Ownership Influence and Cases of Editorializing News in The Port Harcourt Telegraph and National Network

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This study examined whether there were cases of editorializing news stories in The Port Harcourt Telegraph and National Network as a result of political partisanship of their owners who were frontline members of political parties and if so, whether such amounted to gross ethical misconduct in the practice of journalism. The study determined, if ever, the act of editorializing news by the newspaper owners affected the credibility of the newspapers; ascertained if ever, how their editorializing news flouted the ethics of the press; compared the two newspapers in terms of extent of neutrality to perceived interest and the level of distortion of straight news stories and flouting of ethics. The triangulation research design of quantitative and qualitative content analyses was employed to measure the extent of editorializing straight news stories by the newspapers. The findings showed that ownership influenced both newspapers in editorializing their straight news stories which were severally partisan, thus defeating the cardinal objectives of journalism and the moral duty which are guided by ethical code of conduct. It is, therefore, recommended that relevant authorities should initiate proactive measures against media owners who wish to join partisan politics not to interfere in their editorial contents mostly the news contents; the Nigerian Press Organisation and other relevant agencies should periodically review their mandate of monitoring the activities of the press and organise regular forum to review contents of the mass media with a view to ensuring compliance with professional and ethical code of conduct.

Keywords: Editorializing, ethics of journalism, neutrality, newspaper ownership, partisan interest.

Introduction

Editorializing news stories in newspaper reports is an act in which newspapers or broadcasting organizations express opinions, rather than just report the news as it is. It is part of the numerous challenges facing sound journalism practice all over the world. Uwakwe (2005) says to editorialize is “to inject personal opinion on supposedly objective story,” (p.218). According to vocabulary.com editorializing “was coined in 1856, meaning ‘introduce opinions into factual accounts’.”

Over the years, studies have shown that the editorial policies of most mass media are being influenced by the philosophies of the owners thus, ownership and control pattern of the mass media to a large extent, have a way of influencing coverage, analysis and interpretation of news items and issues of public interest. Some of such studies included the one carried out by Ojebuyi and Ekennia entitled: “Godfatherism, Ownership Influence and Media Treatment of Political Conflicts in Oyo State, Nigeria,” which examined how The Nigerian Tribune and The Nation newspapers treated the political feud between Late Chief Lamidi Ariyibi Adedibu and his ‘political son’, Senator Rashidi Adewolu Ladoja in Oyo State, Nigeria (2005-2007) and concluded that ownership factor and political affiliation shaped the contents of the newspapers in terms of the degree of prominence accorded the two political actors. Also, Olayiwola's work entitled: “Political Communications: Press and Politics in Nigeria's Second Republic,” as reported in the journal of Africa Media Review, examined mass media bias in Nigerian political communications and also found out that ownership of the mass media in Nigeria tends to determine how they are used for political communications.

From the first newspaper in Nigeria: Iwe Irohin Fun Awon Ara Egba which was established by Rev. Henry Townsend and on December 3, 1859 to some present newspapers, the press system has always been influenced positively, neutrally and/or negatively by certain philosophies and ideologies. This study evaluates two privately-owned newspapers: The Port Harcourt Telegraph group and the National Network. The former is owned and published by Mr. Ogbonna Nwuke, while the latter was owned and managed by Mr. Jerry Needam. Both publishers coincidentally were active party loyalists as they individually held different positions in their political parties.

Edeani (1985) points out that privately-owned media could operate as commercial newspaper, partisan newspaper or religious newspaper. He notes that the important viewpoint is the assumption that the pattern of ownership of the mass media is crucial in determining the strength or weakness of the press. A review of the policy statements of the two newspapers did not

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however, show that they were established as partisan or religious newspapers, but to join other well-meaning mass media to hold government accountable to the people, while disseminating its policies and programmes in a socially-responsible arrangement.

Acknowledging that a publisher could be a member of a political party without necessarily denying his mass medium the editorial independence, this study is guided by the fact that the founder of The Guardian newspaper, Dr Alex Urueme Ibru (late), had taken up appointment during the regime of General Sani Abacha (also late) as Minister of Internal Affairs (1993-95) without interfering in the editorial content of his newspaper as evident in the testimonies of some of his staff. Mr. Ben Tomoloju, a former Deputy Editor of The Guardian, in his tribute to the late Ibru, as reported in Information Nigeria of December 18th, 2011, said that his former proprietor (Dr. Alex Ibru) with his business acumen gave opportunity to young professionals to flourish. “He did not intervene in the editorial content of The Guardian. Journalism flourishes when the proprietor does not intervene with the business of news production,” Mr. Tomoloju had observed in his tribute to the deceased media mogul. Therefore, what could have been the case of these two newspapers under study? Did they show manifest partisanship by editorializing their news to favour their political friends or not? If any, how did they show it? Is such partisan or ethical, if any?

Statement of the problem
The news story is a highly skilled and specialized form of report that emphasizes accuracy, balance, fairness and objectivity. A news story does not introduce opinion the way it is done in editorial, feature story, advertorial, commentary and cartoon. Omego and Nwachukwu (2013) note that news story which is an account of an event possesses distinct characteristics of immediacy, factuality and objectivity.

When a mass medium or a reporter editorializes news reports, such medium or reporter does not only fail in upholding the cardinal principles of objectivity, fairness, accuracy and truthful reporting, but also exposes the medium and report to ridicule for lacking credibility. It is therefore a problem when mass media or reporters engage in act of editorializing straight news stories.

This study therefore, seeks to find out whether there were cases of editorializing straight news stories in The Port Harcourt Telegraph and National Network newspapers following the partisanship of their owners and to what extent are the two newspapers engaged in the act of editorializing news and how does such, if any, flout the ethics of the profession?

Objectives of the study
The following constitutes objectives of the study; to

i. ascertain cases of editorializing straight news in the reports of The Port Harcourt Telegraph and the National Network;

ii. determine the extent at which acts of editorializing news affected the ethics of journalism;

iii. compare the two newspapers in terms of their neutrality to news distortion;

Research Questions
The following research questions guided the study; to

i. what degree does the act of editorializing news ascertained in the reports of The Port Harcourt Telegraph and National Network newspapers?

ii. what extent does the act of editorializing news flout the ethics of journalism?

iii. what extent are the two newspapers comparatively neutral to the act of editorializing news?

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review
The Social Responsibility theory and Media Systems Dependency theory are the two theories of the mass media that formed the basis for this study. The rationale for selecting these theories hinges on the fact that they both address the role of responsible press in a tripartite system that revolves around the media, audience and society.

Social Responsibility Theory
The idea of social responsibility was developed as a counterpoint to libertarianism.
Although both theories emphasize freedom, the social responsibility theory holds that responsibility is necessarily a partner to freedom in institutional behaviour. Codes of ethics are encouraged as a self-regulatory device to promote social responsibility, Day (2000).

In his study commissioned in 1942 on the prospects of press freedom in America, Robert Hutchins, listed five functions of the media to society:

1. To provide a truthful, comprehensive; and intelligent account of the day's event in a context that gives them meaning;
2. To serve as a forum for exchange of comment and criticism;
3. To provide a representative picture of constituent groups in society; and
4. To present and clarify the goals and values of society;
5. To provide citizens with full access to the day's intelligence, (Patterson and Wilkins 1998).

Media Systems Dependency Theory

Miller (2002) writes that: “MSD (Media System Dependency theory), first proposed by Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur (1976), has at its heart a tripartite system in which media, audience and society are seen to have dependency relationships with each other” (p.247). Each of the components (i.e. media, audience and society) is seen as depending on the other components in the system by drawing on resources in order to satisfy goals.

According to Miller, the duo posit that: “MSD also emphasises that dependency relationships go both ways and that media sources may adjust their content based on audience dependency relationships.”

Espousing on the interrelatedness among the components and other variables, Okon (2001) holds that: “One sure way of understanding the relationship between the media and society is to view the media as subsystems operating within a system enveloped by a set of social conditions that make up the society” (p. 138).

Review of Related Literature

In media ethics, dual loyalty is allegiance to separate interests that potentially entail a conflict of interest. According to Foreman (2010), conflict of interest manifests when a mass medium has an interest to protect which competes with another interest. Media credibility is undermined when the mass medium fails to protect its interest against another conflicting interest. Foreman asserts that journalists owe their first allegiance to the audience. In this study, conflict of interest competes with ethical code of conduct.

Conflict of interest in journalism usually arises as a result of allowing pressures on media content. It is always difficult to effectively serve two opposing interests at a time; the primary responsibility of journalists is to their readers or viewers (audience) and the society which according to the Media Systems Dependency Theory is an interplay of a tripartite relationship. Yellow or sensational journalism which is otherwise referred to as Junk Journalism has no regard for the cardinal principles of journalism which are: accuracy, balance, fairness and objectivity. It is closely related to diatribe journalism which sees nothing good in what others; be they individuals, groups or governments are doing.

In their argument condemning interference of personal interest of media owners on newspaper contents, Omego and Ochonogor (2012) citing Nwanze (2003) assert that: The history of the media in Nigeria (both print and broadcast media) shows that at different times of the nation's history the media were used by their owners (both government and private owners) to advance their own interests...In almost all cases they were used as propaganda tools. In the colonial era, the print was used to serve the interest of then colonial government. A few who initially opposed and criticized the colonial government could not sustain themselves as the government that could be depended upon for patronage would naturally not support newspapers that opposed it (p.56).

Amadi (2003) captures the need for compliance to ethical code of conduct when he explains that: “a peace-keeper must be neutral. So must a journalist. The journalist must not take
side with what the journalist is writing neither is the journalist free to take side with the person(s) about whom the journalist is writing. A journalist must also not take side with the likely people who may consume his writing. The journalist must not even take side with him/herself. The only thing the journalist MUST take side with is OBJECTIVITY" (p.90).

Continuing, Amadi writes that: “Objectivity should mean insistence that the media conform to their own supposedly autonomous and supposedly professional standards for producing accounts of reality.”

On the contrary, citing Silverman (1974), Amadi (2003) states that subjectivity “is the production of news, report or comment based on personal bias and commitments of the author. The major attribute of subjective comment becomes, therefore, that its author allows 'halo effect', personal sympathies, personal political views, personal value judgment to be the basis from which speech springs” (p.70).

Espousing on the concepts of subjectivity, selectivity and objectivity, Amadi stressed the need to know the background of a gate-keeper in news reporting to ascertain whether he is being influenced by any worldviews.

Yalaju (2001) points out that within the social responsibility context, the mass media are expected to bear the responsibility of protecting the interests of the people against the government and assist government to achieve its objectives. He however, notes that: “Apart from the positive uses, there are negative aspects that can be used to destroy personalities either to achieve political or secretarian (sic) motives, it can misinform through biased reporting of events with the aim of brainwashing readers” (p.12).

Okunna (2003) observes that it is only a disciplined press that can make meaningful contributions to national development and discipline comes from journalists' adherence to the ethics of their profession. Okunna's observation that the press in all regions of the world was becoming more powerful without becoming more ethically responsible corroborates the basis for this study.

In other words, it is the task before these researchers to find out the extent to which Ojoko (2003) could be right when he submits that: “As one of the four news determinants, the editorial policy only publishes the interest, direction and appeal of the owner, the publisher and the editor, any other materials find their way into waste paper baskets in all editorials departments” (p.118).

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Research methodology

The study used ten news events to analyse cases of editorializing straight news stories and the extent in which such act breach ethical code of conduct. The news events constituted the major news reports that took place as build-ups to the General Election of 2007 and ran successively throughout the administrations of Sir Omehia and Rt. Hon. Amaechi as governors of Rivers State. They were widely reported in the media between December 2006 and December 2013 which amounted to a population of 100, comprising 50 of each edition of the two newspapers: The Port Harcourt Telegraph and National Network.

The Purposive Sampling Technique was adopted in the selection of the editions under study. Purposive technique involves selecting subjects on basis of specific characteristics or attributes that are important to the research study. Elendu (2010) states that: “Purposive sampling technique is done bearing in mind the purpose of the study...” (p.43).

The Taro Yamane formula was used to determine the sample size. The formula is as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n = is the sample size
N = is the population size
e = is the level of precision (sampling error).
80 is thus the sample size with each newspaper being 40.
Unit of Analysis and Content Categories

The Unit of Analysis used in this study is the Straight News Story. The straight news story is chosen because it ordinarily gives a straight account of events in a factual and objective manner without embellishment.

The major research instrument used for this study is the coding sheet. The coding sheet was employed because it guided the process of coded information from the two privately-owned newspapers covered in the study.

The inter-coder reliability test which calculates the level of agreement among independent coders who code the same contents using the same coding instruments was used in this study. The Holsti formula was applied:

\[
\frac{2m}{N_1 + N_2} = 0.92
\]

Where:
- \( m \) = is the total items agreed upon
- \( N_1 \) = is the total items coder 1 selected
- \( N_2 \) = is the total items coder 2 selected

The primary source of data collection for this study is the newspaper. The data used for the analyses were obtained in The Port Harcourt Telegraph and National Network newspapers.

The study used quantitative and qualitative techniques to analyse the data. Data for quantitative technique were analysed using tables and simple percentages, while qualitative approach was analysed based on newspaper contents, using Critical Incidence Analysis (CIA).

Analysis and Discussion of Findings

RQ;1: To what degree does the act of editorializing straight news ascertained in the reports of The Port Harcourt Telegraph and National Network newspapers?

Table 1: Measurement of degree of editorializing news stories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>PH Telegraph</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>-</th>
<th>Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PHT</td>
<td>Amaechi</td>
<td>Omehia</td>
<td>Amaechi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favourable stories</td>
<td>56 (58.33%)</td>
<td>43 (44.79%)</td>
<td>39 (40.62%)</td>
<td>4 (4.17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfavourable</td>
<td>28 (29.17%)</td>
<td>3 (3.13%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3 (3.13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral stories</td>
<td>12 (12.5%)</td>
<td>8 (8.33%)</td>
<td>6 (6.25%)</td>
<td>2 (2.08%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96 (100%)</td>
<td>54 (56.25%)</td>
<td>45 (46.87%)</td>
<td>9 (9.38%)</td>
<td>42 (43.75%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The extent of editorializing straight news stories when measured quantitatively from the table above showed that out of 58.33% favourable stories, The Port Harcourt Telegraph with 44.79% stories had a whopping 40.62% stories embellished to favour Amaechi and only 4.17% in favour of Omehia. National Network (13.54%) had a greater number of 10.42% in favour of Omehia and just 3.13% in favour of Amaechi.

On unfavourable stories (29.17%), The Port Harcourt Telegraph with 3.13% had no unfavourable story against Amaechi, but the 3.13% was against Omehia, likewise the National Network (26.04%) which had all the 26.04% against Amaechi with no single one against Omehia.
From the table, the two newspapers editorialized their news contents in favour of the principals of their publishers. Using Critical Incidence Analysis (CIA), it was found out that favourable stories were tilted towards the subject with vested interest, while unfavourable stories were against the subject with no interest to protect. In other words, while The Port Harcourt Telegraph was in favour of Amaechi and against Omehia, National Network was in favour of Omehia and against Amaechi.

Qualitatively, the degree of editorializing straight news stories was ascertained in some headlines and news stories where personal biases obviously interfered in the contents and which failed to meet up the provisions of the ethical code of conduct and cardinal objectives of journalism which include: accuracy, balance, objectivity, and truthful and fair reporting.

For instance, the massive headline entitled: "Breaking News: Peter Odili's memory fails?" (Midweek Telegraph, June 19-24, 2008) is ethically questionable when viewed against the context in which it was used. The Port Harcourt Telegraph ran the banner headline in its front page following appearance of former Governor of Rivers State, Dr Peter Odili as a witness before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Tuesday, 18th June, 2008 to question Dr. Odili's testimony at the Commission which was set up by Governor Rotimi Amaechi, a government in which the publisher of The Port Harcourt Telegraph served as Director of Press and then Commissioner.

The front page headline of Weekend Telegraph of May 31 June 5, 2008 entitled: "As Supreme Court rules again ... Confusion grips 'evil planners' ... Forcing them to look at their tribunal moves" qualifies for 'editorial tyranny' in headline casting and shows outright act of editorializing news. Was it right for a newspaper to describe politicians who held opposing view with the principal of its publisher as evil planners?

On the back page of The Port Harcourt Telegraph, July 13-19, 2009 with the caption; "Waterfront Demolition: Faceless Persons Mount Propaganda Against Okrika Chiefs...Accuse them of Bribery," the newspaper wrote: "The spirited campaign to stir confusion and scuttle the good intention of government to modernize the waterfronts through deliberate misinformation has taken a new dimension with some faceless persons accusing Okrika Chiefs of receiving bribes from Governor Rotimi Amaechi." (Emphasis ours).

The direct use of the phrase: "good intention of government to modernize the waterfronts" and accusing opponents of the proposed plan as propagandists without considering their position was questionable. In fact, on page 3 of The Port Harcourt Telegraph of August 4-10, 2008, a correspondent of the newspaper in line with perceived editorial compromise, wrote: "In pursuant to (sic) the urban renewal scheme and development control policy of the state government, the Abonnema Wharf, a densely-populated area...would be likely affected in the ongoing demolition exercise..."

Editorializing in the National Network was made obvious in the issue of April 3rd 9th, 2013 (Vol. 10 No 13) with the caption: "Rights Group Lauds Move To Conduct Inquiry Into Forced Evictions, Demolitions In Nigeria," and reported as follows:

A frontline human rights group, Social Action has described the decision of the National Human Rights Commission to undertake a public inquiry into demolitions and forced evictions in parts of Nigeria as most welcome and a laudable one. The group noted this development as coming against the backdrop of the several systematic abuses to the Housing and indeed Human rights of countless Nigerians by governments in certain parts of the country such as is orchestrated by the mindless evictions and demolition of several Waterfront Communities under the guise of an illusive urban renewal by the Rivers State government as well as the forceful acquisition of large scale land from helpless Communities in Ogoniland for a phantom private commercial Banana plantation by the same Government...

One wonders if the direct use of "mindless evictions" without attributing it to a source was not a form of editorializing the straight news story.

The degree of editorializing straight news stories was high as measured and analysed quantitatively and qualitatively above.
Rq2: To what extent does the act of editorializing of news flout the ethics of journalism?

Table 2: Measurement of Flouting of Ethics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Telegraph</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Network</th>
<th>Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background/Opinion</td>
<td>72 (90%)</td>
<td>Amaechi 37 (51.39%)</td>
<td>Omehia 35 (48.61%)</td>
<td>Amaechi 37 (51.39%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero Balance</td>
<td>68 (85%)</td>
<td>Amaechi 36 (52.11%)</td>
<td>Omehia 32 (47.89%)</td>
<td>Amaechi 36 (52.11%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Quantitatively, the issue of how editorializing of straight news stories flouted the ethics of the press was captured in Table 2 above. On introduction of biased background/opinion, a whopping 51.39% straight news stories were distorted with partisan opinion in *The Port Harcourt Telegraph* in favour of Amaechi, while 48.61% stories were distorted with one-sided background in the *National Network* in favour of Omehia. Editorializing also manifested in the analysis for Zero Balance with *The Port Harcourt Telegraph* and *National Network* sharing 52.11% for Amaechi and 47.89% for Omehia, respectively.

Qualitatively, it is ethically wrong for the *National Network* to suppress facts in the report of destruction of illegal crude products as reported in the *National Network* of July 18\(^{th}\) - 24\(^{th}\) 2012. This flouts provision of Article 2, Items i and ii (Accuracy and Fairness) of the ethical code of conduct which states 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. A journalist should refrain from publishing inaccurate and misleading information…”

It is also ethically wrong for *The Port Harcourt Telegraph* group in its *Weekend Telegraph* of May 31 June 5, 2008 to refer to political opponents as evil planners when it ran a front page headline entitled: “As Supreme Court rules again … Confusion grips ‘evil planners’ ….” This flouts provision of Article 5 item ii (Decency) of the ethical code of conduct which warns that: “A journalist should refrain from using offensive, abusive or vulgar language.”

*The Port Harcourt Telegraph* and *National Network* breached the ethical code of conduct for Nigerian Journalists on Accuracy and Fairness (Article 2) which provides 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. (ii) A journalist should refrain from publishing inaccurate and misleading information…”

Fact is sacred in journalism and every journalist is ethically-bound to be factual. The preamble to the code of ethics for Nigerian Journalists (1998) by the Nigerian Press Organisation, according to Uwakwe (2005) reads as follows:

> Journalism entails a high degree of public trust. To earn and maintain this trust, it is morally imperative for every journalist and every news medium to observe the highest professional and ethical standards. In the exercise of these duties, a journalist should always have a regard for the public interest. Truth is the cornerstone of journalism and every journalist should strive diligently to ascertain the truth of every event… (p.191).

The ethical implication of compromising editorial independence ultimately resulted in yellow journalism. When the mass media flout ethical code of conduct, they are no longer socially responsible to their audience and the society in line with the media systems dependency theory which according to Miller (2002) “…has at its heart a tripartite system in which media, audience and society are seen to have dependency relationships with each other…” (p.247).

In summary, a high degree of editorializing straight news content and how such act flouted the ethics of journalism practice were established against *The Port Harcourt Telegraph* and the *National Network*. 
RQ3: To what extent are the two newspapers comparatively neutral to perceived cases of editorializing?

Table 3: Measurement of Neutrality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>PH Telegraph</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>NNetwork</th>
<th>Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Amaechi</td>
<td>Omehia</td>
<td>Amaechi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral stories 12</td>
<td>8 (8.33%)</td>
<td>6 (6.25%)</td>
<td>2 (2.08%)</td>
<td>4 (4.17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(12.5%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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In comparing the two newspapers in terms of extent of neutrality to perceived act of editorializing news, this study found out that there were few instances of neutral reports by the both newspapers. For instance, The Port Harcourt Telegraph with 8.33% neutral stories, had 6.25% in favour of Amaechi and 2.08% in favour of Omehia, while National Network with 4.17% had an equal of 2.08% in favour of Omehia and Amaechi.

The disturbing ethical issue is the relevance of the meagre figures when The Port Harcourt Telegraph and National Network had more questionable stories as straight news. The extent of neutrality was insufficient to overlook the gross unethical conducts of these newspapers. The findings include:

i) There were verifiable cases of editorial compromise in the reports of The Port Harcourt Telegraph and National Network. The editorial compromise affected the contents of the two newspapers negatively to the extent that The Port Harcourt Telegraph recorded more news stories in favour of Amaechi, while the National Network reported more stories in favour of Omehia.

ii) The act of editorializing straight news stories flouted provisions of the code of conduct for Nigerian Journalists as provided by the Nigerian Press Organisation to the extent of defeating credibility of the newspapers due to embellishment and introduction of biases in the writing of most of the news stories. The code of conduct holds journalists accountable to truthful, accurate and objective reporting.

iii) The extent of neutrality between the two newspapers manifested in few instances of fair reports, but the cases of editorializing news far outweigh that of neutrality. This manifested in a number of neutral reports with The Port Harcourt Telegraph having a higher number of credible news stories than the National Network.

Conclusion

This study has examined whether there were cases of editorializing news in the reports of The Port Harcourt Telegraph and National Network. The findings revealed that there were cases of editorial compromise in the reports of the two newspapers. The extent of editorializing straight news stories flouted the ethics of the press thereby, undermining objectivity, accuracy, truthful and fair reporting which are cardinal principles in journalism. The level of editorializing news and flouting of ethics as compared with the newspapers using various variables attested to a deviation from professional practice. As politicians, the publishers of these two newspapers did not detach themselves from their media contents just as the owner of Guardian did when he took up appointment as Minister of Internal Affairs.

The extent of editorializing news by the two newspapers also lent credence to the assertion by Omego and Ochonogor (2012) who cited Nwanze (2003) that: “The history of the media in Nigeria (both print and broadcast media) shows that at different times of the nation's history the media were used by their owners (both government and private owners) to advance their own interests...In almost all cases they were used as propaganda tools.”

Recommendations

The following recommendations would assist in bringing sanity into editorial contents and minimize ethical misconduct by media owners thereby, enhancing professional journalism practice in Rivers State.
i). Policy-makers and relevant stakeholders should put in place proactive measures that would regulate media owners from interfering in professional practice so that editorial crew could operate without undue pressure and interference.

ii). The Nigerian Press Organisation in conjunction with the Nigeria Union of Journalists and other professional regulatory bodies should periodically review their mandate of monitoring the activities of the press and their members with a view to ensuring compliance with professional and ethical code of conduct.

iii). At least, every Chapel of the Nigeria Union of Journalists or mass media establishment should set machinery in place to review its production regularly in line with the mission statement with a view to ensuring that the cardinal objectives of journalism are strictly complied with. This would assist in keeping such a medium in check and enthrone sanity into the practice.

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