

## Journalists' Perception of News Commercialisation as a Recurring Ethical Question in the Nigerian "Mediasphere"<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

In a fast-paced world where financial inducement is being normalised, journalism professional code of ethics hinged on objectivity, accuracy, fairness, balance and truth became necessary to guide journalists against unprofessional conduct. Despite, scholarly perspectives suggest a decline in news credibility due to news commercialisation. Thus, the sanctity of news is gradually being infiltrated as published or broadcast news promote the interests of the elites, government and private organisations. The foregoing constitutes the challenge. This study, therefore gauged perceptions of journalists of news commercialisation as a recurring ethical question in the Nigerian mediasphere. The researchers relied on survey research design using questionnaire as instrument of data collection with the sample comprised of journalists who are registered members of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ). The sample of size of 269 was determined with the use of Cochran formula from 5945 being the population of members of the NUJ. The study recorded a 95 percent response rate with 256 responses. Findings revealed that news commercialisation remain unabated in the industry as it is mainly about the need for financial gains in order to keep the medium afloat. Motivated by this consideration, journalists sacrifice the principles of fairness, objectivity, independence at the altar of pecuniary gain for their organisation. The practice poses great threat to individuals and communities often neglected in pursuit of financial gains just as much as the watchdog role of the media is diminished in the process. The researchers concluded that news

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commercialisation creates an imbalance in news space and airtime allocation as attention is focused on financial gains. Therefore, it was recommended that the media balances the news allocation and ensure that the public interest is protected.

**Key words:** Commercialisation, Ethical Codes, Media credibility, Mediasphere, News

### **Introduction**

The media as the “Fourth Estate of the Realm” are platforms for mass communication and are also expected to play the watchdog role globally. Consequently, the media are saddled with the responsibilities of informing, educating and entertaining members of the society. This way, the public is abreast of happenings around the world which enable them make informed decisions (Udomisor& Kenneth, 2013). This primarily demonstrates the essence of journalism practice hinged on objective and balanced news reporting and information dissemination through the various platforms to the heterogeneous audiences who overtime have come to have trust and faith in the media. This implies that there is trust and faith gained by the media.

The idea of news commercialisation in Nigeria can be traced to 1986 following the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) by the Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida military regime. The withdrawal of subsidies from government institutions was an economic policy, intended to bring a sense of self-reliance and reduce government dependency (Omenugha& Oji, 2008). The researchers further stressed that while faced with financial challenges, government institutions responded to this policy thrust of the regime leading government-owned and funded media outlets like; the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) to resort to news commercialisation for survival. This birthed what has now transmogrified into an uncontrollable matter and practice in the Nigerian mediasphere.

Accordingly, access to media organisations by individuals, communities, private and public institutions became monetised in order to raise money. As a result, paid messages presented as news, analyses, or commentaries about individuals, groups or organisations began to dominate the Nigerian media space. The foregoing has been validated with the assertion that prominent personalities and names make news globally (Agbaje, as cited in Chioma, 2013). Events affecting high profile individuals get more media attention when compared to the marginalised, weak and vulnerable majority in the society. This pattern of coverage suggests news commercialisation as the lower majority in most cases gets media attention only when indulged in criminal activities, constitute

public nuisance, scapegoated in unusually unfortunate circumstances or hook up with the powerful to be noticed.

Unfortunately, the phenomenon of news commercialisation has become deeply rooted in the operations of Nigerian media landscape. As a result, sponsored news stories dominate the media space as captured in the popular aphorism that he who pays the piper dictates the tune. News focus on the wealthy, the powerful and the leadership to the detriment to the general mass continues unabated. In fact, the phenomenon has assumed a more dangerous dimension owing to its prevalence in news treatment; which raised ethical questions concerning mass media contents in Nigeria. According to Onoja (2009), news commercialisation has to do with tactful strategy of raising revenue by media stations by charging fees for news events they should normally cover and report free. This often suggests a departure from the social responsibility function of the mass media.

Accordingly, Ekeanyanwu and Obianigwe (2016) maintained that monetary gratification exerts pressure on journalists to do the bidding of the giver, by writing stories without strict adherence to journalistic principles. To this extent, the public is denied access to objective, accurate and balanced reportage of events; as the quality of news is compromised in favour of their sponsors. Deregulation necessitated the phenomenon, owing to the struggle for survival by broadcast stations at that time (Adelabu & Onwuka, as cited in Oloyede et al., 2024). The management of these stations made attempts and devised other means to generate money and the focus unfortunately shifted from developmental news to elites-focused and interest news.

Conversely, news commercialisation poses greater and multi-dimensional challenges to the credibility of the news stories reported by journalists because stories of events are usually arranged to suit their sponsors. In this connection, Oso (2012) argued that sponsored news stories are not journalistically worthy, as they lack the basic principles of truthfulness, objectivity, accuracy among others. However, the practice has grown into a monster and if not checked, news will lose value in Nigeria media environment and beyond. It is against this backdrop that the issue has continued to garner research interest and focus even in the modern era of advanced technology and digital media.

Furthermore, it is pertinent to state that news commercialisation operates at institutional and individual levels in Nigeria (Omenugha & Oji, 2008). Institutionally, it

is where media organisations officially charge fees for news coverage and reporting. In this case, the motive is to raise revenue as media proprietors, publishers or editors see these stations as profit-yielding investments. Okoji (2019) validated this claim with the statement that TVC station in Lagos charges exorbitant fees for live events; just as Channels TV Nigeria charges resource persons before appearing on their shows. In line with this, Azeez (2009) earlier noted that profit considerations constitute the main motive of establishing media organisations in contemporary capitalist's societies such as Nigeria.

On the other hand, receiving gratification of any kind from news makers by journalists before such stories are broadcast or published suggests news commercialisation at individual level. Again, individual news commercialisation occurs when a journalist's editorial decision is overly influenced by monetary gains instead of journalistic ethical considerations (Olufemi, 2018). As a result, news content that is broadcast or published prioritises profit maximisation over what is more relevant and of interest to the public. This is why owners of media stations compromise news content in favour of the elites as they have the wherewithal to buy their way into complete and undivided media attention.

In line with the above narrative, Kenneth and Odorume (2015) submitted that profit maximisation by media outlets and the quest for kickbacks by journalists in Nigeria is a deviation from the whole essence of journalism. Unfortunately, owners of media organisations have justified the act, however, (Nwanne, 2018) is of the notion that it needs to be addressed. This is why news stories concerning all kinds of disaster where the victims are mostly common people are underreported yet, the media is awash with elite's ceremonies or political events anywhere in Nigeria. This negates public interest as journalism was founded on the principles of balance, neutrality, fairness, accuracy to mention a few. Therefore, the media cannot be seen to give too much room for sponsored news and to the detriment of the public. In the light of the above, this study was conducted to examine the perception of journalists on the subject of news commercialisation in the Nigerian media landscape.

### **Statement of the Problem**

It is undeniable that news is an account of events that a medium report as news. That means an event must occur for it to attract coverage and reportage in line with basic journalism principles that portrays worthiness (Okunna, as cited in Adelabu & Onwuka, 2022). News commercialisation negates journalistic principles of neutrality, balance,

fairness, accuracy, worthiness to mention a few (Ekeanyanwu & Obianigwe, 2016; Kamal, 2017). It is expected that media organisations and journalists should be guided by ethical codes that frowns at compromising news content for monetary gifts and the likes in the practice of journalism profession.

However, critics such as Adaba (2011), Hanson (2015), Okoji (2019), and Oso (2012) have identified the distortion of news and imbalanced reports necessitating the growing tendency for the public not to believe the media owing to commercialisation of news. In essence, such gifts pressurise journalists to indulge in acts that are injurious to the social responsibility function in favour of full-blown commercialization of news coverage and reportage. Outcomes of commercialisation research efforts showed that the phenomenon is widespread; thus raised ethical questions in journalism practice in Nigeria demonstrating that attempt to proffer solution to the problem remained unsuccessful hence, it continues unabated in journalism practice in the country (Adaja, 2011; Christopher & Onwuka, 2013; Nwokoh, as cited in Adamu et al., 2021).

Consequently, the quality of news reports and the credibility of journalists as well as ethical standards in journalism are affected. This is the case because journalists that engage in it are likely to dance to the tune of those who provide such gifts at the detriment of professionalism (Ekeanyanwu & Obianigwe, 2012). Despite the justification provided by the proponents (Chioma, 2013; Ekwo, as cited in Oberiri, 2016) in favour of news commercialisation, critics observed that the phenomenon has the potency to divert journalists' attention from focusing on developmental news events to stories that put food on their tables. Afterall, ethical lapses occur when media outlets and journalists sacrifice ethics for personal gains. Therefore, this study sought to ascertain the perceptions of journalists on news commercialization as are curbing ethical issue within the Nigerian media environment and particularly sought opinions of registered and practicing journalists in the country.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives that guided the study were to:

1. Determine the recurring nature of news commercialisation in Nigeria.
2. Find out its implication on key principles of journalism.
3. Identify the ethical burdens of news commercialisation within the context of the Nigerian "mediasphere."

## **Conceptual/Opinion Review**

### **News commercialisation**

The term news commercialisation is not new to journalism profession. Thus, it is one of the most used concepts within the Nigerian media space and beyond. In fact, it is difficult to discuss unethical practices in journalism without the mention of news commercialisation. What then constitutes news commercialisation? News commercialisation is used to connote making news a commodity that could be bought by the highest bidder. Una (2014) explained that it is a situation whereby published or broadcast news is bought by the rich; hence, the masses are denied the opportunity of being heard or seen to the detriment of important development issues.

Onoja (2009) amplified the point and stated that news commercialisation has to do with a situation whereby stations raise revenue by charging fees for news stories they should normally carry free. This presupposes that the news stories published or broadcast are no longer subjected to editorial/journalistic scrutiny suggesting a negation of objectivity, balance, fairness, accuracy among others. In line with this, McManus (2009) averred that the focus on the economic rationalisation of news necessitates a temporary decline of public trust for the media saddled with watchdog role. Compromised news content is unethical in journalism as consumers have vested interest in news to make informed decisions concerning important events, government actions and policies, and social issues.

It is the act of focusing on the gains rather than the impact such news will have on the society in terms of public awareness, development, and growth. Therefore, the act of news commercialisation is from the perspective of profit driving decisions of the editorial board or team. Accordingly, Preston (2009) asserted that news commercialisation is likened to market-driven phenomenon where editorial decisions are tailored towards profit considerations instead of creating public value. As a result, paid news dominates the bulletins or publications of major news outlets. Lending credence to this assertion, Sherry (2018) stated that instead of focusing more on news stories relevant to the public, journalists and the media outlets they represent often pay more attention on what will attract advertisers and investors.

From the foregoing scholarly postulations and perspectives, it is apt to infer that news commercialisation is catastrophic to journalism profession in multi-dimensional fashion and pattern. Despite the justification provided by the proponents, it has penchant

to motivate journalists towards coverage of trivial issues; instead of covering and reporting developmental news stories. Moreover, it is an unethical practice and can be seen as one of the factors responsible for the gradual waning public trust for the media and media products in Nigeria. This portends danger as the public depends on news to make informed decisions that range from the political sphere to social concerns.

### **Ethics and the Nigerian media landscape**

Ethics refer to what is morally right or wrong. It is a branch of philosophy responsible for determining what is right to do (Armstead et al., 2023; Singer, 2025). In other words, it defines rules and regulations guiding the conduct of members of an organisation. Accordingly, the field of journalism is not exempted as journalists are obligated to adhere to journalistic code of ethics guiding the profession. The foregoing point has been buttressed with the assertion that journalists are guided by stipulated ethics otherwise known as rules, guidelines, norms and principles to make moral decisions (Okunna, as cited in Nganem & Dapiya, 2017). Thus, ethics are self-determined, self-regulated, as compliance is voluntary and self-enforced by members of the organisation.

It is pertinent to stress that journalistic code of ethics emerged in 1992, as follow-up to the deregulation of the broadcast industry by the Babangida regime in Nigeria. The withdrawal of subsidies from media organisation to reduce dependency prompted "Federal Government" to set up through parliament the "National Broadcasting Commission (NBC)." This commission is saddled with the responsibility of ensuring compliance among other things, to national communication policies as well as principles. Admittedly, NBC, 2006 code, stipulates that news is sacred. Thus, news coverage should be done within the bounds of journalistic code of ethics. Therefore, sponsorship of news cast, commentaries, analyses, current affairs programmes and editorials is unethical; hence suggests a sense of bias in favour of the sponsor (Onoja, 2009).

Unfortunately, the Nigerian media landscape has been overly infiltrated with the phenomenon of news commercialisation which violates the ethics and code of conduct of journalists. Scholars such as, Ekwo (1996), Ogbuoshi (2005) and Oso (2000) argued that lack of adherence to ethical codes associated with the practice of journalism has negative implications, one of which is the lack of public trust for news content they watch and this has tremendously affected the audience in making informed decisions. Idowu (2001) aligned with the foregoing that sponsored news distorts information and at the same time,



constitutes an insult to the intelligence of the audience. Therefore, journalists should abstain from practices that are inimical to the code of ethics and shun acts that undermine the integrity of news, in part, and the journalism profession in general.

To regain public trust, McQuail (2005) opined that the media should be objective, truthful, accurate and fair in their reportage with strict adherence to agreed codes of ethics and professional conduct. Otherwise, the public no longer sees media as platforms to advance their course, owing to considerations of profit. Describing journalism practice in Nigeria, Akinfeleye (2007) likened it to cocktail journalism, next of kin journalism or journalism of the general order. From scholarly perspectives, one can infer that the Nigerian media landscape has been overly polluted as journalists continued to act at variance to journalistic codes. It can also be inferred that the space is polarised. Consequently, it has become difficult to distinguish genuine news items from the commercialised and commercial-oriented ones. This is largely due to high level of commercialised content prevalent in the country's media industry.

### **Literature Review**

Ethics and journalism especially from the perspective of news commercialisation is a widely debated issue in media and journalism studies. Different authors and researchers have delved into distinct and unique angles to understand the complex nature of news commercialisation as it concerns the ethical dilemma in journalism. This review is based on such studies and views. According to Ismail et al. (2021), news commercialisation involves the act of covering news with profit or financial gains as the motivating factor. The foregoing is based on the notion that whenever news coverage is informed by the very concern of making money, it suffices to note that the act of journalism is commercialised. Commercialisation of news in this part of the world is deep-rooted and media organisations have good understanding of what it entails.

McManus (2009) opined that news commercialisation is any action intended to boost profit that influences a journalist's editorial decision or news organisation's drive to prioritise public understanding of the issues and events that shape the community they claim to serve. This underpins the assumption that news is a commodity that can be bought by the rich, so that their voices can be heard to the detriment of important developments (Una, 2014). In essence, it is a betrayal of the principles of journalism because it negates all that such principles rest upon (Ngantem&Dapiya, 2017). Therefore, whenever a piece of information or news is treated as a commodity, such actions offend



the basic principles upon which the journalism practice rests. It also negates the very foundation of the practice in consideration of ethical conducts of practitioners.

Accordingly, news commercialisation is seen to constitute a mockery to journalism practice/profession. Thus, it destroys public trust for media content and the credibility of the journalist. In agreement with this, Idowu (2001) as cited in Oberiri (2016) explained that for news to be useful and trusted, it must measure up to acceptable journalistic principles which include: objectivity, balance, accuracy, fairness, relevance among others. However, this is an era where journalists prioritise personal interest and sponsored news stories dominate editorials or news bulletins. In the Nigerian media space, there is indeed a prevalence of news commercialisation leading to underreporting of significant developments in favour of trivial urban events and individual achievements of the elites (UNESCO, as cited in Ude, 2018). This suggests a gradual departure from the traditional role of the media in pursuit of profit considerations.

Apparently, news commercialisation is unethical; therefore, it affects information flow, leads to distortion of news, and ensures loss of focus on investigative journalism. This is therefore a negation of serious journalism practice which involves serving the watchdog role and holding to account public officials and government of a country. In essence, the idea of news commercialisation delivers the majority of unsuspecting viewers to advertising barons. Azeez (2009) validated this claim that the pursuit for profitability often compels media organisations into prioritising the interests of advertisers and investors over obligatory social responsibility function. This explains how the media have deviated from their traditional function of providing unbiased news to presenting sponsored news stories, to unsuspecting audience as conventional public interest news.

Similarly, compromised news content tends to prioritise profit maximisation than facilitating public understanding (McManus, as cited in Valgerður, 2018). In other words, news has become a commodity for money bags that their voices can be heard. In corroboration with this, Harrison (2006) averred that news commercialisation is an economic process of commodification that recognises media audience as consumers. This lack of adherence to journalistic codes vividly demonstrates how news reporting has become in Nigeria (Asemah, 2011). This birthed the idea that what the audiences watch or read is nothing but packaged news by financially capable individuals. It also underpins

the assumption that the neutrality in news gathered and reported which should be the focus of the media organisation has become a mirage than reality.

News commercialisation constitutes unethical practice that may have some negative implication on core new values (Ismail et al., 2021). The implication of this notion is that all values that ought to be considered before news items are selected may be overlooked on some commercial considerations. Objectivity, fairness, balance, and all could be ignored due to the financial gains anticipated from the decision to publish commercial-oriented news items. Sponsors of news contents and advertisers are given priority in the news media in Nigeria and this is considered as a major challenge (Adelabu & Onwuka, 2022). The researchers blamed economic crises which they claimed forced journalists to indulge in commercial ventures. Accordingly, such factors have elevated the need to make money for their organisations above adherence to core mandate. However, they rely on sponsors and advertisers who may determine what news item gets the prominent feature in Nigerian "mediasphere."

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study is built on the social responsibility theory and public sphere theory. Propounded based on the 1947 Commission on Freedom of the Press in the United States otherwise known as the Hutchins Commission, the social responsibility theory is premised on the propositions that media should accept and strive to fulfill some responsibilities to the society. Among these responsibilities are that the media must ensure to provide unbiased and accurate information, serve as watchdog over powerful institutions and government, facilitate public discussions and debates and promote human rights and social justice. Key variables of the social responsibility theory include media freedom, truth and accuracy, public interest, media accountability, fairness and objectivity, and professional standards.

Social responsibility theory is based on a press that is considered free yet acting in a responsible manner (Asemah et al., 2017; 2022). It therefore implies that the media must act within the ambit of the law while striving to promote and uphold the core values and standards of journalism practice. Another point from this is that while carrying out their duties of reporting the news, media practitioners are expected to place above any other, the interest of the public (the audience) who they are commissioned to serve. According to Adebale and Onwuka (2022), this theory does not support the idea of imposing news paid-for on the public. This theory provides the theoretical framework for

this study in order to situate analysis based on the need for journalists to act in ethical manner while conducting their assigned duty. This includes not prioritising profit-making over public interest.

Habermas' public sphere theory also provides theoretical framework for this study. Based on Habermas' assumptions, the term "public" can be used to refer to an occasion or events open to all to participate (Finlayson & Rees, 2023). Therefore, Jürgen Habermas' theory assumes that the public sphere is a space where citizens are opportune to engage in rational conversations to shape public opinion. The media is one of such spaces where citizens engage in constructive discourse and so news commercialisation may undermine the public sphere because of the priorities set on profit over public interest. Key variables of the public sphere theory include communicative action, the public sphere itself, rational-critical debate, inclusivity, autonomy, and deliberation. The theory is used here to analyse the ethical implications of a shift from a public-interest-oriented media to that which prioritises profit in all its ramifications.

### **Methods**

The study is based on quantitative survey research design which, according to Kluemper (2021), involves a wide range of methodological decisions that the researchers must take. On account of the nature of this study, the population consists of select journalists in different cities in Nigeria. Based on the NUJ membership compendium, about 5, 945 is the estimated population of registered journalists in Nigeria. Using Cochran sample determining formula, a sample size of 269 was determined using a confidence level of 90 percent. This means that the sample size for this study is 269 comprised of practicing journalists in Nigeria.

The purposive sampling method was used to select respondents that took the survey. The selection was based on their perceived knowledge of the subject of enquiry. The researchers relied on their sense of judgment to ascertain the knowledge of the respondents. Therefore, the judgemental sampling technique was relied upon for the final respondents' selection. The main characteristic of the sample is professional homogeneity as they are all practicing journalists in Nigeria with years of experience not less than 5 as practitioners.

The instrument of data collection for this study was the questionnaire. The 5-point Likert-aided questionnaire had components such as D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree; A=Agree; SA=Strongly Agree; U=Undecided. The instrument was also coded according

from a scale of 5-1 to simplify analysis. This was followed by the creation of the online to elicit data from practicing journalists on their perception of news commercialisation and ways that may affect ethics of journalism profession. Data collected from the respondents were analysed with the use of the statistical packages for social sciences otherwise known by its acronym SPSS version 26. The analysis was based on a 95% response rate with 256 responses received within a period of 8-9 months in the year 2024.

## Results

**Table 1**

**Recurring Nature of News Commercialisation in Nigeria**

Parameters	D [%]	SD [%]	A [%]	SA [%]	U [%]	Mean [x]	Decision
News commercialisation in the Nigerian media has a recurring nature	13 [5.1]	26 [10.2]	114 [44.5]	76 [29.7]	27 [10.5]	3.78	Accepted
It is most glaring in journalists soliciting gratification toward suppressing the truth and facts	91 [35.5]	33 [12.9]	15 [5.9]	10 [3.9]	107 [41.8]	1.95	Rejected
It is unabated under the guise that funds are generated for day-to-day running of the media organisation	18 [7.0]	18 [7.0]	157 [61.3]	44 [17.2]	19 [7.4]	3.74	Accepted
Sponsored information is usually presented in form of news to the audience	6 [2.3]	8 [3.1]	206 [80.5]	14 [5.5]	22 [8.6]	3.72	Accepted
Advertisement is an aspect of news commercialisation but in a much disguised format	13 [5.1]	13 [5.1]	38 [14.8]	123 [48.0]	69 [27.0]	3.52	Accepted
News commercialisation is a child of survival instincts of the underfunded media organisations in Nigeria	6 [2.3]	17 [6.6]	140 [54.7]	47 [18.4]	46 [18.0]	3.53	Accepted

**Source:** Field Survey, 2024

**KEY:** D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree; A=Agree; SA=Strongly Agree; U=Undecided

**Decision Rule:** 0.00-3.49 = [Rejected] 3.50-5.00 = Accepted

Data presented in table 1 above demonstrate journalists' perceptions of the recurring nature of news commercialisation in Nigeria. Respondents agreed to the notion that news commercialisation in Nigeria has a recurring nature ( $x = 3.78$ ), and that it is unabated under the guise that funds are generated for day-to-day running of the media organisation ( $x = 3.74$ ), sponsored information is usually presented in form of news to the audience ( $x = 3.72$ ), advertisement is an aspect of news commercialisation but in a much disguised format ( $x = 3.52$ ), and that news commercialisation is a child of the underfunded media organisations in the country ( $x = 3.53$ ). What the foregoing implies is that news commercialisation is a recurring phenomenon in the Nigerian media landscape and made manifest in numerous ways and under varied guises chief of which is that it is explored to generate funds for the smooth running of the media outlets.

**Table 2****Implication of Commercialisation on Key Journalism Principles**

Parameters	D [%]	SD [%]	A [%]	SA [%]	U [%]	Mean [x]	Decision
There are no negative implications of news commercialisation on key principles, ethics and professionalism in journalism	80 [31.3]	134 [52.3]	15 [5.9]	5 [2.0]	22 [8.6]	2.61	<b>Rejected</b>
News commercialisation has no implication on the principles of balance, fairness and objectivity	120 [44.9]	92 [35.9]	14 [5.5]	7 [2.7]	23 [9.0]	2.46	<b>Rejected</b>
News commercialisation has no implication on the principles of truthful reporting and impartiality	121 [47.3]	106 [41.4]	13 [5.1]	4 [1.6]	12 [4.7]	2.52	<b>Rejected</b>
News commercialisation has no implication on the principle of independence and accountability	26 [10.2]	191 [74.6]	23 [8.6]	9 [3.5]	7 [2.7]	3.00	<b>Rejected</b>
News commercialisation has no implication on professional integrity	42 [16.4]	183 [71.5]	13 [5.1]	12 [4.7]	6 [2.3]	2.93	<b>Rejected</b>
News commercialisation has no implication on the credibility of news	43 [16.8]	174 [68.0]	17 [6.6]	10 [3.9]	12 [4.7]	2.88	<b>Rejected</b>

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**Source:** Field Survey, 2024

**KEY:** D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree; A=Agree; SA=Strongly Agree; U=Undecided

**Decision Rule:** 0.00-3.49 = [Rejected] 3.50-5.00 = Accepted

The data in table 2 above show journalists' perception in respect of the implication of commercialisation on key journalism principles. Journalists rejected the statements put in their negative forms. Accordingly, statements rejected are that news commercialisation has no implication on the principles of balance, fairness and objectivity ( $x = 2.46$ ), news commercialisation has no implication on the principles of truthful reporting and impartiality ( $x = 2.52$ ), news commercialisation has no implication on the principles of independence and accountability ( $x = 3.00$ ), news commercialisation has no implication on professional integrity ( $x = 2.93$ ), and news commercialisation has no implication on the credibility of news ( $x = 2.88$ ). This is an indication that news commercialisation affects all these principles of journalism, starting from balance, fairness and objectivity, truthful reporting and impartiality, independence and accountability, professional integrity to that of news credibility.

**Table 3**

**Ethical Burden of News Commercialisation**

Parameters	D [%]	SD [%]	A [%]	SA [%]	U [%]	Mean [x]	Decision
News commercialisation as an unethical practice is associated with ethical burden of loss of public trust	7 [2.7]	12 [4.7]	200 [78.1]	18 [7.0]	19 [7.4]	3.74	<b>Accepted</b>
News commercialisation as an unethical practice can pose serious danger to communities	18 [7.0]	27 [10.5]	99 [38.7]	101 [39.5]	11 [4.3]	4.02	<b>Accepted</b>
It poses great danger to individuals that are neglected due to commercial considerations	5 [2.0]	31 [12.1]	140 [54.7]	70 [27.3]	10 [3.9]	4.00	<b>Accepted</b>
It can undermine democracy causing a boomerang effect on journalists and journalism	54 [21.1]	16 [6.3]	5 [2.0]	11 [4.3]	170 [66.4]	1.57	<b>Rejected</b>
Diminishing active watchdog role is an effect of news commercialisation	16 [6.3]	19 [7.4]	59 [23.0]	153 [59.8]	16 [6.3]	4.27	<b>Accepted</b>

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Information flow is significantly affected making it an ethical burden against the information dissemination function of the media	5	24	9	15	203	1.55	<b>Rejected</b>
	[2.0]	[8.9]	[3.5]	[5.9]	[79.3]		

**Source:** Field Survey, 2024

**KEY:** D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree; A=Agree; SA=Strongly Agree; U=Undecided

**Decision Rule:** 0.00-3.49 = [Rejected] 3.50-5.00 = Accepted

Results in table 3 are about the ethical burden of news commercialisation on the journalism profession from the perspectives of practicing journalists. The data in table demonstrate that news commercialisation has ethical implications. It is an unethical practice associated with ethical burden of loss of public trust ( $x = 3.74$ ), pose serious danger to communities ( $x = 4.02$ ), pose great danger to individuals that are neglected due to commercial considerations ( $x = 4.00$ ), and diminish active watchdog role ( $x = 3.27$ ). However, journalists rejected the statement that news commercialisation undermines democracy causing a boomerang due to the commercial considerations ( $x = 1.57$ ) and that information flow is significantly affected making it an unethical burden against the information dissemination function of the media ( $x = 1.55$ ). Results in the table imply that within the context of media in Nigeria, there are ethical burdens associated with news commercialisation and it is manifested in several ways as captured above.

### Discussion

This study was conducted to gauge the perceptions of journalists on news commercialisation as a recurring ethical burden in the media landscape of Nigeria herein referred to as "mediasphere." Findings from the online survey demonstrate that news commercialisation has a recurring nature and remains unabated on the grounds of funds being generated for running of the media organisation. It was revealed that it is recurring on account of sponsored information being aired as news to the audience, and that advertisements usually assume a disguised nature. Furthermore, findings of the study show that news commercialisation was borne out of the survival instincts of a struggling establishment adducing it to poor funding of media organisations in the country. Previous studies also showed that news commercialisation is common in the Nigerian media industry (Adelabu & Onwuka, 2022; Apuke, 2016; Chioma, 2013; Ezeah & Jonah, 2018; Ngantem & Dapiya, 2017; Oloyede et al., 2024). Particularly, Oloyede et al. (2024)



identified advertisers' influence and profitability as part of the factors that influence commercialisation in Nigeria's media environment.

Findings of this study further show that there are negative implications associated with news commercialisation especially in respect of key principles, ethics and professional rules of journalism profession. Results demonstrate that the principles of balance, fairness and objectivity, truthful reporting and impartiality, independence and accountability, professional integrity, and credibility were all affected. This implies that there is a correlation between unethical practice of news commercialisation and erosion of the principles and ethics of journalism practice as seen in the Nigerian mediasphere. Related studies also established that some implications are associated with news commercialisation. For instance, Iheanacho et al. (2021) revealed that news commercialisation affects the principles of truth, balance, fairness, and objectivity. A study conducted by Adamu et al. (2021) also showed that the principles of accuracy, objectivity, and balance were affected on account of news commercialisation. Additionally, the phenomenon was identified to have negatively affected the image of Nigerian media organisations (Ngantem & Dapiya, 2017). A focus on commercial news negates the postulations of social responsibility theory of the media. This study builds on existing ones through expansion to other principles and ethical considerations.

Burden of news commercialisation was also part of the findings of this study as it was revealed that the practice is associated with the burden of loss of public trust in the media. Another ethical burden is the threat posed to communities whose stories/events are not given prominence due to the commercialised spaces and airtime in the media. Furthermore, this study shows that news commercialisation diminishes active watchdog role. Findings of a study by Chioma (2013) earlier revealed that watchdog role is being relegated on account of the pursuit of financial gains through news commercialisation avenues. Findings on the erosion of public trust align with previous studies and scholar position that news commercialisation has a detrimental impact on public trust of media organisations (Onyinloye et al., 2024). Relatedly, McQuail (2010) explained that as media organisations give priority to profit and sensationalism, the reaction of the public is the diminishing confidence in the media.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study was conducted to gauge the perception of practicing journalists on news commercialisation as a recurring ethical question in the Nigerian mediasphere.

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Therefore, this study concluded that the act of news commercialisation is very much in place in the Nigerian media industry. The practice is said to be unabated on account of its consideration as alternative source of fund to aid media organisations run the day-to-day activities. It creates an imbalance space since airtime and space that ought to be allocated to other important matters of public importance are usually dedicated to commercial purposes as seen in sponsored information being presented as news to the audience. The unethical practice of news commercialisation is inimical to the principles of journalism practice and could lead to it being undermined and underrated by right-thinking members of the society if it continues unabated. In respect of the findings and the foregoing conclusion, the researchers recommend that:

1. Media organisations in Nigeria should strive to develop templates to have good balance between commercial news and public interest. The latter must be accorded priority to ensure that the media perform its social responsibility to the furtherance of development and growth of society.
2. The audience should always hold the media accountable and ensure that professionals give priority attention to the public by putting them first in their dealings. This can be actualised through concerted efforts on the part of the members of the public to hold the media accountable through different avenues such as letter to the editor and partnerships.

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