

**FROM FREEDOM OF THE PRESS TO FREEDOM FROM THE PRESS:
AN ENQUIRY INTO ETHICAL AND RIGHTS ISSUES IN
CYBER JOURNALISM IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

The paper examined the capacity of cyber journalism to offer greater media access for the citizens as against ethical infractions, misuse of freedom of expression, propagation of hate and prejudice as well as general misinformation and sometimes disinformation. By analysing some online commentaries, the paper observes that the new media platform is tending towards becoming a tool for stereotyping and other negative sentiments. These are capable of engendering inter-ethnic mistrust, violence, erosion of peaceful coexistence and impeding of national cohesion, which are likely to lead citizens to demand “freedom from the press, as against the old familiar ‘freedom of the press’”. The paper identifies some likely reasons for the trend, and suggests framework for handling and managing observed ethical and rights breaches in order to make the cyber space a truly better and most effective tool for development purposes.

Key words: Access to the media, Cyber journalism, disinformation, ethical, rights abuses,

Introduction

The rapid growth and development of the Internet has been engendering a high volume of research in addition to engaging experts’ attention. As a dynamic 21st century phenomenon, the Internet, no doubt, has been facilitating mass communication in much greater extent than a few decades ago. As Omazu and Enwerem (2013) have observed, the Internet has facilitated unprecedented revolution in the mass media of communication, offering the general public an unhindered access to major local and global news stories. Its democratisation of journalism has enabled many people to satisfy the desire for self-reportage.

Many people in Nigeria have been responding to this revolution by tapping into the imbedded opportunities through launching of websites, online news sites, blog posts and other sundry Internet-mediated channels. The impact of the new media on social, economic, academic and even professional lives of people is mind boggling.

In this regard, Stephen (2010, p.108) states that:

The last 30 years have brought major changes to the way people can communicate electronically from text-based e-mail to the present proliferation of social networking and communication tools capable of varied combinations of text, audio, images and video in both synchronous and asynchronous modes. Often called Web 2.0 or the "Read/White Web" because of the ability of users to both receive and create content as well as to collaborate share and repurpose content; these tools have provided teachers and learners in ODL (Open and Distance Learning) programmes with the opportunity to address some of the perceived social and communication shortcomings of earlier programme models. Their use can reduce isolation and build a sense of community among learners.

Beyond great changes brought to the way people communicate, the birth of the Internet has also given rise to the ever popular social media defined by Andreas and Michael (2010:59-68) as "a group of Internet based applications that builds on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and which allow the creation and exchange of content". Specifically, the Internet has helped people to launch themselves into the cyber environment through such platforms as Blogs, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and E-mail among others. Digital/Cyber journalism is therefore the process of creating and disseminating media content through any or all of the platforms mentioned above.

If the practice of cyber journalism has enhanced the practice of on-demand journalism and other forms of human and corporate communication, it has also brought with it a number of ethical dilemmas often leading to a breach of citizens' rights of privacy. A study of a number of Internet-mediated news items reveals poor ethical decision making capacities of most persons engaged in the production and spread of Internet news. In Nigeria, this manifests itself in the form of abuse of human rights of fellow citizens, inappropriate use of language, stereotyping among others. The practices portend great danger to cyber journalism in particular, and journalism in general and raise the ethical question about how online journalists use their constitutionally-ensured freedom of information in Nigeria. This entails the consideration of the ability and readiness of cyber journalists to consider the implications of their actions in an online news environment.

The Normative Vision for Cyber Journalism

The original intentions and purpose of cyber journalism are captured in this statement by Brian Trench and Gary Quinn:

The move to Internet news publishing is the latest in a series of technological shifts which have required journalists not merely to adapt their daily practice but which have also – at least in the view of some – recast their role in society. For over a decade, proponents of the networked society as a new way of life have argued that responsibility for news selection and production will shift from publishers, editors and reporters to individual consumers, as in the scenario offered by Nicholas Negroponte: Instead of reading what other people think is news and what other people justify as worthy of the space it takes, being digital will change the economic model of news selections, make your interests play a bigger role ... Imagine a future in which your interface agent can read every newswire and newspaper and catch every TV and radio broadcast on the planet, and then construct a personalized summary (Negroponte, 1995). This vision of Internet self-publishing has been met to a great extent from the day of the invention of the Internet, up to the recent days when infractions are causing people to ask for ‘freedom from the press’, rather than ‘of the press.’

The Internet and Cyber journalism

A major breakthrough of the 21st century, it bears repeating, could well be said to be the Internet which has transformed the mass media and the process of information dissemination, expanding the definition, understanding, and scope of the subject; in the process it has given rise to what is often referred to as the new media. Soremekun (2013) describes the new media as an invention that uses social platforms and other interactive web-based tools. Cyber journalism being an integral part of the new media; it is concerned with the dissemination of those news materials circulated through print and broadcast media like newspapers, magazines, radio and television and even more (including those news hitherto ignored by the mainstream media). According to Farjami (2012, p.50), cyber journalism is the outcome of merging of various traditional media with cyber technology. A key feature of cyber journalism is that many of those who participate and contribute to the space are not necessarily professional journalists but can be regarded as accidental journalists practising citizen journalism, (Allan 2013, p.1).

By extrapolation, cyber journalism is enhancing and expanding the practice of journalism through the application of technology; it is creating the environment in which all citizens become actual and potential journalists - news collectors, columnists, analysts and commentators and even news makers themselves. As Oso and Bello (2013, p.1) contend, cyber journalism is so vital to modern life that it is today regarded as the sphere and ground of all politics. Furthermore, participation in the cyber space guarantees anonymity; it is relatively cheap, ensures fast publication and dissemination of information, facilitates friendship and accords importance to every voice (Akdeniz, 2002). Cyber journalism has also been elevated to the position of power and admiration following its capacity to enhance the ideals of participatory democracy and free speech, which are regarded, in modern times, as the supreme social good.

A look at Rights and Ethics in Journalism Practice

In conventional journalism, ethics refers to a set of professional codes which every journalist is expected to uphold and observe its provisions. In the exercise of his duties, a journalist is expected to have a healthy regard for the public interest. Conscious of the responsibilities and duties of journalists as purveyors of information, Nigerian journalists, in the same manner with their counterparts in some other parts of the world, collectively gave themselves the Code of Ethics, a few of the relevant ones are discussed below.

Editorial Independence

The first provision of the Code of Ethics makes reference to the need for editorial independence which comes from and is guaranteed by the insistence that decisions concerning the content of news should be the prerogative and responsibility of a trained, professional journalist. By extrapolation, an untrained person practising journalism is not only a quack, but cannot subscribe to the Code of Ethics. However, this ethical requirement of journalism practice is effectively eroded by the democratisation and simplicity of entry into and exit from cyber journalism space.

Privacy of Individuals

Another item worth examining in the Code of Ethics of the Nigerian journalists, in regard to cyber journalism, is the provision that a journalist should respect the privacy of individuals and their families unless it affects public interest. By virtue of available evidence, this provision has been greatly breached within the cyber environment as the privacies of many citizens have come under unwarranted attack and undue exposure.

Need for Decency

The Code further provides that journalists should embrace decency as their way of oppression; to this end, they should, for instance, refrain from using abusive or offensive language, presenting lurid details either in words or pictures of violence, sexual acts abhorrent or horrid scenes. Within the cyber journalism environment, these provisions are kept more in the breach than in observance as some commentators, either out of ignorance of these provisions or outright display of bravado, always bare it all in some of those occasions as painted above.

Public Interest

Other equally important items on the Code of Ethics signed to by journalists include: need for careful consideration for public interest (striving at all times to enhance national interest and public good); social responsibility (by promoting universal principles of human rights, democracy, justice, equity, peace and international understanding); avoiding plagiarism (by not copying either wholesale or in part other people's work without attribution or their consent); and by abiding by rules of copy right as established by international laws and conventions (Momoh 2010, p. 95-102). It is argued here, that cyber journalism, by its nature, being without frontiers, practised without training, with little or no understanding of any known professional codes, is a recipe for ethical breaches and abuse of individual rights.

Further on the issue of breaching citizens' rights, Ukonu, Okoro and Agbo (2013) submit that the looseness and lack of centrality of the Internet (a sub-set of the new media) - as well as inadequate gate keeping among others - all combine to characterize the new media as rather problematic. They further contend that the Internet lacks editorial guidance and source control – problems that encourage rights abuse and ethical breaches.

Cyber journalism is said to promote evil. (James et al 2010:221; Msafiri 2012:18), such as compromising the issues of rights and ethics. Barcalow, (1997) defines rights as a valid, legitimate or justifiable claim. Right could also be appropriateness - concerned with correctness and related to rational action of all kinds directed towards a fellow human person, an animal, a tree, and other inanimate objects, etc. Yet right can also be seen here as referring to “the fundamental human rights which are considered inherent in man and which constitute a body of unique virtues which are highly cherished and valued from the inception of time”, Mohammed (1997). These rights were encapsulated in the UN Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, (United Nations, 2020) which states in part:
...recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.

The ethical issues in cyber journalism relate to how to decipher the appropriate manner of behaving, of relating to other human persons, to news and its ancillaries in a cyber environment. It also relates to how participants in the super highway adhere to the codified Codes of Ethics as known and practised in the industry.

Theoretical Framework

Two theories underpin this paper - the Libertarian theory and the Social Responsibility theory. The proponents of these theories (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm 1984) argue that they are the basis for the social and political structure within which the media operate. It canvasses the idea of self-lightening process of free market-place of ideas and freedom of the individual to publish what he or she likes and to hold and express opinions freely.

The Social Responsibility theory (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm 1984) emerged in response to the shortcomings of the libertarian ideals, and thus modified libertarian theory. It argued for the public's right to information and placed a burden on the publisher to assume moral responsibilities in the course of his work. The tenets of social responsibility media theory include raising conflict to the plane of discussion; allowing the media to be used by anyone who has an idea to express, but they are forbidden to invade private rights or disrupt vital social structures or interests.

Strengths and Weaknesses

The principal arguments for the theory include the claim that it gives more values to individuals to express their thoughts in the media; it also gives more freedom to

media to reveal happenings in the society without censorship. The down sides, however, include that it ignores need for reasonable control of media as well as ignores the dilemmas posed by conflicting freedom and that the theories are more idealistic than empirical (Ostini & Fung, 2009). Ostini and Fung also argue that the world order has greatly changed in the last decades. Old concepts and frameworks such as the Four Theories, are obsolete and unlikely to apply to the present realities. Consequently, new ideas are now required to address the new and fast-changing developments of borderless forms of media in the world.

Method of study

With the aid of discourse analysis, the paper reflected on the content of some selected websites and online sources to test the validity of the assumptions that cyber journalism gives rise to issues of rights abuse and ethical infractions based on the content analysis conducted by Omazu and Enwerem (2013) and discovered that certain contextual inferences showed substantial cases of the use of words, expressions and concepts that were less than dignifying of the sources, thus revealing incidences of ethical infractions. Words and expressions that showed subjectivism, prejudice and name-calling were freely deployed clear contravention of ethical considerations. Most of the words and expressions employed in the communication, did not add sufficient value to warrant their inclusion in the write ups, rather, they were found to create negative impressions, distort meanings and convey images that were not expressly conveyed in the texts.

Most of what came out from the analyzed materials showed a clear departure from the normal journalism practice which include proper investigation, checking out the facts, confirming the facts and giving the second person an opportunity to air his/her views. There were cases of name-callings, unsubstantiated allegations without using words as 'alleged', 'reportedly', etc. to indicate that they were not verified at that point. What emerged strongly from the analysis was a clear lack of proper investigation, conviction before trial, narrow ethnic or religious, professional or political sentiments - which all together could becloud the true essence. Instead, it has the capacity to produce street action, tribal war lords and lynch mob with capacity to cause bad blood among citizens. The online journalism/cyber journalism, as practiced in these texts, showed a high level of undermining the gate-keeping role of the media while promoting mediocrity by empowering the mass audience to freely contribute to the content of the Internet and the world wide web, whether trained or not and without constraints.

The materials were analysed based on Galtung's (1998) classification of news items for data analysis which comprises editorials, straight news, features and letters from readers (which in online forum can be regarded as comment streams). A *Straight news* gives facts or quotes references on general information using the four W's and one 'H', such as who, what, when, where, why and how'. It is primarily to inform of developments and new trends. *Editorials* are usually written by members of the editorial board and they reflect the position of the newspaper; they 'identify, define, articulate and address current events or public controversies in a detailed

manner and are not afraid to state their stand'. *Feature articles*, on the other hand, are a special or prominent article about controversies or trending issues treated with some elaboration, while *Letters to the editor* reflect the interplay between the media agenda and the public agenda. The essence of the categorization is to ascertain the 'relative prominence given to varied issues and the way it is handled in order to evaluate an issue' (McCombs, 2005).

In addition, to Galtung's (1998) classification of news items, the texts were also subjected to contextual analysis in relation to some relevant elements contained in the Code of Conduct for journalists in Nigeria, to see the extent of direct use, non-use and/or misuse or implied use of those concepts/key expressions. The use/implied use or lack of inclusion of such words/expressions such as accuracy and fairness, decency, discrimination, national interest and social responsibility, whether directly or by implication, was the focus of this second category of analysis, Momoh (2010).

The place of Rights and Ethics in Nigerian Cyber Journalism Industry

The rapid growth and penetration of Internet use in Nigeria is throwing the country up as one of the fastest growing in Africa. With an estimated 48 million Nigerians hooked up to the Internet out of 160 million people, as at June 2012, Nigeria's Internet growth rate is perhaps the fastest in sub-Saharan Africa (Soremekun, 2013, p.28). Apart from using the net to conduct their businesses online, meet and chat with friends in the social media networks, Nigerian Internet users also view the Internet as a way of adding their voices to current debates. Many Nigerian newspapers and magazines are expanding their readership bases by offering online versions of their operations. There are also a plethora online news sites and blogs posts which are contributing to the pool of and debate on cyber journalism in Nigeria. All these features make the new media environment appear quite attractive to many, with an unwritten promise to help them realise their press freedom and freedom of information (Soremekun, 2013, p.30).

The liberal platform for participation guaranteed by the new media enables many Nigerians to contribute to online debates either with their real names, or through pseudo names or to appear entirely anonymous, depending on their choices. As a consequence, citizens now appear to utilise their freedom of expression to the fullest, dishing out their opinions on any issue in a no-holds-barred manner. In the face of this, it can be said that cyber journalism has offered Nigerians a concrete platform of awareness of their freedom of expression and an infinite opportunity to express that freedom.

While this may be true, it must be stated, however, that a pool of active few appears to be progressively misusing this great opportunity, converting cyber journalism into a tool for insults, hates, stereotyping and inter-ethnic cyber wars among others. These attitudes have brought Nigeria into the global "public debate over the future development of the Internet, shaped by the defence of the right to freedom of expression and freedom of information online" (Globethics.net 2013, p. 6). Those who fan the embers of hate, insults, stereotyping and ethnic wars anchor their action on the constitutional guarantee of freedom of expression. For sure, Nigerian

citizen's freedom of expression is protected by the Nigerian constitution of 1999, thus:

Every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression including freedom to hold opinion and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference, (Nigerian Constitution, 1999, Section 38(1)) Without prejudice to the generality of sub section (1) of this section, every person shall be entitled to own, establish and operate any medium for the dissemination of information, ideas and opinions, (Nigerian Constitution, 1999, Section 38 (2)).

The Freedom of Information Law, signed on the 28th of May 2011, similarly gives the citizen's right to access information. Aggregated, these two instruments put power in the hands of citizens to gather and process information on issues that are of interest to them and to express same through any media available to them including the Internet.

Some implications of misuse

Discussions on the implications of the Freedom of Information Law have tended to focus more on its capacity as instrument to make governments and their agents accountable to the citizens (Cf Enonche 2013, p. 94); while discussions on right to freedom of expression similarly focus on enabling the citizens to actualise this right to the fullest. (Cf Nwekeaku, 2013, p. 119). But what could be the implication for wrong use or abuse? Properly considered, one can argue from the above that the issue of 'right to' has always dominated discussions on the freedom of information and freedom of expression in Nigeria. Scholars seldom have paid sufficient attention to the issues of responsibilities on the part of communicators as implied in the two instruments. Neither should the use of the cyber space, because of its fluidity, absolve anyone of those responsibilities. As Omazu and Enwerem (2013) assert thus:

A citizen who deploys cyber journalism as instrument of attack, violence, cyber-bullying, name calling, insult, stereotyping against fellow citizens may claim to be doing so in fulfilment of his or her right to freedom of expression. However, the same person also exhibits clear blindness to the fact that the use of his right in the manner in which he is using it negates another person's right to personal integrity when insults and name-calling are involved, right to personal identity when stereotyping is involved.

In the same thinking, any form of invasion of a person's privacy, indecency or bullying people through cyber journalism, has the tendency to reduce the person's worth before others. It can also affect people's self-confidence and ability to perform their legitimate duties. When such things occur, the victim feels obliged to respond in equal terms and as a reprisal action launches into yet a defensive action by deploying even more vicious expressions against his/her 'enemies.' Invariably, cyber journalism is rapidly sliding into an instrument of duplicity and rights abuse

rather than serve as a forum for the dissemination of news, information and public debate as obtainable with other conventional media.

On the other hand, when stereotyping is involved, we witness an offhand dismissal of all people of an ethnic or religious group on account of the behaviour of a member of their group. For instance, a terrorist attack by a member of Boko Haram often leads to massive attack and labelling of all Nigerian Muslims as terrorists. Such practice is injurious to the personality of non-Boko Haram members who happen to be Muslims. It denies them the chance to self definition and identification. This tugs at the base of their personhood for this practice is intended to prove to them their inferiority in comparison to the person whose action or behaviour is used to define them. They acquire their identity, indeed their being, from the action of a subversive member of the group which they happen to belong, Omazu & Enwerem (2010)

Numerous scholarly articles have revealed that cyber abuse, stereotyping, and indeed "cyber-warfare can threaten public security." (Globe ethics net 2013, p.17). In a country as diverse as Nigeria, this has the tendency to engender ethnic and religious mistrust which are of great detriment to nation building. Again, the power of the Internet in influencing solidarity among citizens has been proved especially with its positive influences in the Arab Spring where the Internet forum including cyber news arena was used as tools of galvanising the citizens of the countries affected against dictatorship. And in Nigeria, the spontaneous response and action against fuel price increase by government in January 2011 and the renaming of University of Lagos, Nigeria, to Moshood Abiola University, were made possible through the use of the new media.

Also, we may as well inquire, what the implications of the practices described to youths who constitute the majority of digital natives (Prensky, 2001). Since youths are considered highly impressionable, we cannot underestimate the capacity of what they read in the Internet news arena to influence their future attitudes to life as well as the impressions they have about their fellow citizens against whom violent words were directed. Thus, sanctioning abuse of rights and unethical behaviours in the Internet has the tendency to produce violent youths and future adults, and given the number of youths involved with the Internet its effect can only be described as colossal.

Another danger relates to the type of response which abuse of rights and unethical behaviours in Internet news arena calls forth from governments. Every government views its legitimacy as intrinsically tied to its ability to maintain order and ensure the absence of violence within its territory. As certain behaviours in the Internet are more and more being defined as forms of violence, governments may view such behaviours as justifiable reasons to police the Internet news arena.

"From Freedom of the Press to Freedom from the Press"

While journalists and communicators continue to push for freedom of the press/expression both within and outside their geographical domains, there appears to be a new, unexpressed fear among citizens that the excessive freedom prevailing

in the cyber environment may lead to the disturbing situation where citizens would no longer advocate for "freedom of the press"; instead, the new concerns would be, 'freedom from the press,' an admission that the citizens are now afraid of what the press could do to or against them. This conundrum is attributable to some factors including as explained below:

Ignorance of the meaning of Rights to Freedom of Expression

Article 19 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises rights to freedom of information and expression as human rights. What this implies is that the right to seek and obtain information and to express one's opinion on issues are definitive of the human person. People who abuse and insult others in the Internet forum seem to hinge their action on their rights to freedom of expression. This is, however, a wrong interpretation of the entailments of right to freedom of expression and information. Thus, one who explores one's right to freedom of expression must also bear in mind that the same right which he has also imposes obligation, duties and responsibilities to him. One component aspects of enjoyment of one's right is that such enjoyment should not cause an infringement on the rights or dignity of other persons. Doing this, accords to J. S. Mill's harm principle whereby no one should interfere in another person's activities in so far as what the person does causes no harm to other people.

In accordance with this principle one who abuses other people in an online news environment does harm to them and therefore should be stopped. Most commentators on this suggest that the best way to stop such persons is to visit attack with right opinions, and by so doing allow opinions to compete in the market place of ideas. However, it is discovered that such right opinions are often lacking in Internet news environment. Instead, people often respond to abuse with counter abuse. Such approach rarely brings abusers to control. From experience they are emboldened by the replies that their violent opinions attract to dish out more violent attack.

Again, it is also noticed that in the case of stereotyping, people only react negatively to it when their own sentiments are involved. The danger in this is that a group with limited access to the Internet news media often lack the capacity to respond to attacks directed to it. For instance, a stereotyping directed against practitioners of African Religion may go undisputed as most members of the religion are old and often rural dwellers who lack the capacity or the resources to use the Internet.

Internet is largely anonymous

Anonymity, which is lack of reference, a state of being unknown, without identity, a kind of concealment seems to fuel this challenge. According to Aila (2009) in anonymity, a name is not given, but withheld, concealed, unknown, forgotten, unfamiliar, uncanny, and kept in the dark. It is an individual's desire for public privacy and a state in which an individual who is in public places or performing public acts still seeks, and finds freedom from identification and surveillance (Westin, 1967). Anonymity is becoming an integral part of the Internet such that it

“has made anonymity look like entitlement” (Choi 2013, p. 502). Choi builds his case on the observation that the Internet is too relaxed in identifying people who make use of it as it often does not ask for identification. When it does it permits the use of fanciful and easily disposable monikers that in actual sense identifies no one.

Academics discussions on Internet anonymity reveals that it is a dangerous license that erodes accountability, deflects responsibility, offers opportunity for the violation of other people’s rights, inspires violence and imbues a sense of invisibility that engenders crime among Internet users (Cf Bilic 2013, p 78; Soloye 2007:53; Allen 2003). From this perspective, it can be established that the person who seeks anonymity seeks to engage in double standard. He wants to be in public space, to observe events as they take place, see other persons as they parade themselves on the public sphere, pass judgement on their performance and actions and still wants no comments on the appropriateness or otherwise of his own judgement. In a cyber journalism environment, the anonymous participant seeks to hold the powerful government officials and other ordinary citizens accountable for their deeds but evades this criterion of accountability for himself. Curiously, it is yet to be seen how someone who is anonymous and unidentifiable can at the same time, expect to be covered by the provisions of the Nigerian Constitution which holds: “*Every ‘person’ shall be entitled to freedom of expression...without interference*”. In other words, the protection or guarantee of freedom of expression, is for ‘persons’ and not effigies or unidentifiable figures masquerading as commentators. Anonymous persons cannot therefore exercise any rights whatsoever.

Ignorance of the rules of Journalism

Most participants in online/cyber/digital journalism are ordinary citizens, mostly youths, who are not tutored on rules and ethics of journalism. The main driving force for participation in online news environment for this set of people is mere contribution of their voice, and at times the savouring of the euphoria that what one has written is part of billions of data stored in the Internet. In the midst of this type of consideration, little attention is paid to quality of contribution. The guiding principle of journalism is informing for the purpose of enlightenment and holding the powerful accountable for their actions. Since most Internet users seem ignorant of this, they often make contributions that neither inform nor enlighten, nor hold powerful persons accountable.

Nature of the Internet

Some scholars view some of the dangers associated with the Internet as intrinsic to the nature of the Internet itself. For instance, James et al (2010, p.220), proffered a description of the Internet as “frontier-like”. They hold that frontiers are open spaces devoid of rules and regulations and therefore harbour tremendous promises and significant perils. This sort of description seems to play a major role in the conception of cyber journalism by many Nigerians who are involved in the creation and consumption of Internet-mediated news. Even when they view traditional journalism as a regulated media they still feel that such regulations ought not to apply and does not apply to cyber journalism. Indeed, regulating the Internet is a

difficult process for even when regulation is achieved within a country, Internet users often operate from other countries where their activities are not regulated or where regulations do not apply to acts directed towards foreign countries.

Checking Rights Abuse and Unethical Behaviours in Cyber Journalism

Faced with the danger which the traditional press poses to human society, Thomas (2012, p.526) had observed as follows:

To continue to devote ourselves to a media model that no longer reflects where power resides in society is not only a derogation of duty, but plainly illogical. Powerful entities cannot roam the global safari unimpeded; their power must be checked and they must be accountable for their actions.... The news media have become ferocious guardians of their own rights, but absentee parents of the rights of the public. The tabloid press has, for too long, pandered to the basest instincts of ... society, with its voyeurism, invasions of privacy, and obsession with trivia, conflict and personality politics. This culture celebrates the downfall of its victims, turning journalism into a blood sport where the most aggressive dog in the pack wins. This has not gone unnoticed by the ... public.

Thomas's argument is that power has shifted from the governments and now resides with the press. Traditionally, the press was seen as an instrument of protecting the public from the powers of their governments. Samantha (2003) views all forms of power as a problem from hell. It follows that now that the press has assumed the toga of the powerful, a new aspect of the freedom of the press must reflect more on how to protect the ordinary citizen, the powerless, from the press. In this matrix, press freedom does not mean freedom for the press more than it means 'freedom from the press.' Thus, the dangers of traditional journalism articulated by Thomas seem to fizzle into insignificance once discussion is shifted to cyber journalism as it is continuously turning into a fertile ground for much of what is bad and ugly in journalism.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is believed that cyber journalism is dynamic and ever growing, hence the citizens' crave for it will continue to grow fuelling concerns that the identified problems may continue if not checked. This paper, therefore, considers a number of measures to attain a more acceptable cyber journalism practice. The European Committee of Ministers views the abuse of rights and other unethical behaviours in the Internet from the Socratic perspective whereby ignorance is the cause of vice (European Committee of Ministers, 2012). Adopting this measure by online news providers will be of great benefit.

Recommendations

The paper therefore recommends as follows:

1. Consideration of the European Committee of Ministers recommendation that users be provided with "clear information about the editorial policy of the

social networking service provider in respect of how it deals with apparently illegal content, etc.

2. Need for a proactive measure on the part of government to ensure that cyber journalism in Nigeria conforms to certain standards, such as establishing an Online Media Commission whose duty will be to regulate cyber journalism in Nigeria, draw guidelines for operators and ensure strict adherence.
3. Provision of training and retraining programmes for Nigerians (especially the youth and other active online participants) in the art of journalism, especially as regards the rights, privileges and responsibilities of journalists where ever they may be practising.
4. The line between a trained journalist and an untrained one (citizen journalist) in terms of covering and reporting the news, appears to be narrowing. This therefore calls for plans to incorporate these "accidental journalists" formally into the rubrics of the 'profession' to avoid further damage.

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