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# ETHICAL CHALLENGES OF PACK JOURNALISM PHENOMENON AND THE IMPLICATION ON JOURNALISM PRACTICE IN NIGERIA

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## Abstract

This study examined journalists' knowledge and perception of the ethical challenges of pack journalism and its implication for journalism practice in Nigeria. The paper adopted social responsibility theory which established that media has a duty to serve the public interest by providing accurate and unbiased information, promoting democratic values, and holding those in power accountable. It employed a qualitative in-depth interview using a purposive sampling technique where 20 journalists and other media practitioners were selected from 6 chapels within Jalingo metropolis. Findings of the study revealed that poor remuneration and greed are the major causes of the brown envelope syndrome in Nigeria which makes journalists and media organizations to engage in pack journalism majorly to satisfy the interest of the sources of news. The paper also noted that this ignoble practice influences journalism practice negatively as some important issues are downplayed while unimportant ones are exaggerated in a bid to satisfy the givers of these brown envelopes. The paper concluded that engaging in pack journalism is an unethical and unprofessional conduct that must be discouraged and stopped as the phenomenon makes journalists not to be objective and truthful. The paper recommended among others, that media professional bodies should be serious in maintaining ethics in the media industry by sanctioning defaulting journalists in order to ensure highest professional conduct of members in all situations.

**Keywords:** Brown envelope, Challenges, Ethics, Pack Journalism, Phenomenon

**Declaration of conflicting interests:** The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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## Introduction

Journalists are saddled with a serious responsibility globally. Media practitioners are expected to carry out the noble course of social responsibility to the society which is, to inform, educate, enlighten and even entertain the audience (Okocha & Akpe, 2022). This is more pronounced in a democratic society. Part of the cardinal function of the media is to serve the watchdog role. That is, engaging in surveillance and correlating the society toward achieving common good. Media practitioners who work for public/government or private outfits are expected to serve societal interest through ethical and professional conducts. The job of the media practitioner is to provide the public with information they need to make rational decision on issues of societal concerns (Frank, 2019). In this regard, the news media survey the environment, report to the people in order to avoid uncertainties, and increase the probability that the audience will react to conflict and change in a rational way. Thus, the journalists in their surveillance activities scout around the environment and bring news of development, danger, threats to the national stability, threats to public welfare and so on to the people (Matusitz & Breen, 2012).

According to Frank (2019), pack journalism is a practice that is concerned with issues of journalistic

laziness, short-term and long-term harm to readers and viewers, a loss of independence in news reporting, the threat of lost credibility in the content of news reported by packs, defamatory, slanderous, and libelous news, and economic inefficiencies. It is a widespread media practice where large groups of journalists from different media organizations collaborate to cover the same story, and this has negatively impacted the media outfits and society in general. They observe crowd outside courthouses, city halls, or at the scene of an accident or catastrophe and their main target is to gather comments from the important sources and report as same to members of the public (Suntai & Vakkai, 2014).

Similarly, Matusitz and Breen (2012) aver that pack journalism refers to a phenomenon whereby large groups of journalists from different media organizations cooperate to cover the same story. They gather news stories from the same sources, simultaneously, employing the same techniques. These groups of journalists move together carefully observe what the others are doing. Oftentimes, they gather from hotspot to hotspot; congregate together in order to get news reports from other sources to report as though they were present. Consequently, Matusitz and Breen (2012) that pack journalism has existed for a long period of time. For instance, it happened in 1960 when masses of reporters frequently followed President Eisenhower. They further noted that journalists were concerned with talking about what the story was; they agreed on what the essence was before it even happened. After the event, they collaborated on the collective lead. What led to pack journalism was that journalists usually embarked on the journey to cover news reports from the streets where they could be seen eating, drinking, hanging out, comparing notes with other colleagues in order to report to the audience; they gossiped, and slept alongside one another (Frank, 2019). Besides, campaign journalism as opined by Apuke (2016), has disintegrated into pack journalism. The intent is that, to follow a candidate, one must join a pack of other reporters or journalists, where even the most independent reporter may not completely escape the pressures of the pack reporters.

Furthermore, Okocha, Oseni and Odeba (2022) pointed out that Nigerian journalism predates the nation's historic proclamation or inauguration. 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, it is far from the truth. Indeed, it is debatable whether Nigerian journalists practice or belong to a profession in the traditional sense.

This trend is obvious in Nigerian journalistic parlance as the tradition is that journalists and media organization relied on news conference, press release, spontaneous or organized interview, with news sources and utilization of wire services from news agency (Okoro & Chinweabo-Onuoha, 2013). These forms of news gathering cause journalists to report news from the same angle. As a matter of fact, the news sources most at times do not expect the journalists to engage in editing the news release handed to them but to report them exactly as handed to them. For the journalists to be encouraged to report the news handed to them as expected, they are given monetary incentive popularly referred to as 'brown envelope' (Ogbole, 2012). This practice is unethical to journalism. It does not make journalists to be objective in their professional practice. The peril of brown envelope syndrome has become a serious ethical challenge that poses a threat to the image of journalism practice in Nigeria as it discourages objectivity and balance in reporting. Nwabueze (2010) sees brown envelope practice as accepting gratifications for performing journalistic task. Apuke (2016) describes this practice as a cankerworm eating deep into the journalism profession. By implication, brown envelope practice affects fairness, truth and objectivity in reporting. Due to the economic hardship, Nigerian journalists face a big ethical dilemma and this makes it difficult for journalism practice to thrive on truth, fairness and justice.

In addition, Suntai and Vakkai (2014) elaborate that this huge task imposes on journalists across the globe the need to be objective to ensure the survival and blossoming of the profession as well as retain the integrity of the profession and its practitioners. This calls for strict observance of professional ethics or codes of conduct by professionals. The ethics are the moral guide for practitioners to be truthful, objective and balanced (unbiased) in their practice to be able to positively affect the profession and society in which they practice (Ekeanyanwu & Obianigwe, 2012). By implication, a journalist ought to reject any form of pack journalism in order for him/her to be just/truthful in reporting event as it occurs, not manipulating facts/figures to please the person who has paid him but be firm and just; reporting occurrences as it happens, burrowing and unearthing social vices in the society,

making in-depth and interpretative reporting in order to sensitized and enlighten the public. It is against this backdrop that this study examines the ethical challenges of pack journalism phenomenon and the implication on journalism practice in Nigeria.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The issue of pack journalism could be traced to certain unethical practices of reporters by different media outlets who struggle for news coverage and reporting. According to Frank (2019), pack journalism has become incorporated into the conventional political and economic journalism practiced. This pack-style of news coverage leads to the agenda setting of journalism, which, in turn, leads to traditional pack journalism technique (Matusitz & Breen, 2012). The problem here is that pack journalism is considered not only erroneous and inefficient, but also unethical. In fact, significant figures in the fields of journalism and government share similar views on the harmful and unethical nature of this news media practice (Ekeanyanwu & Obianigwe, 2012). Pack journalism is responsible for issues of journalistic laziness, short-term and long-term harm to readers and viewers, violation of privacy, loss of independence in news reporting, threat of lost credibility in the content of news reported by packs, and economic inefficiencies (Matusitz & Breen, 2012). More importantly, not only can such unethical journalism jeopardize lives, but it can also create unjust defamation of careers and spread slanderous and libelous news (Frank, 2019). As a result, Frank (2019) opines that these journalism and media standards seem to drop to the lowest common denominator. This can be observed in stories that are mass produced and circulated by pack journalists which are one-sided or one-dimensional, lacking a variety of dimensions, opinions, or facts. As a result, it becomes understandable why renowned media critics and scholars reprehend pack journalism because of its blatant exclusion of independent reporting (Frank, 2019).

As Apuke (2016) puts it, the ethical journalist is the defender of democracy who must stand out in the fight to sustain democracy and who should be indestructible, incorruptible, beyond change and decay, and ethically sound. But with the perennial problem of pack journalism threatening the credibility of the journalism profession, it becomes difficult to dispassionately objectively regard the Nigerian journalists as an unbiased ethical umpire and the bastion of democracy. A lot of factors have been outlined by various scholars as the reasons behind pack journalism practices among journalists in Nigeria and beyond alongside inadequate literature on pack journalism. In order to bridge this gap in knowledge and extend the frontiers of empirical discussions, this study intends to investigate and unearth the ethical challenges of pack journalism and offer useful suggestions to future researchers of mitigating the phenomenon in Nigeria using journalists in Taraba State as focal points through the objectives identified below.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main aim of this paper is to examine the unethical phenomenon of pack journalism practice observed journalists in various media outlets. However, the specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Examine the level of awareness of pack journalism phenomenon in Taraba State
2. Ascertain the factors responsible for of pack journalism phenomenon in Taraba State
3. Determine the ethical implications of pack journalism to journalism practice in Taraba State.

### **Research Questions**

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the level of awareness of pack journalism practice in Taraba State?
2. What are the factors responsible for the practice of pack journalism in Taraba State?
3. What are the ethical implications of pack journalism to journalism practice in Taraba State?

### **Conceptual Clarification**

#### **Pack Journalism/Copycat Journalism**

Pack journalism refers to a media practice where a good number of journalists such as news anchors, newspaper crew, camera equipment people, etc., passionately pursue one incredible story, fill the site with their

presence, and frequently release similar, if not identical stories (Frank, 2019). It can be described as a few groups of reporters who chase the same story together and present it as though they were present.

In a related development, Nwabueze (2010) aver that pack journalism is seen as unethical media practices where groups of reporters repeatedly cover one particular story and storm the targets with their enormous presence. This usually led to an abolition of independent reporting as opined by Adaba (2010). Journalists' attitudes can be made to resist the influence of such lazy and convenient reporting through a well-established, communication process of systematic resistance in the case of information dissemination. Due to the fact that a good number of reporters recognize the illegality of copying others' sources seen as plagiarism and have attitudes against acts of pack journalism, these journalists are due for undergoing rapid change that will facilitate independent reporting. The effects of these treatments should result in immunity/resistance to pressures to copy the report of others. This ultimately facilitates independent reporting and minimizes the tendency or desire to resort to copycat pack journalism practice in Nigeria (Ogbole, 2012).

Notwithstanding, several scholars such as Okocha, Odeba and Oseni (2022) observed that Nigerian journalism has kept up its fast growth rate in accordance with global trends. Published in 1859, Iwe Irohin was the first newspaper and it enjoyed great success on stage with the businessman and fervent Christian, Henry Townsend. He had launched a newspaper by taking advantage of the relatively high literacy rate in Abeokuta and its surroundings in Southwest, Nigeria. From then, the journal rapidly expanded from its simple or unsophisticated origins, and despite its brief existence, the newspaper presented a crucial argument for the publication of newspapers. In fact, it served as a spark for the emergence of other competitor publications. This not only refers to print sources but people who provide quotes and information for stories too. When reporters need to cover a specific person for a story, these individuals will often move from place to place, and crowd together in masses at the scenes of newsworthy locations just for comments and/or quotes from individuals involved. While this is considered proper reporting, when reporters from several news outlets take the same steps to cover the same story, it leaves news virtually unvaried (Williams 2014). As such, the incidence of pack journalism could be traced largely to reporters' reliance on one another for news tips and use of one single source for their information which often, could be the very subject they are covering.

### **Ethics and Journalism**

According to McQuail (2009), ethics refers to the systematic study of the principles and methods for distinguishing right from wrong and good from bad. It considers the impetus to ethical enquiry to be uncertainty and disagreement over what has to be done. The need to pre-empt the consequences of an action that earlier seemed perfectly acceptable; and the awareness of the difficulties of agreement on norms and practices in a heterogeneous audience. As a result, Suntai and Vakkai (2014) aver that there is a significant difference between morality and ethics, he pointed out that morality refers to behaviour that is acceptable, while ethics on the other hand deals with the criteria by which decisions which are regarded as right or wrong are made. Journalism, as a socially responsible profession, operates on ethics. These are deliberately developed guiding principles that have created and sustained the confidence of the people in media contents (Okocha and Akpe, 2022). They asserted that journalism takes pride in reporting and disseminating accurate and reliable information which must have gone through thorough scrutiny and cross-checked through established and approved news production techniques. Ethics deals with the conduct of human behaviour; it guides journalists in the discharge of their duties as regard news reporting and writing. Ethics of journalism, as opined by Apuke (2016), referred to those rules of conduct that guide the journalist in the practice of his profession. As such, the ethical codes are initiated to prevent and guide practitioners from taking unfair or undue advantage over the public in their news writing and reporting techniques.

The practice of journalism as a profession raises many ethical issues. This is certainly true of journalism. Much of the practice of journalism must be described and analysed in terms of a set of concepts which are essentially ethical, terms like freedom, objectivity, truth, honesty, privacy. Even democracy, the context in which so much discussion of the media takes place, is really an ethical term, since it is concerned with the right or the best form of social and political organisation. Ethics, then, is inseparable from journalism, and ethical discussion must be a part of understanding journalism: its practice and its problems (Okocha & Akpe, 2022).

## Literature Review

### Evolution of Pack Journalism

The term was first coined by Timothy Crouse in response to his observation during the 1972 Nixon and McGovern presidential election. The coverage of this particular campaign was deplored in depth by Crouse in his 1973 book *The Boys on the Bus*. Journalists followed candidates on the campaign trail as a group, often crowding together and spending time comparing notes with the intent to write unique stories for their respective news organizations. Journalists were seen working together such that it became impossible for even the most self-reliant journalists to separate their notes from others. News organizations and media outlets took on the role of determining who the most popular candidate was amongst the public. Crouse noted that what reporters knew well was not the American electorate but the much smaller community of the press plane. Crouse felt campaign journalism is what ultimately paved the road to pack journalism (Williams, 2014).

A close observation by Adaba (2010) submitted that modern pack journalism practices no longer require a physical proximity of campaign buses or shared press rooms. Journalists continue to conform to the pack from their computer screens just in monitoring and imitating other reporters online. It could be argued that the tendency toward homogeneity began well before the reporters hopped on the campaign bus, with agreement, industry-wide, about what constitutes news. Pick up almost any textbook designed for use in an introduction to journalism class and it will have a list of qualities that have been extrapolated from news stories to help aspiring reporters develop news judgment, which can be defined as a sense that an occurrence is of sufficient public interest to warrant a commitment of newsroom resources. Widespread concurrence among mainstream journalists about these “elements of newsworthiness”—impact, conflict, prominence, proximity, novelty, timeliness, currency—accounts for similarities in the daily offerings of news organizations with the same or overlapping coverage areas (Frank, 2019). Thus, for journalists to source for news, they may have to rely on similar sources and similar venue which end up making them to get their main stories from the same source.

### Awareness of Pack Journalism in Nigeria

Several Scholars such as Matusitz and Breen (2012) understand pack journalism, a widespread media practice where large groups of reporters from different media outlets collaborate to cover the same story, and how it has negatively impacted the media and society in general. These kinds of practice can be obvious in Nigeria when Journalists are given monetary gratification in order to report story in which the journalists end up reporting the stories without much being edited. According to Ekerikevwe (2009), brown envelope is common in journalism practice in Nigeria. It is a situation whereby journalists demand for bribe or other forms of gratification before they cover any event or even publish stories from such events. Ekeanyanwu and Obianigwe (2012, p. 516) also observe, “It is no longer news that the Brown Envelope Syndrome (BES) has become an albatross for the 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigerian journalist. It has been criticized by scholars in the field of mass communication who describe it as a form of inducing writers and editors with financial gratification to influence their writings in favour of the givers”.

This therefore, means that the Press whose primary responsibility it is to blow the whistle on wrong doings may not be able to do so. Unfortunately, according to Adaba (2010), professional bodies like the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) and the Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE) and others at the helm of affairs that should ordinarily ensure that practitioners adhere strictly to the ethics of their profession, seem to be also involved. The implication is that real news is watered down while irrelevant issues are overblown because the journalist has been compromised. This also leads to a decline in productivity and professionalism among journalists since they do not honestly and objectively source for news but attend to the highest bidder. In highlighting the existence of the brown envelope syndrome in journalism, Skjerdal (2010) states that the term brown envelope denotes a corrupt practice which involves transfer of various types of rewards from sources to journalists who are regarded as custodians of the truth. This according to him indicates neglect of ethical requirement of the journalism career as well as undermines the primary role of journalism. Referring to the brown envelope syndrome, Okunna (2003) describes brown envelop as a monetary bribe handed out to an unethical journalist to pressurize him or her into doing what the bribe giver wants. In some Nigerian cities such as Lagos, Abuja, Kaduna, Port-Harcourt, Jos,

Makurdi and Kano, it is expressed in catchy phrases such as chope, kua, keske, egunje, partikola, kola, gbemu, golden handshake, communiqa, communiqué, family support, transport, Ghana Must Go, the boys are going, last question, last line (skjerdal, 2010). Others terms associated with this are: Press release, appreciation, welfare, freebies, etc.

### **Factors that Encourage Pack Journalism Practice in Nigeria**

Nwabueze (2010) worked on the perception of Nigerian journalists about brown envelopes and the need for ethical re-orientation. The study was aimed at finding out from practising journalists what their perception of the brown envelope syndrome is and their views regarding why the syndrome has continued to exist in the profession. The study employed survey research design. The major findings show that the basic reason behind the continued existence of the syndrome in journalism is the orientation of journalists. Most of the journalists see nothing wrong with the acceptance of brown envelopes. Since, the brown envelope is expected to influence the report of the journalists, the tendency to report news by these journalists from same angle will be high; thus, setting in the practice of pack journalism. The study recommended that the welfare of professionals should be improved to provoke a change in the perception and attitude towards the acceptance of brown envelopes. Okoro and Ugwuanyi (2006) conducted a study on brown envelope syndrome and mass media objectivity in Nigeria. Using the survey research method, they sought to find out if journalists in Nigeria accept brown envelopes and if such action affects journalists' social responsibility and objectivity in reporting. Findings revealed that journalists in Nigeria accept brown envelopes because of poor conditions of service and lack of adherence to ethical standards. They also found out that such actions affect mass media objectivity negatively. The study recommended, among others, that the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) and other relevant agencies should ensure strict application and compliance to professional ethics and standards by practising journalists.

Conversely, Okoro and Chinweobo-Onuoha (2013) found that brown envelop was caused by poor remuneration or economic hardship, carried out a related study on the Perception of Lagos-based journalists on brown envelope syndrome in the coverage of news events in Nigeria findings reveal that issue of brown envelope has become institutionalized within the Nigerian media circles. Findings of this study also revealed reasons why brown envelope syndrome has eaten deep into journalistic practice such as poor remuneration, lack of welfare package for journalists in the industry to Government and media proprietors. Other reasons were 'lack of interest in the industry' which hinders the tackling of the menace of brown envelope syndrome. These factors can no doubt set in motion, the practice of pack journalism in the country.

### **Ethical Implication of Pack Journalism Phenomenon in Nigeria**

Scholars such as Edeani (1990) in Ogbole (2012) reports that, the Nigeria press is operating in a depressed economy and is barely managing to keep its head above water this situation according to Ogbole (2012), has led to poor remuneration of journalist and neglect of their welfare, a situation which exposes them to ethical dilemmas in the field. Journalists are often faced with the quest to protect their "stomach" at the expense of journalistic ethics. The adage he who pays the piper dictates the tune becomes practical in this case, a journalist who collects money on a report will definitely influence his reportage to suit the intention of the person he has sold his integrity, fairness, justice, and objectivity to. Asemah (2012) elaborates that the most common type of bribe in journalism is the so-called 'brown envelope which is monetary bribe handed out to the journalist to pressurize him or her into doing what the giver wants. Once accepted, monetary bribe and other gifts "tie the hands" of the journalist who then becomes incapable of being objective in reporting events and issues involving people who gave the gift. Any news source that provided brown envelope to reporters is expected that the story will be given the perspective that favours him or her. In fact, these journalists can receive news release from the source and now report it as given.

In the same vein, Ekeanyanwu and Obianigwe (2012, p. 517) add that: monetary gifts could pressurize the journalist into doing what the giver wants, and this makes the journalist unable to be objective in his reporting of events and issues involving the people who give such gifts. Thus, the news stories produced are likened to commercial products that have been paid for by the customer which should serve the need to which

the product is expected, in favour of the customer.

Besides, Williams (2014) postulates that since the brown envelope syndrome found its way into Nigerian journalism, all attempts to curb it has failed. As a matter of fact, it is fast assuming a conventional status as most journalists now demand and take bribe monies and other forms of bribery as a prerequisite for performing their traditional duties of providing information, education and entertainment to the society without demanding undue favour; little wonder that it is now referred to as the controversial brown envelope.

This implies that, journalists now see pack journalism being propelled by brown envelope practice as a normal tradition, coining such practices as “chope” which means “collect money before you publish or broadcast anything” According to Ekerikevwe (2009), brown envelope is common in journalism practice in Nigeria. It is a situation whereby journalists demand for bribe or other forms of gratification before they cover any event or even publish stories from such events. This act has, and is still eating deep into the fairness, objectivity and balance of daily news reporting. The implication of pack journalism causes a huge threat to journalism practice

### **Mitigating Pack Journalism Practice in Nigeria**

Authorities in the field of journalism have raised concern over pack journalism phenomenon in Nigeria. This explains why Nwabueze (2010) studied the perception of Nigerian journalists about brown envelope and the need for ethical re-orientation. Findings of the study revealed that, the major reason behind the continued existence of brown envelope syndrome in journalism is the orientation of journalists. Most of the journalists see nothing wrong with the acceptance of brown envelopes. The study recommended that the welfare of professionals should be improved to incite a change in the perception and attitude towards the acceptance of brown envelopes.

Consequently, Ekeanyanwu and Obianigwe (2010) found that journalists in the study proposed that a healthy/competitive rewards system and welfare packages should be established and the existing Code of Journalistic Practice should be strengthened to tackle the menace. Williams (2014) elaborates on additional ways by which brown envelope syndrome could be curbed. He suggests providing sound education and professional training of journalists. Okoro (2013) submits that a high status could ultimately make a journalist a more ethical professional because the visibility arising from this attribute could engender in the journalist the conviction that he/she has a name to protect. Akabogu (2005), citing Okunna writes that media employers should be encouraged to create good working environment that will enable the journalists to function as ethical professionals. To create such working environment, employers should not force newspaper journalists to produce copies that serve their ideologies and prejudices, or ‘hype’ their copy by spicing it with rumours and innuendoes. Regular seminars, lectures and workshops for journalists should also be organized, Akabogu (2005), citing Okunna, notes that through “the organization of regular workshops, seminars and public lectures by the Nigerian Press Council, NPC, and other bodies such as Proprietors’ Association of Nigeria, NPAN, the journalists would be sensitized into maintaining ethical conducts in the discharge of their duties.” Those venturing into journalism practice are strongly advised to be committed to the ethics of precision, neutrality, accuracy, justice, independence and accountability and observe them thoroughly at all times.

### **Theoretical Underpinning**

This study is anchored on social responsibility theory. The social responsibility theory of the press was propounded by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm in 1956. The theory postulates that, the press is attached with freedom but must act responsible in carrying out fundamental functions of mass communication and journalism as a noble profession. Additionally, McQuail (2005) cited in Apuke (2016) encapsulates the basic tenets of the theory as follows: (i) the media have obligations to society, and media ownership is a public trust. (ii) News from the media should be free but self-regulated. (iii) The media should adhere to certain stipulated codes/ethics in order to guide its practices (iv) and in some circumstances, government could intervene to defend the public interest. Thus, journalism profession is expected to be enshrined in ethical and professional practice to meet up with the taste of the public - truth, objectivity and fairness.

The theory emphasizes that journalists have a social responsibility to keep the public informed on activities and hold those responsible accountable. Media social responsibility theory posits that the media has a duty to serve the public interest by providing accurate and unbiased information, promoting democratic values,



and holding those in power accountable. It is therefore essential for media outlets to uphold their social responsibility by maintaining high ethical standards and avoiding conflicts of interest among reporters who are involved in unethical practices in an attempt to cover and report news stories (Asemah, 2012).

Therefore, aligning this study with the theory, journalists are expected to shy away from pack journalism phenomenon as this could affect their sense of social responsibility which requires objectivity, fairness, balance and adherence to codes of ethics as their guiding principles. In a nutshell, it means that an ideal journalist must be socially accountable to the audience.

### **Research Methodology**

In this study, qualitative research methodology was adopted. Data were collected through in-depth interviews of 20 journalists purposively selected across the six areas within Jalingo metropolis. The areas are: Roadblock, Sabongari, Angwan-Kasa, Dinyavo, Sabonlayi, and Nukkai. This research method was intentionally adopted to reflect the views or perceptions of the journalists on pack journalism practice in Nigeria by reaching out to them within the six areas in Jalingo metropolis.

According to Toluhi (2001), qualitative research design is a technique where the researchers ask open-ended questions orally and records the respondents' answers. However, the researchers conveniently selected twenty (20) journalists to form the sample of the study. The idea behind selecting twenty (20) journalists was to give room for effective discussion on the subject matter as getting many may affect the desired results as regards sampling responses from journalists who resides in Jalingo metropolis and can respond to issues on pack journalism phenomenon in Nigeria. The interviewees were members of the Nigeria union of journalists selected from six (6) NUJ chapels in Taraba State. The data collection exercise lasted 3 days from 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> August, 2023. Majority, that is, seven (7) of the interviewees were journalists from correspondence chapel who writes for national dailies. Three (3) from Taraba Television (TTV), five (5) journalists from Nigeria Television authority (NTA), three (3) from Taraba State Broadcasting Service (TSBS) and two (2) were selected from Sunrise local newspapers. The data collection method was face-to-face. This allowed the researchers to create rapport with the interviewees. To ensure confidentiality and privacy of interviewees, the twenty (20) participants are coded as thus: (D-1, to D-20). This also facilitated data analysis and discussion of findings.

### **Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion of Findings**

Data presentation was based on responses from the interviewees who are journalists writing for different media outlets in Nigeria and are residents in Jalingo, Taraba State.

#### **Q1: Demographic Data**

Demographic data was drawn from the six locations within Jalingo metropolis which consisted of Roadblock, Sabongari, Angwan-Kasa, Dinyavo, Sabonlayi, and Nukkai areas in Jalingo metropolis. In the course of this study, every interviewee was identified by location in Jalingo town according to age range, sex, occupation and educational qualification. Each participating journalist was identified with the tag, D-1 to D-20. The participants were made up of 13 males and 7 females; the oldest was 61 years while youngest was 30 years. The interviewees were chosen to fully reflect the views of the media audience as they write for the various outlets in Jalingo metropolis. The focus was strictly on journalists who report for various media outlets in the state and identified from five (5) chapels of the Nigeria Union of Journalists, Jalingo Chapter.

**Table 1: Sex of Respondents**

<b>Sex</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Male	13	65
Female	7	35
Total	20	100
<b>Age Range</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
30-45	10	50
46-60	9	45

60 above	1	5
Total	20	100
<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
National Dailies	7	35
TTV	3	15
NTA	5	25
TSBS	3	15
Sunrise	2	10
Total	20	100
<b>Location</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Roadblock	5	25
Sabongari	3	15
Angwan-Kasa	2	10
Dinyavo	5	25
Sabonlayi	2	10
Nukkai	3	15
Total	20	100
<b>Educational Qualification</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Diploma	6	30
HND/Degree	12	60
Master	2	10
Total	20	100

**Source: Field Study (2023)**

The above table indicates that 13 interviewees representing 65% were male, while 7 representing 35% were female. The table equally indicates that people between the ages of 30-45 were more than other age brackets among the interviewees. This however was followed by the 46-60 age brackets. The least was 60 and above age bracket. Also, from the table, interviewees were made up of journalists from different media organizations: 7 participants from national dailies, 3 reporters from Taraba Television, 5 from Nigeria Television Authority, 3 from Taraba State Broadcasting Service, and 2 from Sunrise. The table also indicates that the interviewees reside in Roadblock, Sabongari, Angwan-Kasa, Dinyavo, Sabonlayi, and Nukkai areas. The table also shows that 6 interviewees representing 30% are holders of diploma, 12 interviewees representing 60% were bachelor's degree holders, while 2 interviewees representing 10% were master's degree holders.

#### **RQ1: Examine the level of awareness of pack journalism phenomenon in Taraba State**

Answers to this question revealed that the pack journalism syndrome manifests in all aspects of journalism in Taraba state and by extension in Nigeria. However, further analysis shows that it manifests most in the sourcing and reporting of news stories as most of the respondents agreed. This is in line with the findings of Williams (2014) that the pack journalism syndrome manifests in areas of journalism generally. Though, most of the journalists did not know that the practice of covering stories by the media organizations in the same perspectives is referred to as pack journalism. In Nigeria, the idea of the source of the news determines the perspective of journalists is referred as copycat journalism.

The above reveals that pack journalism is manifest in all aspects of journalism. However, majority of the interviewees believe that it is more manifest in sourcing and reporting of news stories. While 6 interviewees agreed that it is manifest in interview, 5 respondents agreed to press conference, 3 interviewees on the other hand, opine that it is more manifest in public relations while 1 interviewee agreed that it is more manifest in documentaries.

**RQ2: Ascertain the factors responsible for of pack journalism phenomenon in Taraba State**

Following the responses to this question, it is evident that poor training is the major cause of the pack journalism syndrome in journalism. Findings from the interview conducted with journalism practitioners revealed that lack of adherence to ethical standard, poor remuneration and greed are the causes of the pack journalism syndrome in Nigeria. They however, agreed that poverty should not be used as an excuse for being corrupt as the final choice lies with the journalists to defend the integrity of their profession. This agrees with the finding of Akinfeleye (2007) that most journalists embrace corruption not because they cannot make ends meet, but because they have the desire to acquire more. He, however, argued that journalists as watchdogs cannot afford to allow materialistic tendencies to jeopardize the noble profession.

According to Frank (2019) pick up almost any textbook designed for use in an introduction to journalism class and it will have a list of qualities that have been extrapolated from news stories to help aspiring reporters develop news judgment, which can be defined as a sense that an occurrence is of sufficient public interest to warrant a commitment of newsroom resources. Widespread concurrence among mainstream journalists about these “elements of newsworthiness”— impact, conflict, prominence, proximity, novelty, timeliness, currency, accounts for similarities in the daily offerings of news organizations with the same or overlapping coverage areas. These factors drive journalists in Nigeria to sources of news in press release or news conference, which now make them to be prone to pack journalism practices (Adaba, 2010).

Though majority of the journalists did not accept that pack journalism was caused by poor remuneration or economic hardship, they insisted that journalism is not a poor man’s job, and that well-trained journalists are getting enough to get by. Most of the journalists saw those engaging in pack journalism as those who were not well trained. These crops of journalists argue that people do not necessarily get involved in corruption as a result of poverty. They argue that some people accept bribes even while they are comfortable financially, noting that character weakness, lack of professionalism and adequate training are the major factors that fan the embers of this corrupt practice. The journalists in this group insisted that poverty should not be used as an excuse for being corrupt as the final choice lies with the journalists to defend the integrity of the profession and maintain individual integrity.

**RQ3: Ethical implications of pack journalism to journalism practice in Taraba State.**

Answers emanating from this question showed that pack journalism influences journalism practice negatively because important issues are downplayed while unimportant issues are exaggerated or do not give objective perspective. This means that a journalist who is involved in pack journalism syndrome does his/her duty at the dictates of the giver of the story. According to D-11, sometimes, stories that are of no consequence to the society are published and good stories killed because the journalist has been compromised. These findings are in line with the unethical practices in Nigerian journalism as found by Apuke (2016).

Majority revealed the effect of brown envelope on journalism practice. 13 interviewees strongly agreed that pack journalism affects objectivity and balance in reporting, D-3 noted that brown envelope is the major reason for pack journalism which affects objectivity and balance in reporting, while interviewees D-16 and D-20 disagreed that pack journalism affects objectivity and balance in reporting. These findings have proved that pack journalism happened in both developed and developing democracies around the globe (Matusitz& Breen, 2012). The implication to professional journalism is that it will not make the media to keep up with its task of ensuring a vibrant and effective democracy. By implication, majority of the interviewees are of the opinion that pack journalism affects objectivity and balance in reporting. Thus, engaging in pack journalism will make the journalists not to be socially responsible to the public.

The researchers went further to ask the Identify ways to mitigate the practice of pack journalism in Nigeria, Responses to this question showed that to tackle the problem of pack journalism syndrome in journalism practice in Nigeria, professional bodies need to ensure that news organizations are serious in maintaining high ethical standards and professionalism. This is because when media take ethics seriously, practitioners will sit up to their professional calling and responsibility. From the interview conducted with the media practitioners, it was discovered that to deal with the issue of pack journalism in the profession, adherence to journalistic codes and

ethics is very essential. They also opined that journalists should understand the position they occupy in governance hence they should resist every form of professional misconduct within the media organization. D-1, D-3 and D-8 appealed to the union to fight for the good course of the profession as expected.

This finding further validates the conclusion of Nwabueze (2010), that in curbing the cancer of the brown envelope syndrome which causes pack journalism, the NUJ and other media professional bodies need to exercise their prerogative of collective bargaining in pushing forward an attractive welfare package for members. It is after this that such bodies can have the moral authority to deal with issues of professional misconduct among members.

### **Conclusion**

So far in this study, it has been seen that pack journalism poses huge threat to journalism practice. It is a cankerworm eating deep into the fairness and objectivity of reporting. Pack journalism is an unethical and unprofessional practice that damages the reputation of both media and journalists in general. The findings of this study show that majority of the journalists in Jalingo metropolis are aware of the existence of pack journalism, though they all frown at the practice. Nevertheless, the media would be well advised to face reality and consider their questionable newsgathering procedures. Therefore, it is of critical importance that news media reports should be fair and not biased or skewed. It is also imperative to make reporters disbelieve that pack journalism is rooted in human nature and it is an unavoidable or necessary evil. In evaluating the media's ethical standards as noted in the recommendations made by the Hutchins Commission (with regard to Social Responsibility Theory), we should strive not to promote unethical media practices and not to scold the news because of those pack journalists.

The fact that pack journalism syndrome is about to destroy the lofty height which the journalism practice has attained in Nigeria should be a source of concern to journalism practitioners and stakeholders in the profession. Wherever the pack journalism culture exists, truth is often suppressed and the highest bidder usually gets away with injustice and unfair treatment. This is the major reason this paper calls for concerted efforts in dealing with the monster.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Professional bodies within the media industry such as Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) among others should improve on the implementation of the various ethical codes in the industry to check the excesses of journalists in their practice.
2. Media outlets in the country and in Taraba State by extension should intensify efforts towards an improved welfare package for members. This will go a long way in addressing the temptation of engaging in some unethical practices in order to meet needs.
3. Subsequent professional misconduct by journalists in the various media outlets should be squarely dealt with and erring members adequately sanctioned. This is the way to go in curbing the ill effects of pack journalism syndrome in the Nigerian media industry.
4. Media organizations alongside Nigeria press council (NPC) and other bodies such as Newspapers Proprietors' Association of Nigeria (NPAN) and NUJ should organize regular workshops, seminars and public lectures for journalists that will sensitize them into maintaining ethical conducts in the discharge of their duties.

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