

Understanding the Fate of Journalism Practice Without the Brown Envelope: Views from Practicing Journalists in Anambra State

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ABSTRACT

Restoring the long-damaged image of journalism practice is a concern for virtually all communication scholars and professionally minded journalists. This need has triggered research on how to eradicate some of the unethical and unprofessional practices that undermine the profession's integrity. Understanding the fate of journalism practice without the brown envelope is among the research inquiries targeted at ensuring credible and integrity-laden journalism practices capable of serving public interests. Specifically, this study examined how respondents perceive the practice of journalism without brown envelopes; the dominant factor responsible for the flourishing of brown envelopes; respondents suspected major consequences of the absence of brown envelopes on journalism quality and welfare; the institutional and professional supports needed to sustain ethical journalism in Nigeria and respondents' suggested strategies that could be helpful in total eradication of brown envelope journalism in Nigeria. The study was based on the postulation of the social responsibility theory, with the focus group discussion as the method. The thematic result from the three focus group sessions, which lasted for 50 minutes each, with 10 discussants, revealed that although the respondents shared some views that journalism can survive a brown envelope, a poor salary structure was generally agreed to serve as the major factor for the flourishing of a brown envelope in the Nigerian media landscape. It was recommended that a journalism welfare fund should be established with transport and hazard allowances enforced by media organisations to improve the welfare of journalists among others.

Keywords: Ethical Journalism, Brown Envelope, Journalism practice, Professionalism

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

As the fourth estate of the realm, journalism is one of the globally recognized and acknowledged institutions that is critical in democratic governance. This is because the profession has the responsibility of monitoring both the government and its environment (Rodrigo, 2022). It correlates societal responses to leadership, transmits cultural histories, educates, and entertains the masses. In keeping with these functions for the sustenance of robust mutual relationships between the government and the people, good journalism practice is embedded in the presentation of objective, balanced, and fair reporting (David & Peter, 2019; Rolli, 2025). In doing this, journalism practice empowers citizens to make informed decisions that can lead to favourable consequences, and at the same time, holds government officials and representatives accountable to the public they serve.

Unfortunately, the practice of journalism is confronted by a lot of critical challenges that are gradually murdering the profession (Rodrigo, 2022). Significantly, these challenges are more manifest in developing nations of the world (Ashwani, 2024). However, in many developing nations, including Nigeria, the practice of journalism faces a moral crisis due to widespread ethical compromise. Prominent among these ethical compromises is the practice of "*brown envelope journalism*".

The term "brown envelope" refers to the act of offering monetary or material gifts to journalists either for favourable coverage or deliberate suppression of critical information from the public space. The brown envelope comes at different times, before the coverage, on the beat presentation of gratification, and post-coverage offering of gratifications, usually called '*publish and come*'. While before coverage offering of material or fund

to journalist occur when the coverage is about to start, the second one happens at the scene of the event immediately before the journalists leave the event. The last one occurs when the deal is executed as planned and satisfaction is met by the reports. It can come in every form, including free traveling tickets, freebies, money, or any other material things capable of getting the reporter at that material time to act in line with the dictates of the giver (Lamwaka, 2022; Skjerdal, 2018). In Nigeria, this phenomenon is deeply entrenched and manifests across various media environments, irrespective of beat, medium, or professional rank. While citing (Okoro & Chinweobo-Onuoha, 2013), Lamwaka (2022) stated that the brown envelope has different names in Nigeria where it is rampant. According to the author, the name of the brown envelope includes Gbalamu/Gbalamun, Kewu, Kua/Kwa/Qua, Keske, Kola, Chope, Communique, Goro, Egunje and Awufu. The prevalence of the practice in Nigeria according to Oberiri, 2016) is caused by institutionalized corruption. According to Tandoh & Agbemenu (2020), this practice threatens the credibility of journalism practice and at the same time challenges objectivity, accuracy, and responsibility in the coverage of news, leading to a significant decline in the trust that the public has in the media. It is important at this point to argue that the brown envelope syndrome is not just a matter of professional misconduct but also a reflection of the economic, structural, and institutional weaknesses in the Nigerian media system.

In the real sense of the world, all trained journalists are aware of the ethical precepts and implications of accepting gratifications of any kind(s) for the provision of their professional services. Despite being aware of the implications, acceptance of gratifications is now the order of the day among practitioners as a result of several reasons. According to Adeniyi, (2017), corruption among journalists, poor remuneration, and self-discipline or indiscipline, which is personal to the individual practitioner, are the motivating factors for the sustenance of brown envelopes in journalism practice. Moreover, factors motivating the existence of the brown envelope can also include gross lack of welfare provisions for journalists, commercialization of news, weak regulatory frameworks, and the commodification of information by the sources. In Nigeria, public relations firms even go to the extent of paying the media organisations covering their beat to report them in a good light (Ristow, 2010; Omenugha & Oji, 2008) cited in Lamwaka, (2022). This is another angle to the issue, underscoring why the brown envelope has come to stay in journalism practice. Relying on the transfer of moral burden (Ikegbunam & Obiakor, 2019), on the field, journalists accept gratifications and transfer the burden of ethics and professionalism to their organisations, which may have accepted something from familiar PR firms over the news either directly or indirectly as an advert subscription.

Importantly, journalists often work under hazardous conditions with little or no job security. This condition makes them more vulnerable to inducement by any little thing that comes their way. This condition was captured in Sani and Abubakar, (2020), where the authors argued that this has not only created an environment of mistrust between the journalists and society, but it has also led to the loss of credibility by the profession. Ethical lapses have become normalized in many media houses where reporters are expected to "hustle" for survival on their own. In most cases, reporters are left to hunt and gather news stories from a distance far from their base without any transport fee on a salary that hardly sustains them till the next pay. In a bid to meet up with the tasking and unfriendly economic challenges in Nigeria, many journalists accept what is offered and publish as directed. The consequence of this is that public relations documents find their way into editorial content of media organisations many a time in the interest of the pay masters against the public interest that journalism is meant to serve as a profession. This has not only created an environment of mistrust between the journalists and society, but it has also led to the loss of credibility by the profession

As a city with a higher concentration of diverse media organisations, Awka, the capital city of Anambra State, houses many journalists who earn their living serving as reporters either for broadcast, print, or online media. With this diverse media presence, Awka is home to journalists serving in both public and private sectors and, therefore, is a strategic setting to examine how practicing journalists conceptualize their roles in the absence of financial inducements. Scholars have, over the years, researched the influence of brown envelopes on journalism practice, the ethics of the journalism profession, and means of combating brown envelopes, with little or nothing on the views of practising journalists on the survival of the journalism profession without brown envelopes. In the face of the need to meet up with the rising economic cost of news production, personal needs of the working journalists, societal values, and structural corruption in Nigeria, this study examines the views of journalists on the future of their services if brown envelopes are totally forced out of the system.

Statement of the Problem

In the ideal sense of the profession, journalism is meant to serve the public responsibly at all time without fear or favour. In the sense of the practice, instead of serving these public interest, economic stand points of both the media organisations and their workers have drastically changed the long-preached concept of ethics and professional proclamations. Despite the trainings and seminars organised at different intervals to instil the real idea of journalism practice into the minds of the practitioners, journalism is still grappling with one major unethical practice which has affected its credibility and public trust. Brown envelope has continued to flourish in the Nigerian media landscape because reporters and their organizations alike have pressing organisational and personal economic needs. These and the prevalence of chronic corruption in the country culminates in the transfer of moral burden that sustains the massive acceptance gratifications for the publication of news items. The pervasiveness of this practice has led to a devaluation of the journalistic profession, with many journalists viewed not as watchdogs of society but as pawns for the highest bidder. Against this backdrop, this study is asking whether journalism practice can survive and remain effective in Nigeria without brown envelopes? While existing literature has focused largely on the causes and consequences of the brown envelope syndrome, few studies have explored what the media landscape would look like in its absence particularly from the perspective of those who are most directly affected: practicing journalists themselves.

Research Questions

1. How do respondents perceive the practice of journalism in the total absence of brown envelopes?
2. What is the dominant factor responsible for the flourishing of brown envelope practices in Nigerian media landscape?
3. What do respondents think would be the major consequences of total absence of brown envelopes on journalism quality and welfare?
4. What institutional and professional supports do respondents suggest would be needed to sustain ethical journalism in Nigeria?
5. What strategies do respondents suggest could be helpful in total eradication of brown envelope journalism in Nigeria?

Significance of the Study

This study will be beneficial to practising journalists, the profession itself, policy makers and regulatory institutions in Nigeria such as the Nigerian Press Council (NPC), Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), and media training institutions. These are the various bodies seeking to develop realistic and effective strategies for professionalizing journalism in Nigeria. It will as well be important to the public who are being denied quality journalism services and to academic. To the practising journalists, this study will restore personality and respect for their services to humanities and the nation. If brown envelope is gone, journalist will be seen the way lawyers and Doctors are seen as professionals with special interest in service to humanity. To journalism itself, all lost glory and public trust so far dashed in the wind will be restored and reports will continue to be seen as a serious information that can exert significant social change. To the regulatory agencies, will study will inform regulatory proclamations that will guide the practice of journalism in Nigeria with clearly spelt out sanctions against offering and acceptance of gratifications of any kind and at any time for the sake of publishing news items. To the public, making an informed decision on public policy and issues are well guided by journalistic information. Many decisions have been wrongly made because of distorted information dished out by the media for the sake of gratifications. With the influence of this study, restoring true journalism practice in Nigeria will enable the people to access good journalism that can inform good decision making on public issues. This study contributes meaningfully to both academic discourse and media policy reforms. Academically, it adds to the limited literature that focuses on journalists' perceptions of ethical reform within the industry. Additionally, this research will benefit journalism students and educators by providing insights into the ethical dilemmas facing practitioners and highlighting the importance of strengthening ethics in journalism training curricula.

Scope of the Study

Geographically, this study is premised in Awka, the capital of Anambra State, Nigeria. Its human population is the practicing journalists working in various media organisations- broadcast, print, and online domiciled in the city. Thematically, it addresses issues surrounding journalists' perception of their practice without gratifications, the dominant factor that encourages acceptance of gratifications, their thought on the possible consequences of absence of brown envelope to their services, suspected institutional and regulatory frameworks to guard against the practice of brown envelop and suggested ways of eliminating the unethical practice in the system.

Theoretical framework

This study is premised on the theoretical postulation of the social responsibility theory of the press, which places the responsibility of serving the public interest on the shoulders of the press. Originating from the inventive thinking and ideas of Political free thinkers, the essence of the theory was to advocate for total press freedom with little or no censorship (Uzochukwu & Ikegbunam, 2022; Kobiruzzaman, 2021). Its main base is to improve on objectivity in reporting to achieve responsibility in the interpretation of events and issues around the people in the society (Agudosy & Ikegbunam, 2020). It places the media on the side of humanitarianism while requesting public accountability from the government without acting in a way that incites the public against the government or society against another. In the above views, it is clear that accepting gratifications can easily take the practice off track in providing the needed service to humanity. Considering the facts that studies have found that the brown envelope erodes the principle of objectivity and responsibility, the brown envelope is an unethical practice that needs to be eradicated to save the journalism profession. With gratifications, journalists can only serve as praise singers rather than the ideal purpose of serving humanity through the protection of the rights of the less privileged, the unprotected in the society and holding the government accountable for the public goods (Agudosy, Ikegbunam & Obiakro, 2018).

Brown Envelope and Journalism Codes of Ethics: A brief conceptual review

It is a common knowledge now that the brown envelope syndrome is frowned upon. This is because, like every other profession, journalism has rules and regulations governing its practice. These rules and regulations are generally called ethics. In journalism, ethics means the code of morals that journalists are supposed to uphold at all times irrespective of what comes may (Ike, 2005:75-76; Agbanu, 2013, p. 142). To underscore the importance of ethical obligations in journalism, it is pertinent to rely on Ewelukwa (2004:282-283) for the international, regional and national codes of ethics that condemn the brown envelope syndrome, starting with the international code, which is code-named *The Journalist's Professional Integrity, and forms article IV of the international code*: "The integrity of the profession does not permit the journalist to accept any form of bribe or the promotion of any private interest contrary to the general welfare." Also regionally, the charter of the West African Journalists' Association, WAJA, in its Article X, condemns the brown envelope syndrome thus: "In all circumstances, the journalist must show proof of integrity by avoiding of illicit remuneration, directly or indirectly (Eke, 2014). He also has the duty of refusing to aid and abet the promotion of interests that are contrary to the general wellbeing."

Again, nationally, the portion of the Nigerian Press Organisation, NPO, that deals with the brown envelope syndrome is code-named Reward and Gratification, and it states that, "A journalist should not give or accept bribe in order to publish or suppress information neither should he accept patronage or gratification of any type because this will affect the society's expectation on him of an unbiased, accurate and fair report of people and events." From the above codes, it is clearly seen that the brown envelope syndrome has no legitimate place in the practice of journalism anywhere in the world. In this regard efforts to stop its existence has to be intensified at all costs by all well-meaning practitioners. This study is a mission to finding a lasting solution to ending the unethical practice.

Empirical review of related literature

Relying on the fact that journalism profession has been tainted just like other professions by corruption, Lamwaka (2022) examined journalists and PR practitioners' perceptions of brown envelope journalism and what

the industry can employ to address the vice. The study which was anchored on the theoretical provision of the social responsibility theory adopted the mixed method research approach in studying 180 respondents, 94 journalists and 86 PR practitioners working in Kampala and registered to the Uganda Journalists Association and the Public Relations Association of Uganda while. The study also interviewed 6 Public Relations practitioners and journalism experts as key informants. Findings revealed that although journalists and Public Relations practitioners perceive the brown envelope journalism as unethical practice, they are brown envelope complaints with money as the dominant form of brown envelope in Uganda and poor pay and the lack of facilitation as the dominating factors leading to the prevalence of brown envelope in the country. The study concluded that the eradication of brown envelope from the Ugandan media landscape is dependent on the combined effort by media houses, media associations and the government to deal with it. Improvement in welfare of journalists and formation of an effective functional regulatory framework for checkmating of the practice of journalism was recommended. This study shares almost the same objectives with the current one but has deviation in area of study and thematic focus. While this study is centered on ascertaining what journalism practice will look like in the absence of brown envelope, the previous study examined perception and complaint to the dirty practice. Again, the previous is set in Uganda and the current one is set in Nigeria.

Again, Iroh (2022), examined the influence of brown envelope on practicing journalists in Ebonyi State. The study looked at the level of knowledge of brown envelope syndrome among journalists and the areas brown envelope syndrome manifest most in the profession. Premised on the theoretical postulation of Social Responsibility Theory and the Cognitive Moral Development Theory, the study surveyed 296 journalists in Ebonyi State. Findings revealed that majority of the journalists are aware that brown envelope exists in the profession and it has become a common practice in the profession among others. the study recommended that media professionals should apply self-discipline and do away with accepting gratifications of any kind and at any time. The study also called on the National Union of Journalists and other professional bodies to ensure that there is sanction and punishment for journalists and organisations who accept gratifications for the sake of providing favourable coverage to any firm or party in the country. This study relates to the current one on the general theme of the target which is brown envelope and journalism practice in Nigeria. While acknowledging that the study has relationships, it is pertinent to also observe the differences in the two studies. The previous study is premised on journalists in Ebonyi state. This means that its counterpart of Anambra extraction is necessary. Moreover, while this study is looked at awareness and common practices where brown envelope manifests most, the current one is on the perception of journalists on the survival of journalism practice in the total absence of brown envelope.

Similarly, Abubakari, (2021) examined the impact of brown envelope syndrome on professionalism among journalists in Kwara State using a descriptive survey research design and in-depth interview approach. The study which was based on the theoretical position of Deontological and Teleological Ethical Theories, sampled 219 journalists from Kwara state was drawn using the Taro Yamane formula while in-depth interviews were conducted with five senior journalists to compliment the quantitative data. Findings revealed that the dominant factor encouraging demand for gratifications among journalists is economic pressure. The result also shows that the objectivity and balances in journalism reporting. In reversing was affected negatively by acceptance of gratifications by reporters. It was recommended that frequent raising awareness of ethical standards, ensuring media independent, enforcing ethical media policies and providing regular media trainings for effective investigative function of journalism will redeem the damaged image. Economically, the study recommended that the salary of media workers should be reviewed in upward direction to keep journalists financially stable to be able to resist gratifications. The study closely relates to this current one in target theme which is brown envelope. On the other hand, the studies differ from each other in physical setting and specific thematic target. As the current study targeted the reasons for accepting gratifications the current one is targeted at the chances of the survival of journalism in the total absence of brown envelope.

While applying quantitative research method, Awofadeju, Aiyesimoju, and Ilesanmi, (2022) assessed Ondo-based journalists' perceptions of the perceived unethical practice of brown envelope. The study which was premised on the should of the provision of Social Responsibility Media Theory sampled 325 members of the Nigeria Union of Journalists, Ondo State council. Findings revealed that commercialization of news in the Nigerian media industry is not considered an ethical issue due to the circumstances that gave birth to the practice.

The study concluded that inadequate media funding, poor pay and benefit packages for journalists are largely responsible for the practice that now determines newsworthiness rather than the traditional news elements. The study recommended improved welfare packages for practising journalists and increased budgets for media houses to be financially stable and independent from firms and politicians. This study is also related to this recent one by examining the perception of the journalists. However, while the previous study examined the perception of journalists on brown envelope, the current study is examining the perception of journalists on the absence of brown envelope and possible consequences on journalism practice in Nigeria.

In another study, Sani and Abubakar, (2020) examined the influence of brown envelope Syndrome on Journalism practice on Kaduna state Media Corporation staff using the survey research method. Premised on the theoretical postulation of the Social Responsibility Theory, the study surveyed 95 respondents and found that brown envelope manifested in the sourcing and reporting of news stories which are the most common journalism practices among the respondents. The study also shows that brown envelope syndrome negatively influenced the social responsibility function of the oppress and their objectivity and balance in journalism practice. It was recommended that professional bodies should be serious in maintaining ethics in the media industry through sanctioning defaulting journalists to ensure that journalism practitioners adhere to laid down rules. This study is closely related to the current one for examining the influence of brown envelop on the practice of journalism in Nigeria. However, the studies differ in method of study, area of focus and thematic bearing. While the previous study is looking at the influence of brown envelop on practice of journalism, the current one is on the perception of journalism practice if brown envelope is to entirely eradicated in the system.

Method of study

This study adopted the FGD research approach in studying 33 registered journalists in Awka serving across print, broadcast and online media. The FGD was organised in three groups of 11 discussants each. Each group discussing lasted for 55 minutes with special attention on the themes drawn from the research questions posed for the study. The researcher served as the moderator in each of the three groups. The discussants were selected based on acceptance and convenience. The reason for selection of only 33 discussants is to have a manageable number of discussants without exceeding the saturation point in gathering information about their perception of the absence of brown envelope and future of journalism in its total eradication. For the sake of confidentiality in connection with the nature of the study, the researcher coded the discussants for confidentiality purposes. The codes ranges from FGJP-1-FGJP-11 for prints, FGJB1-FGJB11 and FGJO1-FGJO11. The first code represents print sector, the second, the broadcast and the last is the online sector. The essence of choosing it in this pattern is to ensure that each team is well represented in the focus group. The reason for the choice of this method is that it offers the researcher the opportunity to explore views of the discussants to a great extent that questionnaire cannot to explore if utilised. The three groups held at a hotel near Regina junction where many journalists hang out at the end of the day's work for relaxation. The discussion was held in three days: one on Tuesday, the other one on Thursday and the last one on Friday of the same week. All the discussants were present at each section.

Data presentation

On the research questions set to investigate respondents' perception of the practice of journalism in the total absence of brown envelopes, different but interesting views were expressed among discussants. Generally, there was a shocking look on the moment the questions came up. While some felt indicted being confronted with what they meet in the field every day, others felt, they are in it together. According to a female discussant from group 3, FGJB5,

journalism practice is already in this mess. Its existence must be threatened, so to speak, but it will pick. The only thing that will happen is that it will be only those who are self-sufficient economically will continue to serve as the media workers.

To another discussant in the same group who works for an online newspaper, FGJO7, there is no possibility of the survival of journalism without the brown envelope.

I started working as a reporter during my university days, and I worked for three organisations before joining my current station. We get it, and we hardly return happily after the day, without incentives. One of my news editors then once told me to bring what I got from the field, or the story would not fly. I have lost two of my major stories to my inability or refusal to bring something from my source. So, to me, a brown envelope has come to stay. You people in school should graduate and come and practice, let's see you and your ethics.

While reacting to the same question, FGJO1, participating in the first group on Tuesday, opined that journalism will die without a brown envelope. His reason is that the idea of making ends meet has created another monster called the '**survival strategy**'. In his words.

My sister, I learnt that you are still fresh in the classroom. If journalism is lucrative, your lecturers would have been in the field. They collect sorting from you and teach you about ethics and professionalism in journalism practice. Brown envelopes are everywhere. Tell your teachers whether lecturing will survive without sorting by the students.

The discussant further exonerated himself, saying, *I accept kola nuts from my customers and not brown envelopes. In Igbo land, we offer and accept kola nuts to and from our visitors and relatives during visits.*

On his reaction, FGJP6 from group 2 said that *ethical compliance should start from the beginning. If the brown envelope should be eradicated, it has to start from Abuja down to Awka. People share money anyhow and find their way.* The most dismissive reaction was that of an aged senior reporter in group 3 FGB10, who stated that the Nigerian situation is not a place where you will claim that you are too righteous. They will finish you and even laugh at you in the end. Recounting his experience, the discussant said,

I had investigated a story of murder here in this city in 2013. The murder involved a relative of the then police DPO of a station in this town. I refused every incentive to reframe the story. To my surprise, my boss in the editorial room went behind me, accepted the cash, and helped me to reframe accordingly. In the next edition, I saw what I did not cover. Where will you start from?

On the dominant factor responsible for the flourishing of brown envelope practices, there is general agreement that it is economic reasons. FGJO9 in group 1 said,

You just wanted to ask us this one. I went to Uga to cover a story, and my organisation didn't give me one naira to travel from here to Uga. And that day, I was going to cover the erosion site there. So, I am most likely to get there and see nobody. I am from Uga, so I went there. On my way back, I was waving my hand for a lift just like a beggar on the road. If I had my means of movement, I would go and deliver.

To discussant FGJP8 in the same group, anything that is not a political beat is a no-go area. He has his ways of getting assignments on political beats and other incentive-based beats. *I am lucky, I hardly get assignments with non-political beats. In politics, there must be '**change**', he said.*

In the views of another discussant in group 2, FGJP10,

if I had enough payment as a reporter, I wouldn't accept gifts or funds from sources. We did a story on a scam issue here in this city, and the firm's PR manager is a friend of my landlord. I could not do anything again than to comply. If house rent increases tomorrow, I won't know how to remain ethical in my practice, so I will leave ethical and professional issues aside and listen to my landlord.

On the consequences of the absence of the brown envelope, significant views agreed that there will be true journalists and journalism practice. According to FGJB11,

We shall then know the seed from the chaff. While there will be small journalists to cover massive beats, media organisations will die off in the market because they cannot afford to pay the true reporters. If a brown envelope is eradicated, journalists will be respected a lot in human society for the role they play.

Media reports will command more credibility, and the public will get true information to make informed decisions on issues affecting their lives.

On the institutional and professional supports that respondents would need to sustain ethical journalism in Nigeria, views were more pessimistic than optimistic. There is a general belief that the total institutional failure in the country and the state of corruption will not allow the implementation of the enabling environment that can get the system working again in an ethically minded manner. According to a discussant from group 2, FGJP4,

if you ask us about the institutional and professional support we need to work, I will say we need an effective regulatory framework devoid of corruption. Professionally, journalism practice should be regulated for only those who have the requisite qualifications, and a licence should be withdrawn from those who accept gratification.

In the views of FGJO1, another discussant from the same group,

The institution is not the problem, but the individual makeup of the institution. We need reorientation and self-discipline. To me, the best institutional framework is improving the life of journalists and making the job more lucrative. If not, the brown envelope has come to stay. Again, people should be stripped of their licence to operate, and with that it will be reduced, but as for the total eradication of brown envelopes, it cannot work

On the strategies, the respondents suggest that it could be helpful in the total eradication of brown envelope journalism in Nigeria; reactions from the discussants show a total lack of hope for ameliorating the menace. There is a fear of corruption and the Nigerian way of life. While admitting that there are strategies, the respondents were very pessimistic about the ability of the strategies to survive corruption, nepotism, selective execution, socio-political and ethno-religious sentiments.

Strategies are already there for the right things to be done. The question is who and who have managed the strategies to work for the purpose it was made? We have the NUJ, NBC, NPC, NIPR, as the professional bodies regulating different practices. You have the code of ethics and professional conduct all written out there. How far were they implemented in Nigeria? FGB11 queried?

In the view of FGJB5, the best measure to control inducement is the personal sanction of actors found in the practice. *If any journalist is found, he should be punished, and the same should apply to any organisation that publishes a story that is not in line with true journalism.*

FGJP3 of the first group premised his submission on the economy of the practice, which he argues is the major solution and best practice to control brown envelopes. He said,

Best practice can only be achieved in good working conditions; beyond this, the brown envelope will continue to pose threats to journalism practice. As we speak, many journalists accept it not because they did not know that it is unethical, but because they need to make ends meet. While some see no wrongdoing in accepting a brown envelope, others see it as a survival strategy. Justifying the eradication is to improve their lives through robust welfare packages for media workers and organisations.

This discussion was taken further to the role of media organisations on the regulation of brown envelopes among their workers. From every indication, organisations is the closest sector that can examine and understand the actions and attitudes of their staff towards brown envelopes. In this capacity, FGJP2 argued that if the media organizations discourage the acceptance of brown envelopes, the staff will be forced to stop accepting them. This was made clear in the views of FGJO3 in the same group when he noted that the brown envelope thrives because there are givers and receivers, and there is a common market where the transactional deal is sealed.

On the issue of regulation, FGJB9 stated that there is a need for an effective regulatory framework that will monitor both the givers and the receivers of brown envelopes. If NUJ, NPC, NBC, NIPR, etc, are responsible enough to execute their set objectives, media organisations will be left with no option but to sit up. With this

brown envelope will drop, and objectivity in journalistic reporting will be restored for people. the key controlling factor is in the hands in the hands of various professional and regulatory bodies. If they sit up to their duties without sentiment, median organizations, their staff, and the PR executives will comply with the ethical and professional requirements of journalism and save the profession.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

On the first research question posed to ascertain the how the respondents perceived the practice of journalism without brown envelope, the study found that respondents have mixed views of the possible implications of journalism practice in the absence of a brown envelope. While a few are optimistic that the profession will still survive with self-sufficient journalists, the majority opinion sees the brown envelope as a necessary evil that can hardly be left out of the practice. The reactions obtained from the question transferred the purification of the profession to the larger society, which is totally corrupt. One of the discussants sees the brown envelope as pervasive and irresistible. In his words, you people in school should graduate and come to practice so we can see you and your ethics. This implies that people can talk about the absence of a brown envelope only when they are not directly concerned. This finding is connected to the transfer of moral burden, which, in Ikegbunam and Obiakor (2019), formed the basis of engaging in immoral actions among the people. By making an effort to indict those in offices and claim that controlling brown envelopes has to start from the offices before getting to the field, it is a pointer that no one wants to accept blame for his or her actions.

The respondents' reactions to the second research question on the dominant factor responsible for the flourishing of brown envelopes in the Nigerian media landscape show that the poor economic condition of journalists is the major factor encouraging acceptance of gratifications for news dissemination. Although greed and the perception of people in political offices and leadership who engage in more critical and corrupt practices also serve as justification for journalists to accept envelopes, it is clear that journalists earn close to nothing in salaries for their job. Naturally, any worker without enough pay will hardly resist incentives for service delivery. This finding aligns with that of Lamwaka (2022), who found poor salary as the major factor, and Abubarkari (2021), who concluded that the major driver of the brown envelope is economic pressure against journalists. This may have accounted for why a discussant hid under a survival strategy in accepting gratifications. Significantly. Studies such as (Ikegbunam & Obiakor, 2023) have shown that people most times take excuses for doing the wrong thing as a survival strategy.

On what the respondents think will be the major consequences of the absence of the brown envelope, it was found that there was general agreement among the discussants that the total eradication of the brown envelope will bring out the true journalists and restore the lost glory in journalism practice. The views were concluded in a submission by FGJB11 when the broadcast journalist said

If brown envelope is eradicated, journalists will be respected a lot in human society for the role they play. Media reports will command more credibility, and the public will get true information to make informed decisions on issues affecting their lives.

The fourth research question investigated the respondents' views on the needed institutional framework that can help to eradicate brown envelope. On this research question, reaction shows total believe in the obituary of Nigerian institutions as discussant demonstrated lack of trust in any Nigerian institution. However, suggestions from the discussants show that for proper eradication of the brown envelope, there must be sincere execution of the laid down rules irrespective of who is involved. According to FGJP4, *if you ask us about the institutional and professional support we need to work, I will say we need an effective regulatory framework devoid of corruption.* This response is a perfect demonstration that corruption in the land is major reason that everyone wants to cut corners to get to where they want to be. Both the journalist and the PR executive accepting and offering brown envelopes knew that it is not ethical but shift blames to others and take their eye off the truth. Sincerely, the response above citing corruption is sacrosanct because the Nigeria of our generation can hardly respect the laws in an equal manner for all citizens. There must be exemptions and compromises for those who have fathers and mothers as the key players in the institution. The recommendation for checking who comes in as a journalist should be taken seriously. Many reporters today are not from the field of communication and therefore lack the prerequisite knowledge of journalism ethics and professional conduct.

FGJO1, crowns the discussion, saying, *To me, the best institutional framework is improving the lives of journalists and making the job more lucrative. If not, the brown envelope has come to stay. Again, people should be stripped of their licence to operate, and with that, it will be reduced, but as for the total eradication of brown envelopes, it cannot work.* Based on the submission above, paying the journalist's wage and placing severe punishment, such as withdrawal of the licenses, is seen as a significant measure that can reduce brown envelopes. This finding is in tandem with that of Awofadeju *et al* (2022), where it was made clear that the brown envelope was not mainly considered as an ethical issue among journalists because of the prevailing conditions compelling them into accepting what is offered. In this regard, the best way to handle the practice is to pay the journalists well and ensure that only those who are trained in the services are employed to do the job.

Finally, the last research question is interested in getting the strategies to eliminate the brown envelope to restore the dignity of journalism practice in the eyes of the people. Discussion on this part of the question shows that although there are regulatory frameworks to handle the practice, people in the system are not serious about the implementation of the rules. Most of the time, the lack of media freedom due to government interference in the appointment and dismissal of leaders of the various professional and regulatory bodies forms part of the reasons that practitioners indulge in unprofessional services. With the presence of NIPR, NUJ, NBC, etc, there are frameworks. These institutions have rules, but the personality of the people manning them and their mode of appointment or selection make their work less active and the system what it is. Sometimes, the leaders of these regulatory and professional bodies were appointed from the government house, and he who pays the piper dictates the tune. FGJO3 crowns the discussion when he noted that the brown envelope thrives because there are *givers and receivers, and there is a common market where the transactional deal is sealed.* If both givers and receivers of brown envelopes have something to check them and punishment for any action, there will be less possibility of their existence. To get sincere regulation of the practice of journalism, there must be a transparent regulatory system, independent of any external control. This finding goes straight to corroborate the finding made in Sani and Abubakar (2020), where it was concluded that the inability of the various regulatory bodies to carry out their duties diligently exposed journalism practice to different kinds of indulgence in unprofessional and unethical practices. This inability is domiciled in corruption and inequality in regulatory actions against the practitioners orchestrated by undue government involvement in the selection and appointment of their respective leaders. In a true democratic state, the media is a sacred institution free but responsible to humanity and nothing more.

CONCLUSION

Relying on the research findings, it is clear that the brown envelope is a known ethical and professional issue in journalism practice. Both journalists and the people are aware that its presence has dealt with the credibility of the profession. This study concludes that since its existence has cost journalism its pride of place in society, there is a need for its eradication. Based on the study findings, eradication of this practice will restore the lost glory of journalism practice, enhance true journalism practice and bring out the people who are dedicated to journalism practice. Importantly, one thing that start the fight against the practice of brown envelope is robust improvement on the salary of all practicing journalists. Both regulatory and organisational measures, as well as any other measures, including sanctions and withdrawal of licence, are secondary to this.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above research findings, the study recommended that:

1. Media organisations and media owners must strive to establish a journalism welfare fund, enforce transport and hazard allowances to improve the welfare of journalists. This way, they will take their eyes off the incentives and gratifications offered by their sources.
2. Journalists themselves should always recall their ethical and professional code of service whenever they are confronted with the temptation to shape or reshape news stories.
3. Transparent monitoring and regulatory systems should be created to regulate journalism practices, while NUJ, NBC, NIPR, and other related agencies should be strengthened and independently allowed to actively and professionally sanction ethical violations.

4. Motivation in the form of punishment and rewards should be initiated in journalism practices to help the practitioners resist the brown envelope. In a situation where some people are rewarded heavily for good journalism practice and others are punished heavily for dirtying the image of the profession, the rest will decide on which side to belong.
5. Media independence is also advised because government intervention in media practice is also among the challenges that journalists face in service delivery.

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