

## RISKS AND CHALLENGES OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM: A NIGERIAN PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT

*New media and communication technologies have had a significant impact on news operations and production, and as a result, journalism as an industry and profession has changed. In human history, we have never been more connected, exhibiting the benefits of a new, exciting digital age. As a result, this research investigated the dangers and obstacles that Nigerian media professionals confront in this new era, as well as how technological advancements have influenced their work. The objectives are to: identify the main challenges facing professional journalism in Nigeria, identify the risk taken in professional journalism as well to examine the media act of Nigeria. The study was anchored on the Authoritarian theory of the press. The research design for this study was an in-depth interview. Thirty journalists from Abuja's media houses are among the study's discussants. The study drew a sample of 30 journalists from the specified media organizations using the purposive sampling technique. The investigation discovered many issues concerning the safety and professionalism of journalists. Journalists and editors in the media are frequently placed in perplexing and dangerous situations that jeopardize the ethical and legal process of news generation and delivery. This study, therefore, concluded that journalism in Nigeria requires a second look to improve its current performance and safety.*

**Keywords:** Digital Media, Digital Rights, Journalism, Nigeria, Press Freedom

### INTRODUCTION

Nigerian journalism dates back to the country's struggle for independence from British colonialists. In Nigeria's war for independence, the print media played an important role. Nationalists such as Hebert Macaulay, Nnamdi Azikiwe, and Obafemi Awolowo, among others, founded newspapers and went on to become great icons of leadership in the country, whose shoes have remained too wide for the feet of the continent's current crop of leaders to fit into. Nigerian journalism plays an important part in the country's political, social, cultural, and economic growth. People have a great deal of respect and trust for the institution, and they rely on it for daily updates on current events. Similarly, social circumstances have a large impact on how pen pushers are perceived. As a result, it is reasonable to conclude that journalism as an institution in Nigeria has an important role to play in society, which can only be done through the industry's high degree of discipline and professionalism.

It should be emphasized that Nigerian journalism predates the nation's historic proclamation or inauguration. According to records, Nigerian journalism was not initially governed by any rules or regulations. This indicates that there was nothing in place to define the industry's requirements, composition, and operations. As it was, Nigerian journalism was dominated from the start by people drawn from a variety of backgrounds. As a result, while Nigerian journalists frequently claim that carrying out their tasks with objectivity, neutrality, and impartiality qualifies them as professionals, this

is far from the truth. Indeed, it is debatable whether Nigerian journalists practice or belong to a profession in the traditional sense. According to Momoh (2005:11), "a profession is eligible to be one only when the body of knowledge to be imbibed by individuals who will be its membership register, the disciplinary body that will enforce the code" can be identified. Again, the Federal Government of Nigeria's liberalization and commercialization policies in the 1980s and 1990s posed numerous difficulties to Nigerian journalism's professional standards. The policy required that all kinds of news coverage be assessed from a commercial standpoint. The policy had a considerable impact on journalists' sense of news judgment, particularly in the broadcast media. News events that were not sponsored were rarely broadcast.

Aside from huge changes in the journalism profession and industry, digital media have provided journalists with several opportunities while also posing significant hazards. The digital media forces journalists to take up positions as close to the subject matter and reporting zone as possible. Hadland (2015) emphasizes that to produce more accurate and compelling information, "journalists need to be in the faces of their subjects, holding the equipment up between them, exposed and often isolated" (p. 130). Previous research has shown that journalists confront physical dangers and danger when covering combat zones (Vandevoordt, 2016), as well as assault or murder of journalists (Hadland, 2015; Jamil, 2018).

The following objectives of this study are to:

1. Examine the main challenges facing professional journalism in Nigeria
2. Examine the risk taken in professional journalism.

3. To examine the media regulation acts in Nigeria

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Journalism in the Digital Age

Technology always influences journalism. Since Julius Caesar's *Acta Diurna* in AD 59, disseminating information about the day's major events has been a challenge. Technological advancements enable, if not always drive, change. The printing press of Gutenberg made it feasible to print the Bible and other religious texts. It also paved the way for widespread literacy and the development of a newspaper.

The telephone, invented by Alexander Graham Bell, changed not just how people communicated, but also how journalists gathered and reported the news, with journalists routinely conducting interviews over the phone and even transmitting news over the phone. Indeed, in the early 1900s, trials of newspaper delivery by telephone were conducted, which subsequently evolved into the widely used audio text services provided by more than 1000 daily newspapers in the United States in the 1970s. Technological Change is the increasing changes in the efficiency of the creation of a product reflected in its output.

Since the founding of Iwe Irohin in 1859, Nigeria's mass media has made a concerted effort to stay current with modern technology. However, it has been limited in its ability to absorb and use current technological improvements due to ongoing underdevelopment and governance. According to Waisbord (2019) journalism in the digital era refers to how news is created, distributed, and consumed through a combination of networked settings that broaden the scope of news reporting in digital environments.

### Journalism and Media in Nigeria

Despite significant infrastructure issues, Nigerian journalism has continued to grow at a rapid pace in line with worldwide trends. In Nigeria, communicating with a large audience is common. The first newspaper, Iwe Irohin, was published in 1859, and it was a huge success on stage with Henry Townsend, a businessperson who was also a devout Christian. He had taken advantage of Abeokuta and its environs in Southwest, Nigeria's comparatively high literacy rate to launch a newspaper. The publication has since grown swiftly from its rudimentary or crude beginnings. Even though the newspaper did not live long, it made an essential statement on the need for newspapers to be

published. Indeed, it acted as a catalyst for the publication of a slew of rival newspapers. Newspapers have been popular in Nigeria over the past 160 years, following the Iwe Irohin experiment. Nigeria has Africa's most active press. This is not without reason, as the press has played a pivotal role in Nigeria's turbulent past. The press was vital in the campaign against the oppressive military dictatorship in Nigeria, which ended in 1999. Although Nigeria's economic and political growth is far from ideal, the country's modest gains in both areas may be ascribed in great part to the relentless and lively press, which has made it impossible for the political elite to completely control Nigeria.

### Freedoms of Expression and Safety of Journalists in the Digital Age

Over that time, several definitions of press freedom have been proposed. Although there appears no single, accepted definition of this concept, scholars such as: (Oso, 1998: 45–74, McQuail, 2005; Oloyode, 2005; Okoye, 2007; Hachten & Scotton, 2007; Garton, 2011) are united in their belief that press freedom presupposes the independence of the media in disseminating diverse ideas and providing citizens with access to and participation in an exchange of information and opinions.

Alabi (2003) defines press freedom as the unlimited right of the press to publish or communicate whatever it thinks fits the public, as expressed in Okoye (2007: 47). According to Onogoruwa (1985), as stated in Okoye (2007: 47), press freedom is the right of the press to publish without fear of intimidation, menace, molestation, or blackmail. In a similar spirit, Okoye (2007: 47) defines press freedom as "the right to receive, hold, express, and disseminate information and opinions without official or unofficial constraints through written and unwritten laws and actions." Press freedom, according to Okoye (2007: 52), is "the freedom of the mass media to execute their responsibility of informing, educating, and entertaining the public without previous official censorship." Freedom of expression, according to Oloyode (2005), is the ability to publicly communicate one's opinions to others through the written word or non-verbal means such as art, music, and fashion.

This unavoidably means that journalists, whether working for print, broadcast, or social media,

as well as citizen journalists, have the right to "publish facts honestly and faithfully, even if they prove uncomfortable or embarrassing to someone," as Aviyar (1979) cited in Okoye (2007: 47). However, Leman (2013: 1) views safety as implying freedom from danger, and in the context of our discussion, the safety of journalists thus entails protection from various threats that journalists face during their work, such as arrests, legal action, imprisonment, kidnapping, intimidation, bombings, and killings.

The internet now accounts for a significant portion of journalistic activity. Journalists and even citizen-journalists, most of whom express critical ideas, find that the tools available in the digital era make it easier to reach out faster and to a larger audience than before. People all across the world can access free information about corruption, maladministration, unethical behavior by public officials and enterprises, as well as major human rights violations, thanks to the internet. However, as more bloggers, citizen journalists, and others join traditional journalists in the broadcasts, they face old and new threats daily.

According to Emenalo (2015), threats like violence, intimidation, prosecution for lawful speech, judicial harassment, and surveillance of individuals who report are genuine and have continued unabated around the world. Although most countries have declared a legal obligation to build a proper regulatory framework to ensure the effective protection of journalists' freedom of expression, regardless of the media platform, this continues to be the case.

### **Media Regulation in Nigeria**

Print and broadcast media, as well as emerging media such as computers, cellphones, and the internet, are all considered public means of mass communication. People use the media as a source of information, education, entertainment, and self-expression, especially in a democratic society. Over time, the media has proven to be a strong tool for human expression. As Curran (2002) observed, mass media serve as a source of cultural expressions, politics, economics, philosophy, and various other forms and values of life.

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantees the freedom of individuals and groups to freely seek and communicate information, giving the media worldwide credibility.

The validity of media organizations all around the world is derived from this universal convention. On the one hand, the Nigerian 1999 Constitution guarantees the right to freedom of expression and the press in Section 39(1), which states that:

"Every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression, including the freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference."

Subsection (2) added that "Without prejudice to paragraph (1) of this provision, any individual shall be right to own, establish, and run any media for the dissemination of information, ideas, and opinions".

Due to cultural limits, the right to free speech is not absolute. There would always be a dialectical tension between the doctrine of free speech and media regulation because of this fact. The fact is, however, that the rationale for broadcast media control is both political and economic (Hilliard and Keith, 1996) recognizing that the broadcast media can be used for good or evil, a system of control is frequently required; thus, media regulation is an important concern in media practices.

From the mid-fifteenth century onwards in Western Europe, media regulation began with the use of the printing press for book manufacturing. There was a flood of publishing of books and other printing materials when the printing press was established. As a result, the contents of what was being published piqued the curiosity of the churches and the government. Before being allowed into the business, the printing company had to have a license and/or ecclesiastical clearance. As a result, book export and import were regulated and prohibited (Source: Module 2: Unit 11: Media Regulation).

Historically, the media as a vehicle for transmitting knowledge has been a religious hurdle to free speech for a long time. Another method of putting it, different religious doctrines do not grant their followers unlimited freedom of speech, imposing some restrictions on free speech and expression. Newth (2001:1) made the following observation about Christianity:

Free speech and freely expressed opinions and ideas may have caused problems for free-Christian monarchs, but they were rarely more troublesome than the guardians of Christianity as orthodoxy grew. The Nicene Creed, promulgated in 325 AD, was one of the helpful steps made to ward off a heretical danger to Christian teaching. However, as more books were produced, copied, and widely distributed, subversive and heretical ideas spread uncontrollably. As a result, the censorship got stricter and punishment became tougher.

### **Laws Regulating Mass Media in Nigeria**

According to Beli et al. (2014), the article of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria ensures a regulation of

freedom of speech and the press to ensure National Security and to keep vital facts and information secret from the public and the rest of the world. While section 39(1) guarantees freedom of expression and the press, sections 39(2) and (3), (a)-(b) quickly check the provisions by allowing its restriction or abridgment by any law that is reasonably justifiable in a democratic society to prevent the disclosure of information received in confidence; or by imposing restrictions on persons holding office under the Federation or State government; or Members of the Armed Forces (Malemi, 2009).

The preceding section generated a slew of enactments and legislation aimed at controlling the "total freedom" enjoyed by the media in Nigeria, as well as their counterparts around the world. The legislation aimed at regulating the media in the country is as follows:

- a. The Nigerian Constitution: While Section 39(1) of the 1999 constitution provides the right to freedom of expression and the press, Sections 39(2) and (3) impose restrictions on that right, including:
  - i. that to own, create, or operate a television or wireless broadcasting station for any purpose, the approval of the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is required;
  - ii. that it is illegal to publish any information received in confidence, such as matters classified by governments as official secrets or confidential matters, or any matter that will jeopardize the courts' authority and independence, such as publications that constitute contempt of court, or publications prohibited by laws governing telephony, wireless broadcasting, television, or the exhibition of cinematograph films;
  - iii. We prohibit the publishing of information received in confidence by persons holding office under the Federal Government of a state, or confidential information received by members of the Federation's Armed Forces, such as official secrets, security matters, or other classified subjects. Section 37 guarantees an individual's right to privacy and family life, "and the press may not impugn the private and family life of an individual with inappropriate or unlawful publications" (Malemi, 2009) unless the individual in question is a public figure, or there is a lawful justification, or it is a matter of public interest, and so on.

Section 45 justifies the restrictions on press freedom imposed by the law in the interests of

defense, public safety, public order, public morality, and public health; and to protect the rights and freedoms of others, such as under defamation and criminal libel laws, children and young person's laws in various states, and the matrimonial causes act, among other things.

- b. Official Secrets Act: Nigeria's official secrets restrict the publication of confidential information and matters connected to defense establishments, security installations, and other restricted areas. The revelation of government secrets and the abstraction of sensitive materials are also prohibited under Section 97 of the Criminal Code Act. As a result, the Official Secrets Act acts as a tool for limiting or controlling Nigeria's mainstream media functions.

c. Defamation Law: Defamation law is divided into sub-categories such as libel, slander, and abuse. Defamation laws exist in practically all of the federation's states, even if they are part of general-application statutes or received English laws. As a result, a person may be held accountable for uttering unjustified defamatory remarks against another person. Defamation is also a crime, with sections 373–381 of the Criminal Code Act (1990) and other laws prohibiting it.

d. Obscene and harmful Publication Laws: These rules ban the publication of obscene and harmful literature, articles, and acts that are likely to debase public morality. The principal law that forbids immoral activities and indecent and destructive publications are criminal law. The Criminal Code Act and legislation ban various acts against morality under sections 214–233(a), whereas obscene publications and articles are expressly outlawed under sections 233(b)–233(c) (f). Apart from that, obscene and damaging publications are illegal by the Penal Code and statutes governing children and young people, the constitution, and other regulations (Malemi, 2009 *ibid*).

e. Printing Presses Regulation Law: The Printing Presses Regulation Law gives the Nigerian government the authority to regulate the printing and publication of various printed products.

Even in the "free social states" of the world, absolute freedom of the press has never been attained. From the time the printing press was established, when books were mass-produced in Western Europe, mass media were claimed to be subjected to various regulating processes. In various parts of the world, such as China, France, India, and Australia, the same history of media regulation may be found. In Nigeria, the colonial overlords were considered to be the first to govern the media. The Nigerian Constitution of 1999 followed the colonial masters' lead in defining a specific section authorizing media regulation in the country. The Law of Sedition, the Law of Contempt, the Law of Defamation, the Law of Publication, the National Broadcasting Commission Act, and other laws regulate the media in Nigeria. As a result, these restrictions act as a barrier to press freedom in Nigeria.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Authoritarian Theory of the Press**

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, society was divided into three estates: clergy, nobility, and commoners. At the time, it was thought that one's right to govern was given to them by God. The ruling class utilized the concept of divine right to defend their absolute right to power, which paved the way for authoritarianism to emerge. Plato's philosophy inspired the authoritarian theory of mass communication (407-327 B.C.). When the printing press was established, the English monarchs employed this strategy by censoring, licensing, taxing, and passing laws. It is a normative

### **METHODOLOGY**

To anchor this study, survey design was used for this research. Population of the study included journalists of media outlets who were drawn from media outlets in Abuja, Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory. Purposive sampling, also known as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling was used to select samples. This is a non-probability sampling approach in which participants are chosen based on the researcher's selection criteria to achieve the goal of the study. The participants were purposefully drawn from two (2) media outlets named CBN Africa and NTA in Abuja, Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory. These were journalist with at least one year of experience in news reporting so

philosophy of mass communication in which the nation's power and authority affect and overcome the media. However, the media must respect the wishes of the authorities and act in accordance with their wishes, rather than being under the direct control of the state or ruling classes. The press and media are unable to function independently, and their work is accused of being censored. The authoritarian theory is a theory utilized by dictatorship administrations, but it can be found in both democratic and dictatorial countries. The media cannot insult or oppose the majority or dominant groups in this country. In authoritarian doctrine, the media must remain subject to the rulers. It is believed that if state information is disseminated, it could jeopardize security and pose a national security concern. As a result, the idea is supported by claiming that in situations when the state controls the media, such as wars and conflicts, the state is larger than individual rights. These can be internal or external situations.

This theory is relevant to this study because it explains how journalists were subjected to very harsh sanctions during the military era when they were subjected to harassment, physical assault, assassination, proscription, confiscation of publications, and facility destruction for a variety of flimsy reasons. Some regimes, particularly in the fourth republic, have utilized censorship to witch hunt media organizations for their uprightness and simple concern in the projection of truth and disclosure of bare facts in the quality of their materials

that they could share the dangers based on their professional experience. Through the process, 30 journalists were selected for the study.

Primary data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and in-depth interviews. The semi-structured interview and in-depth interview took one week to complete, and the respondents are categorized as J1-J30. The majority of the interviews took place in person, with only a few taking place over the phone. There were nine questions regarding their experiences with journalism, with five open-ended questions, one semi-open-ended question, and six closed-ended questions. Data analysis involved use of statistical analysis as percentages and analytical tables were used.



**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

**Table 1: Mode of Information Dissemination by the Participants.**

Mode of Dissemination	Number	Percentage
Social Media	7	23.3
TV Broadcast	4	13.3
Newspaper/Magazine	4	13.3
Radio/podcast	2	6.7
Social Media/TV Broadcasts	3	10.0
Social Media, TV, Newspaper Magazine, Radio/Podcast.	4	13.3
Social-Media, Newspaper/Magazine	3	10.0
TV/Broadcast, Newspaper/Magazine	1	3.3
Social Media, TV/Broadcast, Radio/Podcast	1	3.3
Social-Media, Newspaper/Magazine, TV/Broadcast	1	3.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Study, 2022

The table illustrates the channels through which the participants disseminate information to the general audience. Social media has the highest percentage, which is 23%, the participants in this group believe that a wide audience will be reached through social media and that they would be able to readily receive

comments. The social media/newspaper/magazine/TV broadcast recorded the lowest percentage, followed by TV/radio/social media and TV/Newspaper/Magazine, all of which is 3.3 percent.

**Table 2: Nature of the Participants ‘Media Organization/Company**

Nature of Organization	Number of Participants	Percentage
Government	10	33.3
Private	20	66.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: field survey, 2022

According to the data, 33.7% of participants work for a government-controlled media company,

while 66.7% work for a privately owned media company.

**Challenges Experienced Faced by journalists in the Field**

An interviewee set the tone for question three (the challenges they face) when she said:

When we contacted our participants for interviews, some of them were hesitant to divulge certain details for reasons only they know about. Gathering facts for dissemination has become quite challenging for us journalists.

J1 answered nicely, lamenting the distance barrier and emphasizing that they will have to go long distances to get information on some occasions. She said that when people are on social media, they

can be very different. Most individuals would never hurl abuse in person, but they do not think twice about posting it online. She stated,

While we are attempting to obtain and broadcast high-quality news on social media, some individuals will hide behind their private profiles to intimidate and humiliate us.

Insecurity is one of, if not the most visible and widely discussed issues in Nigeria today. Throughout the country, acts of insecurity occur regularly. Nigerians, who are well-informed and rational, are deeply concerned about this troubling trend.

**Table 3: Percentage of Journalist who have received threats messages**

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Those who have not received threats	23	77.0
Those who have received threats	7	23.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Survey 2022**

More than 70% of the journalists said they have not received any threatening messages; while 23% said they have received messages from unknown persons. Others stated that they were told to drop a case they were working on or they would get killed.

An interviewee stated that:

This happened to me because I recorded some videos of a particular person who was abusing a child, so, messages were sent threatening to kill me if I published the video or told anyone about it.

**Table 3: Their Worst Experience as a Journalist**

Nature of Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Bad Experience	10	32
No Bad Experience	20	68
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Survey, 2022**

Most journalists are now afraid to gather news in some northern states. Some journalists who were interviewed talked about their worst field experiences.

An interviewee shared the experience of Eneche Akogwu, a journalist and a camera operator for channels Television in Kano on the 20<sup>th</sup> of January 2012, who was investigating Boko Haram terrorism when he was killed by unidentified assailants. J6 also stated that he came under a gunshot attack while returning from a trip.

An interviewee who is a government journalist also stated

*I would also relate this to a time when I traveled to a village in the northern part of Nigeria and there was no light or water, to add to this there was a high rate of banditry activity including kidnapping going on at that time.*

Almost all journalists in this study shared the same viewpoint on media independence and the right to freedom of expression.

*"We were held by the judges in the Niger Republic, and we were not allowed to acquire content in the country," An interviewee explained.*

**Rating of the Nigeria Media Regulation**

Data has shown that 6.7% of journalists rated the Act 'well' while another 6.7% of journalists rated it 'very well'. One journalist rated it 'excellent'. Also, 43.3%

rated the Act as 'average', while about 20% rated it 'poorly'. The remaining 20% were neutral about the act.

**Discussions**

Obtaining data, processing it, and presenting it to the public is tough for journalists, according to the in-depth interviews. The first goal was to investigate and identify the major issues that professional journalism in Nigeria faces. The research revealed that Nigerian journalists confront a number of challenges, including funding, cyberbullying, distance, and language barriers. Insecurity is one of the key issues that professional journalists confront in the digital era, and most of those who are at risk just go get information, as indicated in the second

purpose, which is to identify professional journalism's risk. It was observed that journalists risk their lives by traveling to some Northeast states to report events.

The third objective, which examines Nigeria's media act, has revealed that some of the restrictions do not help to reduce fake news, and that press freedom is now being constrained. The law governs what journalists are permitted to do and are not permitted to do while on the job. Journalists who break the law may face imprisonment or prison time

for criminal charges, or they may be made to pay substantial sums of money in damages if they are charged with civil breaches (Kolodzy, 2012).

The authoritarian theory of the press was used in the study to explain what our journalists face today and how they are subjected to very harsh sanctions such as harassment, physical assault, assassination, proscription, confiscation of publications, and facility destruction for a variety of unknown reasons, while the government used

## CONCLUSION

This study concluded that a lot of Nigeria's journalists face a number of challenges, including funding, cyberbullying, distance, and language barriers, according to research carried out by the author. Insecurity is one of the key issues that professional journalists confront in the digital era and

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends the following:

1. Media personnel should be appropriately inspired and encouraged to conduct their public service responsibilities to Nigerians, they should not be subjected to any restrictive legislation and their safety should be guaranteed.
2. The authorities in control should ensure that our journalists are appropriately paid and equipped with basic training and tools.
5. .

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mentorship to witch hunt media organizations for their uprightness and simpering.

Finally, the findings reveal that there are numerous barriers to the professional discharge of journalistic practice in government-owned media. Management not being allowed complete control over their stations, poor employee salaries, a lack of contemporary equipment, the employment of non-professionals, insufficient budget, censorship, termination of appointments, and intimidation are only a few of the restraints

most of those who are at risk just go get information. Journalists who break the law may face imprisonment or prison time for criminal charges, or they may be made to pay substantial sums of money in damages if charged with civil breaches.

3. To provide Nigerian journalism with a sense of direction, well-articulated editorial policies capable of elevating Nigerian journalism to the same level as their counterparts in other developed and developing countries should be adopted and maintained.
4. The press and media organizations should be encouraged to perform their responsibilities and safeguard journalists, who are frequent targets of oppressive administrations





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