 2005, two journalists with the privately-owned radio station Rhythm 93.7 FM, in Port Harcourt, the capital of Rivers State in the Niger Delta region, were arraigned before Port Harcourt High Court on charges of broadcasting "false information" . and remanded in custody until 3 January 2006. The two journalists Klem Ofuokwu and Cleopatra Tawo were arrested and charged with giving false news report that Choba Bridge on the outskirts of the city had collapsed and trapped seven vehicles. The report as at that time did not only cause panic in the State but led to the shutdown of the Station and subsequent arrest of the News Director and Programme Manager (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2025).

Thus, it is a problem that journalists who are supposed to serve as role models to the rest of society have shifted ground and are losing credibility, integrity, for non-adherence to the journalism ethics, particularly Accuracy and fairness. This unsettling trend prompted research into assessing whether or not journalists in Rivers State adhere to Accuracy and Fairness, in the discharge of their duties.

Objectives of the Study

The study has the following objectives; they are to:

1. Ascertain if journalists in Rivers State are exposure to their code of ethics.
2. Find out the extent journalists adherence to the ethical principles of Accuracy and Fairness in Rivers State
3. Identify factors that influence non-adherence to Accuracy and fairness by Journalists in Rivers State.
4. Find out the consequences of non-adherence to Accuracy and Fairness by Journalists in Rivers State.

Research Questions

1. To what extent are Journalists in Rivers State exposed to their code of ethics?
2. To what extent do Journalists adhere to the ethical principles of Accuracy and Fairness in Rivers State?
3. Are there factors that influence non-adherence to Accuracy and fairness by Journalists in Rivers State?
4. what are the consequences to non-adherence to Accuracy and Fairness by Journalists in Rivers State?

Literature Review

Ethics are set of guiding principles that assure proper behavior. They are ideals and opinions that individuals use to analyses or interpret a situation and then decide which is right or wrong. Journalism like any other profession has ethical codes that guide them in their activities. This code of ethics consists of moral principles, guidelines, and rules that guide the behaviour of journalists in course of their practice as well as their relationship with the public (Pepple and Acholonu, 2018). Journalism code of ethics therefore is the set of moral principles guiding the journalism profession. The Nigerian Press Council [NPC] (as cited in Pepple and Acholonu 2018), have this to say on some of the journalism ethical codes, according to them editorial independence entails that decision concerning the content of news and how it should be the responsibility of a professional journalist. According to Tsegyu & Asemah, 2014), Ethics is based on the Greek word "ethos" meaning character or what a person is or does in order to have a good character; it deals with choosing among the good or bad opinions that individuals face. It may be seen as

being concerned with that which holds society or a profession together or provides stability and security to social or professional cohesion (Kayode as cited in Angese, Okoro and Etumnu, 2019, p. 184). Merrill (as cited in Sunday & Tommy, 2011, p. 67) defines ethics as "a branch of philosophy which aids in determining what is right." This perhaps explains why Asemah (2011) avers that "ethics may be described as the systematic study of the principles and methods for distinguishing right from wrong and good from bad." Corroborating this, Ogunsiji (as cited in Agbanu, 2011, p. 305), states that ethics is not laws in application but is binding on all members of the profession once it has been officially adopted. A journalist may be disciplined, reprimanded or suspended for contravening the ethics of his profession. Ethics controls those individual behaviour not controlled by law, since law cannot take care of every aspect of human behaviour. Ethics serves as a guide to human conduct in a desirable way. Ethical principles serve as ideals which allow the individual to act according to the dictates of his conscience and judgment (Tsegyu & Asemah, 2014).

Accuracy and Fairness is the cornerstone of Journalism that every Journalist should strive diligently to achieve. Journalists are expected to be conscious and observe these ethics as purveyors of information. According to Anti-Satelite weapons (ASAT) (2018)"Journalists cannot always guarantee 'truth' but getting the facts right is the cardinal principle of journalism. It further stated that Journalists should always strive for accuracy, give all the relevant facts they have, and ensure that they have been checked. When they cannot corroborate information, they should say so."

Accuracy**,** according to the online dictionary means a state of being accurate, freedom from mistakes while fairness is being just, honest, equitable, exact conformity to truth, it also means truthfulness. Accuracy means that all news must be based on verifiable facts, not rumour and speculations. A media organization will be judged on the accuracy and reliability of its journalism, which must be well-sourced, supported by strong evidence, examined and tested, clear and unambiguous, (Media Helping Media, 2015. P. 1) Okunna, Eze and Emmanuel (2020, p. 665) opines that accuracy and fairness means that the public has the right to know, factual accurate, balanced and fair reporting is the ultimate objective of good journalism and the basis of earning public trust and confidence. A journalist should refrain from publishing, inaccurate and

According to the code of ethics for Nigerian Journalists Accuracy and fairness, are;

a. The public has a right to know, factual, accurate, balanced and fair reporting which is the ultimate objective of good Journalism and the basis of earning public trust and confidence.
b. A Journalist should refrain from publishing inaccurate and misleading information, where such information has been inadvertently published, and prompt correction should be made.
c. In the course of his duties, a journalist should strive to separate facts from conjecture and comment.

Regarding accuracy and fairness, The Nigerian Press Council [NPC] (as cited in Pepple and Acholonu 2018), noted that the public has a right to know factual, accurate, balanced, and fair reporting is the ultimate objective of good journalism and the basis of earning public trust and confidence. Akunyeli in hers address on the need for re-branding Journalism (as cited in Ofose 2009, P. 1) declared that society needs men and women of courage who will shape and direct the national conservation and its policies. Accuracy is a mind-set, an attitude – A good reporter should die a thousand times when he learns a story he wrote includes an error. Though everyone makes mistakes because no one is perfect, but Journalists must take great care to get it.

The main structure of media writing is Accuracy, truth, exactness, fairness, neutrality, objectivity and civic liability. The news organizations and the journalists seem to overlook and sometimes disregard the "code of ethics" in their quest for acquisition of newsworthy information and its subsequent dissemination to the public. This can be because of a variety of reasons like arousing sensationalism, rush to break news, larcadastic attitude, increasing readership and viewership, pressure from proprietors, coercion from powerful and useful news sources, bribery, character assassination, Sycophancy, sexism, invasion of privacy and fake news. According to Okunna and Emmanuel (2020, p. 668) society is often riddled with all manner of ethical maladies and these ethical problems in society are reflected in the field of communication resulting in unethical conduct among communication professionals. Buttressing the view Belsey & Chadwick, (as cited in Tilak 2020) notes, "there has been always a danger of violation of ethical principles which entangled with comprising on investigative reporting. For example, journalist's foremost principle is to maintain honesty in investigation as well as in reporting, however, if public corruption can be investigated only under cover and a journalist requires to hide his/her identity.

A study by Angese et al., (2012) found that only 45% of 320 registered journalists understand their code of ethics. Hence adherence is low, requiring constant reminders to maintain public trust. Another study by Pepple and Acholonu (2018) conducted among 300 journalists, observed that ethical adherence is poor due to sycophancy, greed, and ignorance. Hence, recommended that NUJ hire only trained journalists, form disciplinary committees, and review ethics regularly. Asemah & Tsegyu (2014) conducted a study among 200 NUJ journalists. Findings show widespread unethical practices which called for improved welfare and enforcement by government, owners, and associations to restore credibility.

Theoretical Framework

This study anchored on the Absolutist and Social Responsibilities theories of the press. The Absolutist Theory that there are moral universal which should guide all human beings no matter the place, time or age. It is also based on the fact that a good action should be right everywhere in the World, at all times and in all circumstances. According to Merril (1974) the ethical absolutist believes that there is one universal and eternal code that basically applies to everyone in all ages, that changing opinions, traditions and conditions make no significant differences in this absolute moral code. Fab-Ukozor (2004, P. 15) states that in the field of journalism, the professional who believes in this theory accepts in principle that there are absolute and universal journalistic ethics which should guide the practicing journalists everywhere in the World and which should equally form the basis for the articulation of a universal and eternal code in journalism. The ethical moral universals are truthfulness, fairplay, accuracy, balance and objectivity. Hence, the need for Journalists or Media Organizations to maintain integrity, by ensuring strict adherence to Accuracy and Fairness.

Social Responsibility Theory

This Paper also adopted the Social Responsibility theory as its tool of analysis. This theory originated from the 1947 Hutchins Commission on the freedom of the press and has its main aim as "to whom much is given, much is expected". The Society as it is has given much to the Media by way of freedom, peace and security to operate, it is therefore important that the Media will in turn ensure responsibility to the society. Hence, the media has a responsibility to the public and must fulfill key functions of mass communication. Nevertheless, the idea maintains that a free press is essential because it

helps to scrutinize other social institutions and because it provides unbiased, reliable news reporting (Pepple & Acholonu, 2018; Nkwam-Uwaoma, Etumnu & Okoro, 2020). The purpose therefore is to ensure that the Journalist must be open to anyone with something to say, he has to in-turn report it accurately and fairly in-order to avoid crises or discredit himself or his organization. A responsible Media, therefore should give accurate reports of events. Corroborating this fact, Owolabi (2007, p. 162) states that to achieve freedom and responsibility of the press, there must be an independent body to regulate media practice, and further added that there must be development of professionalism as a means of achieving higher standards of performance while the Media maintain self-regulation. This theory is very apt to this study because the first responsibility of the Journalist is to the masses and that is to report the truth. Thus, to report the truth means to ensure accuracy and fairness as parts of the ethics of the journalism profession.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed method approach using survey and In-depth interview. Questionnaire was used to generate the survey data while in-depth interview guide was use to gather the qualitative data. The population of the study was 500, being total number of registered Journalists in Rivers State (NUJ Rivers State Council Chairman) therefore, the researchers carried out a census by studying all the registered journalists in River Rivers State. Consequently the sample size was 500. Meanwhile, the interviews were drawn from senior news editors and new managers/directors and some of those who were involved in the Rhythm saga. Data from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics and simple percentage. Data from the in-depth interview were analysed using expiation building technique.

RESULTS

The data presentation are done according to the Objectives and research questions of the study. Only 470 copies of the questionnaire out of 500 were found valid for analysis. This made up 95% of the total administere470 respondents.

Table 1: level of knowledge of Journalists in Rivers State about Accuracy and Fairness.

Response Option	Frequency	Percentage
YES	150	31 %
NO	220	46%
Cant say	100	21%
Total	**470**	**100**

Source: field survey, 2024

Analysis in Table 1 above showed that the some of the respondents have knowledge of Accuracy and Fairness at 150220 (31%),220 (46%) said they don't have knowledge of it, while others said they don't know.

Table 2: channels on which journalists receive information about Accuracy and Fairness

Response option	Frequency	Percentage
On Air	80	17%
Training	50	10%
Social Media	250	53%
NBC Newsletter	70	14%
None of the above	20	4%
Total	**470**	**100**

Source: field survey, 2024

Analysis in Table 2 above showed that the majority 250 (53%) of the respondents got knowledge of Accuracy and Fairness on Social Media.

Table 3: extent journalists adhere to Accuracy and Fairness

Response Options	Frequency	Percentage
To low extent	100	21%
To moderate extent	200	42%
To large extent	150	31%
Can't say	20	4%
Total	**470**	**100**

Source: field survey, 2024

The finding in the above table is an indication that 200 (42%) being the majority of the respondents admitted that journalists in Rivers State adhere to accuracy and fairness to a moderate extent. The implication is that Journalists in Rivers State do not adhere to Accuracy and Fairness.

Table 4. Factors that influence non-adherence.

Response Option	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of training	120	25%
Rush to break news	180	38%
Lack of remuneration	40	8%
Ignorance	50	10%
Lackadaisical attitude	80	17%
Total	**470**	**100**

Source: Field survey, 2024

Finding in table 4 indicated that most journalists believe that rush to break news and lack of training influenced non-compliance to accuracy and fairness while others believe it is ignorance, lackadaisical attitude and brown envelop.

Table 5. Consequences of non-adherence

Response Option	Frequency	Percentage.
Loss of station credibility	110	23%
Misinforming the public	80	17%
Denting the image of the profession	70	14%
Loss of trust on Journalists	140	29%
Criticism	30	6%
Infringement of code of ethics the profession.	40	8%
Total	**470**	**100**

Source: field survey, 2024

The implication of the data in table 5 is that majority at 140 (29%) and 110 (23%) of the respondents agreed that loss of trusts on journalists and loss of station credibility are some of the major consequences of non-compliance to accuracy and fairness.

Presentation of in-depth interview Data

Knowledge Level of Journalists on Accuracy and Fairness VJ I:

It has been so devastating since observed and known that journalists who have adequate knowledge on Accuracy and fairness are few among the numerous practicing journalists in Rivers State. One thing, is to have the knowledge and another thing is to put the knowledge into work or practice, often times, I think that these short falls in journalism ethics are perpetrated by journalists who are well armed with the do's and don'ts of journalism and yet choose to indulge in unethical practices with reasons best known to them. NE II: it is not to be argued that most journalists in Rivers State are ignorant of these codes of conduct. Some persons got themselves into practice of journalism for the aim of making money and means of livelihood and not ready to practice in line and in accordance to the ethical code of journalism practice. "What I mean is that some practicing and registered journalists in Rivers State came into the profession as a second choice and without prior knowledge of the practice. GM I: in responding to the knowledge level, answered the question using an explanation e.g some professions have a process or stages to pass through by intending members before being inducted as members of the professional body. For instance, the law profession has the law school. When a practitioner did not go to law school and lacks the knowledge of practice, and goes into the profession through the back door, it is sure that such a person will fail to do the right thing. If an individual gets into building without the fundamental and advance knowledge in building, such a person will help to construct and build structure that will collapse. Consequently in the journalism profession, if a journalist lacks the knowledge of the ethical codes, he will likely not adhere to them. This observed ignorance, would be said to be contributing factor to the unethical practice as observed among some journalists in Rivers State.

Level of Journalists Adherence to Accuracy and Fairness:

In responding to the level of adherence NE I responded that The Nigeria Union of Journalists' Code of Ethics and the Nigeria Guild for Editors remained unenforced for a considerable amount of time. According to him, the process has been hampered by a lack

of concern of the code. "The journalists who this code is intended to protect have voiced concerns about the importance of editorial independence and other ethical guidelines for editors maintaining the public's trust and confidence for quite some time. Corroborating the above, NE II noted that it has really crippled the level of accuracy and fairness towards the maintenance of high professional standard in the journalism profession. Almost all news produced for the audience violates basic standards of decency. VJ I responded as thus; The right of the public to know is being misused in Nigeria, and no effort is made to present a factual, accurate, balanced, and fair report of an event, in all my experience as a journalist, as these are the provisions of the ethical code that seem to be most abused. GM II continued by saying that certain journalists and editors have trouble avoiding editorializing theirreporting, which can lead to the appearance of half-truths or even exaggerations. In order to win and keep the public's trust, journalists and news outlets must adhere to the strictest standards of professionalism, as outlined in their separate style guides. But this is not the case with Nigerian journalists; in fact, many of them disregard professional ethics. VJ II Reporters in Nigeria, particularly, Rivers State have been seen repeatedly breaking the rules. In the world of journalism, the "larcadastic attitude " has endured. Despite the codes requirements to the contrary, journalists employed by particularly, Private -owned media outlets have persisted in excessively not adhering to them. The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) of Nigeria and the Nigerian Media Council have become a toothless tiger. No journalist who has made a public error has ever been publicly reprimanded. VJ I: I have found that journalists who have a high opinion of themselves are more likely to violate journalistic ethics. Permit me to remark that these ethical egoists consider their unethical behaviours to be appropriate if they bring about positive and advantageous outcomes for themselves. Regardless of the repercussions to others or to the integrity of one's vocation. These celebrated egoists in action believe that the end justifies the means if their actions will lead to private gain at the expense of society or their profession. VJ II reiterated the position that ethical flaws have been observed in thepractice of journalism in response to the non-compliance with journalism code of conducts, particularly, accuracy and fairness. When journalists violate ethical standards, it hurts the entire profession and the news outlets that employ them. If a news organisation loses its credibility, it won't last long. Reporters who are dishonest besmirch the profession from which they have received so much respect and honour because of the weight of the obligation that is placed on the shoulders of the person who carries the nation's banner.

Since journalists serve the public, they should answer to it for their actions, and the public has a right to expect that information will be presented to them in a fair, honest, and competent manner, but unfortunately, this has not always been the case.

Factors that influence non-adherence: VJ I; said a good number of journalists in Rivers State, did not study mass communication nor journalism and as such will see journalism as an all comers affairs and field of play. As a retired journalist from one of the private media house in Rivers State, "I have questioned the knowledge of a particular journalist in Port Harcourt on the ethical values of the profession. Knowledge in journalism could be acquired either while in practice or before coming into practice but it is necessary and recommended to media houses to organize discipleship classes for their new intake as to guide them properly with a required knowledge. According to NE II;

The pattern and system of employment in the station is opposite to what is expected when someone that studied language and linguistic is employed how will such a person know about fairness and accuracy, and other ethical codes of the profession ,this is one of the major part of limiting factors on adherence to ethics of the profession.

On Incident involving Staff of Rhythm 93.7 FM

The effect of the incident on the Rhythm 93.7 FM: GM I stated that for a while, the false information affected the station negatively, particularly with government patronage. According to him, the Government of Dr. Peter Odili also ensured that SSS detained the two staff involved in the false information, Clem Oforkwu and Cleopatra Tawo. It was so serious that" I went into hiding for 2 weeks for fear of the SSS, until it was found out that it was not entirely the fault of the station, because the information was lifted from AIT and without verification it was aired".NE I; explained thus, " I saw the news on AIT's scroll bar and decided to use it not knowing that was not true, the mistake I made was not being able to verify the information" A I; explained that hers is to read whatever is in the bulleting that was sent to her. GM II, emphasized that it is really unethical for journalists and media organizations to report news they are not sure of. In his words; "I usually read between the lines these days before I share or take any information seriously. This is because it's unethical to air any news without any form of investigation or confirmation "and we are sure this could defame or scandalize or debase someone or an organization. MP I: agreed that non-adherence to accuracy and fairness causes lack of

credibility to media organizations and lack of trust from the masses. They suggested that Journalists should verify information before giving them out to the public.

MP II; "One dangerous trend these days is for people to share certain information without first subjecting such information to sound reasoning- sadly, Journalists have been found wanting in this area.

GM II; "no Journalist want to practice investigative journalism any more. They are always in a hurry to share any information at their disposal or sent by their friends who are not journalists, without caring to check the source or investigate if the information is correct and worth sharing. "We have lost it all".

On the consequence of Rhythm 93.7 Incident

GM I; said the Head of News David Obi, News Editor Clem Oforkwu and Announcer Cleopatra Towa were detained and eventually sacked. According to him: "When my Chairman and government met, the then governor Dr. Peter Odili insisted that the I be removed as the General Manager, but for the intervention of the then Speaker of the Rivers State House of Assembly, Rt. Hon. Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi who insisted that I will not be removed because I was deceived by the Editor." NE I; explained thus, "I was arrested by the DSS, later released and was eventually sacked by my organization for the singular mistake".

Impact of non-adherence to Accuracy and Fairness by Journalists in Rivers State, particularly in the Rhythm 93.7 FM Port Harcourt:

GM I**,** stressed that the impact of non-adherence to the codes on Journalists and that of the Rhythm 93.7 FM were that the Journalists became the talk of the town, the public lost hope on them while the station suffered criticism from members of the public. He stated that though the burden of social responsibilities is not an easy task, every media organization and Journalists should endeavour to abide by it to effectively carry out their functions effectively. MP I; observed, "We know that the station would want to break news or inform and educate the public, but in doing that they should consider the kind of news they are giving out, because if they cannot give us correct information, it means we cannot believe in them anymore as our source of information." MP II; has this to say, "when I heard about that news on that fateful day, I was devastated because my husband travelled to the village and was on his way back, I started making frantic efforts to reach my

husband, calls were going all round to relations and friends who travelled through Choba bridge to warn them of the eminent danger, I felt so bad and was already crying when I heard the story was not true. We are not saying they should not break news but they should investigate and be sure knowing that they are the purveyors of information, they should endeavor to serve the public responsibly" they stated.MP I; some of stressed that "Rhythm 93.7 FM should know that by not being accurate in their reportage, they are reducing their credibility in the eyes of the public and also causing members of public to look elsewhere for credible news."

DISCUSSION

Result of findings in table 1 showed that majority of Journalists in Rivers State at 220 (46%) do not have knowledge of accuracy and fairness. The result is in agreement with the qualitative data which revealed that journalists who have adequate knowledge on Accuracy and fairness are few among the numerous practicing journalists in Rivers State. This point of view is supported by Pepple and Acholonu (2018) who noted that ignorance of the code of ethics by journalists can lead to actions totally against the prescribed guidelines. They further maintained that, journalists can act unethically if they aren't aware of the rules they're supposed to follow. Corroborating this view, Tsegyu and Asemah (2014) noted that most media practitioners are found of breaching the canons of the profession.

Analysis in Table 2 above showed that the majority 250 (53%) of the respondents got knowledge of Accuracy and Fairness on Social Media. The implication is that most journalists are not trained on the codes of ethics of the profession. Supporting this finding Alete (2013) observed that some of these ethical challenges in journalism practice are as a result of discrepancies in the internal and external factors affecting journalism practice in Nigeria. He went further in noting that managerial incompetence poses a great challenge not just to the performance of journalists based on ethical principles but also on the image of the journalism profession. In essence, managerial problem such as lack of training for journalists have the propensity to influence journalists in indulging in unethical practices.

Analysis on Response of respondents on level of journalists in Rivers State adhere to the ethical code of accuracy/fairness; revealed that of the respondents confirmed that journalists adhere to the ethical code of accuracy/fairness to a mod are extent. By

implication journalists in Rivers state do not fully adhere to the ethical code of accuracy/fairness. The qualitative data corroborates the quantitative data as it states that that, The Nigeria Union of Journalists' Code of Ethics and the Nigeria Guild for Editors remained unenforced for a considerable amount of time. The findings are in line with the finding of Asemah and Tsegyu, (2014) hat journalists engaged in a number of unethical practices. Pepple and Acholonu (2018, p.56), also corroborates thief findings "journalists most times go against the ethics of the profession due to sycophancy, security reasons, desperation, greed, ethical dilemmas, and ignorance of the code of ethics. Analysis of findings revealed that several factors such as Lack of training , rush to break news.

Lack of remuneration, Ignorance and Lackadaisical attitude contributes to journalist non-adherence to journalism codes of ethics such as accuracy and fairness. The Interview responses also shows that respondents confirmed that lack of training, Ignorance, lack of remuneration lackadaisical attitude are some of the factors that influence, non-adherence by journalist in Rivers State to accuracy and fairness. In line with the above view, Asenah (2014) argued that most media professionals enjoy breaking professional ethics. According to him, factors that influences journalists in Rivers State into unethical practices are poor remuneration, personal interest, condition of employment, hierarchical influence and government interest. This also agrees with what Angese et al. (2019) found. Researchers in one study said that several of the problems they found were major factors in pressuring journalists to engage in unethical behaviour. Alete (2013) corroborates these findings by noting that disparities between internal and external factors affecting journalism practice in Nigeria are to blame for both unethical practices and difficulties in the field. According to Okunna (1995), Nigerian society is plagued by a wide variety of ethical ills for which no effective treatments exist.

The findings in table 5 reveals that respondents agreed that loss of trusts on journalists and loss of station credibility, Lack of trust on journalists, Denting the image of the profession etc are some of the consequences of non-adherence to accuracy and fairness. The qualitative data gathered on the field also corroborates the quantitative data, stating that the impact of non-adherence to the codes on Journalists and that of the Rhythm 93.7 FM were that the Journalists became the talk of the town, the public lost hope on them while the station suffered criticism from members of the public.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, this study concludes that the level of adherence by journalists in Rivers State is not impressive. In a situation as this, a lot of unethical practices are bound to happen and when such practices take place, the profession will be at the receiving end. From the findings, Rhythm 93.7 FM suffered a setback because of false information it aired, such as arrest, detention and sack of journalists who were involved in the act.

The principle of accuracy is meant for journalists to be morally conscious of what they disseminate to the public in the discharge of their professional duties. It is further concluded that while absolute accuracy may not be possible because of the need to meet strict deadlines, because of rush and sometimes lack of time to verify data when filling their stories, it is imperative that media organisations put measures in place to help checkmate journalists to fulfill this sacred responsibility to its audience.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, some recommendations were formulated

1. Media organizations should organize training programmes, seminars and workshops to educate journalists on the ethics of the profession.
2. Stringent measures should be taken to ensure that journalists uphold the journalistic codes in order to preserve the integrity and professionalism of the profession in the eyes of the public.
3. There should be training and retraining of journalists while prompt and sufficient remuneration should also be implemented.
4. The Nigerian Union of Journalists should be reviewed to add compulsory one year training and examination for professional journalists. This will help cut down on the high level of quackery (Media-by-Media) in the profession.

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