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EVALUATION OF PROFESSIONAL STANDARD AND PRESS FREEDOM AMONG MEDIA PRACTITIONERS IN ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this work is to evaluate press freedom and effective media practices among journalists in Enugu, Nigeria. The survey research method was adopted. To this end, the researcher issued 210 copies of questionnaire to journalists in Enugu, this is based on the number of registered journalist in Enugu Chapter of the Nigerian Union of Journalist. Simple percentage and tables were used for data analysis. While the study used the Libertarian theory and social responsibility theory as its theoretical foundation, the findings shows that press freedom is practiced to a limited extent, this connotes that press freedom is a term solely defined but not practiced at large. Issues in press freedom were explored with the clear link between a free and unfettered press and good governance. The state of press freedom in Enugu was examined, noting that the journalists and media professionals suffered attacks, including arrests, detention, assaults, threats, and seizure of equipment for carrying out their traditional and constitutional roles. In order to enhance press freedom and effective media practices in Nigeria, this study recommends that media houses should be allowed to operate independently, journalists should be allowed to have access to government sources and records so long as it will not bring chaos to the polity. Government and media owners should motivate journalists through good and attractive welfare packages, so that these packages would encourage and drive them to stay on the side of truth, objective news reporting and fairness.

Keywords: Evaluation, Press Freedom, Professional standard, Media Practices, Journalists.

Introduction

Globally, and particularly in Nigeria, media operations play a crucial role in advancing democratic progress, promoting equitable governance, and safeguarding civil liberties. A free press empowers the public to engage in political processes, strengthens institutional accountability, and contributes to nation-building. Press freedom, by definition, allows media outlets to share information openly, critique societal structures, and hold political, economic, and social systems to scrutiny (Asemah, 2011).

Researchers such as Nwakaego (2012) highlight that press freedom serves as a benchmark for evaluating democratic maturity and developmental progress in nation-building. Similarly, Hacket and Carroll (2010) emphasize the media's constitutional role as a societal watchdog—exposing power abuses, advocating for justice, challenging elitism, and driving transformative social reforms. A vibrant press facilitates public dialogue, amplifies marginalized voices, and shapes discourse on critical issues, thus fostering inclusive civic participation.

Within democratic frameworks, the media fulfills three key functions, as outlined in a 2004 Nigerian freedom of expression advocacy publication (Tell, September 20, 2004, p. 47). These include: (1) informing citizens on governance and policy through balanced analysis and debate; (2) monitoring power structures to expose corruption, inefficiency, and policy failures; and (3) educating the public on civic rights and participatory mechanisms. Collectively, these roles promote transparent, responsive governance and strengthen democratic institutions.

Press freedom remains essential to assessing a nation's democratic health. Transparent governance and public access to information rely on unrestricted media expression. Onagoruwa (2012) defines this freedom as the press's ability to operate without coercion, harassment, or censorship. As the "fourth estate," media institutions bear a constitutional and ethical duty to oversee governmental branches, ensuring citizens are informed about leadership decisions and policies. This underscores the necessity of investigating press freedom dynamics and journalistic practices in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

A free press is not a luxury to be deferred for more favorable circumstances; rather, it is a critical mechanism for establishing those improved conditions. Although Nigeria currently exhibits a diversity of voices and ideas within its media landscape, this does not automatically equate to a truly open and free society. The issue lies in the narrow interpretation of press freedom as merely the ability of journalists to report and express opinions. In reality, it is closely tied to the public's right to access accurate information and hold power accountable. According to Bamidele (2013, p. 51), "Countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, and a few others are environments where journalism often encounters intimidation, harassment, arbitrary arrests, detention, and other forms of repression by both state and non-state actors, particularly when reporting on corruption within political administrations." This highlights the importance of examining press freedom in Nigeria's current political climate.

In democratic societies, journalists operating without adequate press autonomy face significant risks, including mistreatment and abuse. In Nigeria, law enforcement agencies have frequently targeted media professionals, especially editors and reporters who maintain professional integrity and resist government attempts to manipulate public narratives (Bamidele, 2013). The growing number of assaults, arrests, and legal actions targeting journalists highlights a troubling trend that shows no indication of slowing down. A notable example occurred during the October 2020 End-SARS protests, when journalists reporting on the nationwide demonstrations against police brutality were subjected to arrests, physical violence, threats, and the seizure of their equipment. Instead of safeguarding press freedom,

authorities have increasingly taken steps to silence media voices, thereby obstructing their ability to operate effectively.

The persistent harassment, violence, and detention of media professionals underscore significant concerns regarding the state of press freedom in Nigeria. This research seeks to examine these obstacles, particularly how they prevent journalists from carrying out their duties without fear or external interference. Furthermore, the media's ability to function as the "fourth estate" has been severely compromised by expansive interpretations of "national security," which have profound implications for the country's socio-economic development. Given this backdrop, this research seeks to investigate the conditions under which journalists gather and disseminate news independently and impartially, free from external pressures or threats.

Research Questions

To ensure the research aligns with its objectives, the study will be steered by these essential questions:

1. What is the level of press freedom among journalists in Enugu State?
2. What are the perceptions of journalists in Enugu State on press freedom and professional standard in Nigeria?
3. How does press freedom influence Professional standard in media practice?
4. What are the problems affecting the press in effective media practice?
5. What are the opportunities available to the journalists through press freedom?

Literature Review

In their 2017 study titled "Analysis of Impediments to Nigerian Press Freedom: Implication on the National Development," Touitou and Tina C. examined the crucial role of press freedom as a fundamental human right essential for any society, particularly in Nigeria. The unrestricted flow of information and expression is critical for the effective functioning of democratic systems. Democracy thrives on transparency, openness, and accountability, which facilitate the exchange of information both globally and locally. This fosters broader and more balanced dissemination of knowledge while ensuring that no barriers hinder free expression. Additionally, improving communication capabilities in developing nations can enhance their involvement in the communication process.

Although absolute press freedom does not exist anywhere in the world, Nigeria faces numerous constraints on press freedom aimed at protecting societal interests. The researchers relied on empirical secondary data to conclude that meaningful democratic participation depends on the press performing its professional duties effectively. They also stressed the role of the mass media in fostering national unity, development, and regulated governance. Additionally, they emphasized the necessity of expanding media access to rural areas as a crucial step towards substantial progress.

In 2011, Omora conducted a study titled *The Quest for More Effective Media and the Freedom of Information Act in Nigeria*. This research examined the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and its potential to enhance the effectiveness of media operations in the country. The study utilized historical analysis, document review, and interviews to assess the FOIA and its implications for media professionals, the media sector, and various aspects of national life in Nigeria.

The study concluded by recommending the adoption of the FOIA across all 36 states in Nigeria. It argued that this would help remove unnecessary barriers to accessing information, combat widespread corruption, and promote a culture of accountability and efficient service delivery at all levels of government. Furthermore, the study called for collaboration between Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and media institutions to push for amendments to the FOIA. It noted that the current version of the act is heavily restricted and requires revisions to maximize its impact.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on two core theories: the Libertarian (or Free Press) Theory and the Social Responsibility Media Theory. When combined, these frameworks emphasize that freedom must be balanced with responsibility.

Libertarian (Free Press) theory

The libertarian theory gained prominence in 1963 through the work of F. S. Siebert, T. B. Peterson, and Wilbur Schramm. According to Baran and Davis (2000, p. 90), libertarianism is a normative framework that perceives individuals as inherently good and rational, capable of distinguishing between sound and unsound ideas. This perspective proposes that the press should act as a partner with the government in the pursuit of truth, rather than merely serving as an instrument of state control (Folarin, 2002, p. 30). Drawing on Darmola (2003), Anaeto, Onabanjo, and Osofiso (2008, p. 55) identified the core principles of the theory: publications should be free from prior censorship, the gathering of information for publication should not face restrictions as long as it is conducted legally, and journalists should enjoy a reasonable level of autonomy in their professional environments.

Social Responsibility Theory

The Social Responsibility theory emerged from the Hutchins Commission on Freedom of the Press, established in the United States in 1942 amid significant criticism of American newspapers. Initiated by publisher Henry Luce and chaired by Robert Hutchins, the commission aimed to evaluate the contexts in which the press was either succeeding or failing, as well as to identify where freedom of expression might be restricted or unhindered. Building on the principles of the Libertarian theory, the Social Responsibility theory emphasizes that "freedom comes with obligations, and the press, which enjoys a special position under government, must be accountable to society for fulfilling its essential roles" (Anaeto et al., 2010, p. 57).

This theory is particularly relevant to this study, as it is widely acknowledged that no country offers absolute press freedom. The extent of press freedom varies depending on the nation in which the media operates. This research examines press freedom in Enugu State, highlighting the factors that impede press freedom in Nigeria while considering the broader implications of social responsibility in journalism.

Methodology

This study adopted the survey method research design because there is need to elicit data regarding the opinions of journalist as it relates to press freedom and how it brings about effective journalism. The population for this study comprises the total number of journalist registered in Nigerian Union of Journalist Enugu Chapter. The population of journalist in Enugu is **210** (Two hundred and Ten) registered under Nigeria Union of Journalist (NUJ). The

sample size for this study consist of 210 respondents. The multistage sampling procedure was used to select the samples for this study. The first stage involved the use of purposive sampling technique to select four media houses in Enugu which includes Dream FM, Radio Nigeria, NTA, and Daily Independent Newspaper. The second stage involved the use of availability sampling technique to get to 210 journalists in any of the selected media houses in Enugu State. Furthermore, the study used a proportionate sampling technique to select the number of elements to be studied in each media house. The research instrument for this study is the questionnaire. The questionnaire has two sections; the first one covers the demographic characteristics of the respondents while the second one contains items that address the research questions. It is the most appropriate to get opinions and comments of respondents. A four point Likert scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree were also adopted for ease of statistical analysis.

Results

Table 1: Description of demographic and psychographic data of respondents

Variable	**Percentage (%)**
Gender	
Male	53.9
Female	46.1
State of practice	
Enugu	52.7
Imo	47.3
Media sector	
Government	46.0
Private	54.0
Length of practice	
1 year	3.4
2 years	9.7
3-5 years	36.0
6-10 years	27.9
>10years	23.0
Media organization	
Radio	49.0
Television	9.4
Newspaper	30.1
Online media	10.7
Beat	
Science	4.4
Health	14.9

Business	19.1
Politics	29.0
Sports	17.5
Entertainment	21.1
Registration with Nigerian Union of Journalists	
No	6.8
Yes	92.7

Research question 1: What is the level of press freedom in Enugu State, Nigeria? Table 2: Level of press freedom in Enugu State, Nigeria

S/N	Items	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Mean	Remarks
1	I publish accurate and balanced information	61.5	38.4	2.41	Disagree
2	I receive threats	60.4	39.6	2.37	Disagree
3	I have been sacked	90.8	9.0	2.09	Disagree
4	I have been attacked	81.8	18.2	2.11	Disagree
5	I have been imprisoned	96.6	3.4	2.02	Disagree

From Table 2 above, journalists disagreed with all the listed items. The level of press freedom is low since journalists cannot disseminate accurate and balanced information (61.5 %). However, journalists do not receive threats (60.4 %), are not facing suspension/loss of job (90.8 %), physical attacks (81.8 %) or imprisonment (96.6 %) for reporting, publishing and disseminating accurate information. Other factors inhibiting press freedom apart from the listed items have to be unraveled.

Research question 2: What are the perceptions of journalists in Enugu State on press freedom in Nigeria?

Table 3: The perception of journalists in Enugu on press freedom in Nigeria

S/N	Items	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Mean	Remarks
6	Press freedom is not guaranteed in Nigeria	3.2	96.9	3.82	Agree
7	Press freedom is highly practiced in Nigeria	96.6	3.2	1.33	Disagree
8	Press freedom is practiced in Nigeria	46.9	53.0	2.47	Agree*
9	Press freedom is rarely practiced in Nigeria	5.0	95	3.10	Agree
10	Press freedom is not practiced in Nigeria	61.6	38.4	2.24	Disagree

Results contained in Table 3indicate that 96.9 % of respondents perceive press freedom not to be guaranteed in Nigeria. Also, there is uniformity in rejecting that press freedom is highly practiced in Nigeria to the tune of 96.6% of respondents. Almost all respondents (95.0 %) agree that press freedom is rarely practiced in Nigeria, while most respondents (61.6 %) reject the idea that press freedom is not practiced at all. Although, more respondents (53.0 %) agreed

that press freedom is practiced in Nigeria, the mean value (2.47) is below the accepted value of 2.50.

Research question 3: What are the influences of press freedom on effective media practice?
Table 4: The influence of press freedom on effective media practice

S/N	Items	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Mean	Remarks
11	A free press is more productive	1.1	98.9	3.77	Agree
12	A free press is more creative	0.8	99.2	3.62	Agree
13	A free press is fearless	1.3	98.6	3.76	Agree
14	A free press is innovative	2.1	97.9	3.38	Agree
15	A free press is more proactive	1.1	98.7	3.71	Agree
16	A free press promoted development	7.7	92.3	3.28	Agree
17	A free press leads to a peaceful society	59.4	40.4	2.59	Disagree*
18	A free press abhors corruption	4.2	95.8	3.51	Agree

From Table 4 above, over 92 % of the respondents agree in seven out of the eight listed impacts of press freedom as a tool for effective media practice. Thus, journalists agree that a free press is more productive, creative, fearless, innovative and proactive, promotes development and abhors corruption. However, more respondents (59.4 %) do not agree that a free press leads to a peaceful society devoid of insecurities.

Research questions 4: What are the problems affecting the press in effective media practices?
Table 5: To identify the problems affecting the press in effective media practices

S/N	Items	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Mean	Remarks
19	Journalists are not tech-savvy	16.9	83.0	3.13	Agree
20	Poor internet facility	5.3	94.7	3.49	Agree
21	Cost of buying data/gadgets too high	1.1	99.0	3.65	Agree
22	Prevalence of defamatory statements	1.6	98.4	3.64	Agree
23	Poor remuneration	0.6	99.4	3.84	Agree

Results in Table 5 shows that respondents agree with the listed issues as limitation to effective media practice. Hence, the use of manual approach instead of recent technologies, poor internet facility, high cost of equipment, stifling of the press and poor remuneration inhibits effective media practice.

Research question 5: What are the opportunities available to the journalists through press freedom?

Table 6: Opportunities available to the journalist through press freedom

S/N	Items	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Mean	Remarks
24	Information comes from multiple sources	10.9	88.0	3.51	Agree
25	Journalists are always on their toes	0.3	99.2	3.53	Agree
26	Identity protection for journalists	1.1	98.7	3.26	Agree
27	Leads to a conscious society	34.8	65.1	2.85	Agree
28	Journalists can report real time events	0.5	99.4	3.32	Agree

Most respondents agree with the suggested opportunities for press freedom (Table 6). Press freedom can be achieved by using multiple sources of information; provision of up-to-date feeds; identity protection and anonymity; and real time reporting.

Discussion of Findings

Research question 1 (One): The level of press freedom in Enugu State, Nigeria

The data presentation and analysis shows that the level of press freedom is low since journalists cannot freely disseminate information without the fear of been threatened, imprisoned, attacked or suspended. The study also highlights that absolute press freedom is non-existent in Enugu State or Nigeria as a whole. Various external and internal factors regulate media operations in the country, including legal, economic, and political constraints, as well as issues related to secrecy and direct censorship or coercion. These factors significantly limit the press's ability to operate without restrictions.

Similarly, in 2010, Akeem conducted a research project titled "Repression of Press Freedom in Nigerian Democratic Dispensations." The study surveyed 480 participants from Lagos and Ibadan, with over 91 percent of respondents agreeing that press freedom has never been fully realized during any democratic period in Nigeria. This finding is consistent with numerous reports documenting the harassment of journalists and human rights violations in the country.

Research question 2 (two): The perception of journalists in Enugu State on press freedom in Nigeria

The findings in Table 3 indicate that press freedom is still uncertain in Nigeria. Despite being enshrined in the Nigerian constitution, press freedom appears to be more of a nominal guarantee, as the government uses various tactics to circumvent the rights provided by law.
In a related study, Dunu and Ugbo (2014) examined "The Nigerian Journalists' Knowledge, Perception, and Use of the Freedom of Information (FOI) Law in Journalism Practices." The importance of accessing information, expressing views, and participating in governance has been recognized by many democratic governments globally, leading to the adoption and implementation of Freedom of Information Acts, including in Nigeria.

However, it seems that this significant power granted to the media—and by extension, journalists—has not been fully utilized. As key disseminators of public information and societal watchdogs, the media's role remains underexplored and underutilized in practice.

Research question 3 (three): The influence of press freedom on effective media practices In Table four, it was revealed that free press is more productive, creative, fearless, innovative, and proactive, promotes development and abhors corruption.

In their 2017 study titled "Analysis of Impediments to Nigerian Press Freedom: Implication on the National Development," Touitou and Tina C. emphasize the crucial importance of press freedom as a fundamental human right essential for any society, particularly in Nigeria. The unrestricted flow of information and expression is essential for the proper functioning of democratic systems. Democracy depends on transparency, openness, and accountability, which ensure that information circulates freely at both international and national levels. This promotes the broader and more balanced dissemination of knowledge while removing barriers to free expression. Additionally, improving communication capabilities in developing nations can enhance their involvement in global communication processes.

Although no country enjoys absolute press freedom, Nigeria faces significant constraints on media liberty, often justified in the name of societal interests. Using empirical secondary data, the study concludes that for democratic participation to be genuinely meaningful, the press must effectively fulfill its professional responsibilities. It further recommends that the mass media should act as a catalyst for national unity, development, and regulated governance. To achieve meaningful progress, the study suggests expanding the reach of media to rural communities to ensure that the benefits of information access extend to all parts of the country.

Research question 4 (Four): Problems affecting the press in effective media practices
Results in Table 4 shows that respondents agree with the listed issues as limitation to effective media practice. Hence, the use of manual approach instead of recent technologies; poor internet facility; high cost of equipment; stifling of the press and poor remuneration deters effective media practice.

Nigerian media organizations face significant pressures from political figures and various private interests while performing their duties. These challenges hinder their ability to contribute effectively to societal development. Despite these obstacles, the media should not allow their work to be impeded. Whether privately or publicly owned, media entities should not serve as propaganda tools for their owners. From a sociological and philosophical perspective, media houses exist to protect the rights of the general public and advocate for their interests, from the most remote areas to the highest levels of society. As the Fourth Estate, they must rise to the occasion when needed.

In 2014, Nwanne conducted research titled "Another Look at Press Freedom" and argued that genuine press freedom serves as a shield, protecting journalists and other media professionals from all forms of injustice and abuse. The differing perspectives highlighted in the study reflect diverse opinions on the true meaning of press freedom. A robust level of press freedom is crucial for establishing inclusive, knowledge-based societies and democracies, promoting dialogue, peace, and effective governance. Furthermore, strong press freedom is vital for ensuring the safety of journalists and combating impunity and human rights violations.

Research question 5 (Five): Opportunities available to the journalists through press freedom.

Here, most respondents agree with the suggested opportunities for press freedom through technology (Table 5). Press freedom can be achieved by using multiple sources of information; provision of up-to-date feeds; identity protection and anonymity; and real time reporting.

In his book, Deuze (2012) contends that the adoption of technological advancements not only changes the daily tasks of journalists but also leads to a reevaluation of their professional identity. The book examines the relationship between journalists' professional perspectives on how the Internet impacts journalistic values and their actual usage patterns in practice. Additionally, it provides empirical evidence to enhance the often speculative discussions about the influence of the Internet on journalism, offering a more grounded viewpoint on this evolving dynamic.

Recommendations

In order to enhance press freedom and effective media practices in Nigeria, the following steps should be taken:

1. To ensure that journalists working for government-owned media outlets can express themselves without worrying about reprisals, media organizations must be given the freedom to function. Furthermore, the government ought to protect independent media organizations' functioning and protect journalists' freedoms.
2. Legal requirements should ensure that journalists in Nigeria have the freedom to exercise their profession without excessive limitations in order to ensure press freedom. Leaders and government representatives need to openly acknowledge the vital role journalists play in educating the public, advancing human rights, and holding leaders responsible. Law enforcement organizations and security personnel should also receive training on how to safeguard media professionals and abstain from actions like raids on media outlets, arbitrary arrests, harassment, and intimidation.
3. Media practitioners are expected to uphold the highest standards of professional ethics and integrity in order to preserve the balance of rights and responsibilities in journalism. This dedication will contribute to the preservation and upholding of press freedom.
4. To improve journalists' technical and professional skills, the government should provide them with up-to-date technology. Furthermore, in order to inspire journalists, the government and media owners should go above and beyond their essential responsibilities by providing them with alluring and competitive welfare packages. Even in the face of danger or difficulty, these rewards can motivate people to seek the truth, impartiality, equity, and investigative journalism.
5. The government should view new communication technologies as vital instruments for promoting free speech and guaranteeing the unhindered dissemination of information. It is important to work quickly to standardize these technologies so that everyone, wherever they may be, has fair access to networks and content. Through information access, this strategy will empower people and encourage diversity.

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