EFFECTS OF NON-DISCLOSURE OF SOURCE OF INFORMATION ETHICS ON NEWS GATHERING AND DISSEMINATION IN A MEDIA STATION

by

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ABSTRACT

As much as the target of every journalists is to get information on events and happenings and present it to their audience while at the same time, a journalist cannot be everywhere all the time in order to witness events and incidents especially the unplanned ones and because of this, journalists need other ways of getting information on all those hundreds and even millions of those events that he cannot witness personally. The person who provides information in this regard to journalists is called a source. This paper studied the importance of non-disclosure of sources of information to journalists and media stations because it is the sources that are the oil in the wheels of success and smooth gathering and dissemination of news or information. Case study and Key Informant Interviews were used to elicit information from chosen practising journalists from a media station and Gate keeping theory was reviewed to explain the process of gathering information that makes use of gate keepers rights from sources of information to journalists that report certain events over others. The research study was able to discover that sources of information are important to successes recorded by journalists and media stations and that contributions of source(s) who can also be audiences of media stations are active participants in news gathering and dissemination of news.

KEYWORDS: Journalists, Source, Information, News, Media Organisation, Audience

Introduction

Every journalist's goal is to gather information about events and happenings and present it to their audience, but a journalist cannot be everywhere at once to witness events and incidents, especially the unplanned ones. For this reason, journalists need alternative methods of gathering information about the hundreds or even millions of events that he cannot personally witness. A source is a person who offers information to journalists in this regard.

It is the strong relationship that exists between journalists and their sources that makes journalism practise efficient. To gather data and create stories, journalists rely on sources. In plain English, there wouldn't be any journalism without sources. A "source" in journalism is, as the name suggests, a source of information from which a reporter gathers information for a story. (Manninen, 2017).

Anything that consistently offers news or information is referred to as a news source. Official records, government representatives, victims, written reports, social media, and data dumps from websites like Wiki Leaks are just a few examples of information sources. It also includes people like eyewitnesses to events, leakers of information, public servants, law enforcement authorities, prominent business figures, advocacy groups, and the public relations specialists who speak for them. (Manninen, 2017).

The rapport between the reporter and the source is dynamic and adapts to the surrounding social, political, cultural, and economic factors. Significant changes are also made as a result of advancements in communication technology. The boundary between a journalist and a source was quite clear in the age of mass media.

At its most basic level, the information was provided by the source, filtered and validated by the journalist, and then made available to the audience by his or her news organisation. But with the advent of digital media, that sharp line between a reporter and a source has all but vanished. The sole primary "gatekeepers" of fresh information are no longer journalists. (Chadwick 2017)

The topic of so-called "anonymous sources" is one that generates a lot of debate during negotiations. When a source provides information to a journalist with the understanding that the source's identity won't be revealed, the source is referred to as "anonymous" by the journalist. Both the reporter and the public may struggle with this setup. The journalist must weigh the importance of the information against the requirement to protect the source. Once such a contract is signed, the journalist is obligated by an ethical code to keep the identity of a confidential source a secret.

The choice may be pretty simple in the case of a whistle-blower or vulnerable person. However, "leaks" and "off-the-record" briefings from politicians and other official sources may cause manipulation problems since they take advantage of the journalist's ethical duty to provide them anonymity. Additionally, it is challenging for the general public to assess the veracity of assertions if they cannot determine the source of the information. Concerns have been expressed concerning the impact of using anonymous sources on how trustworthy the public perceives the news media.

Journalists participate in a process of social construction of reality through the selective portrayal of events when deciding which sources to include in a report. This process of choosing who to interview, what to include, and what to leave out is a representation of the journalist's authority as the "gatekeeper" of information. These choices are significant because they influence the type of information the general public receives. These choices also illustrate the influence of the limitations and available resources of daily journalism on the "framing" or shaping of a narrative. These restrictions relate to, but in no way are limited to, factors like the availability of a source, time, budget, the reporter's personal prejudices, the proprietor's politics, the target audience, the publication's news values, and the list goes on.

Journalists make conclusions based on judgements of the dependability, credibility, or trustworthiness of a source and their information in addition to these impacts arising from the procedures and practices of traditional reporting (Manninen, 2017).

The question of source reliability is crucial to journalistic practice and the relationship between journalists and sources. According to the fundamentals of journalism, reporters must obtain their information for their reports from trustworthy sources. According to Tuchman (1978), the utilisation of sources is a crucial component of the "web facticity" that journalists employ to collect and validate information. A reporter cannot give a version of events to the public that preserves the concept of journalistic "truth" without being able to believe that the information coming from dependable or credible sources is correct.

According to Jacquette (2010), Truth is the gold standard by which journalists are judged. A source can lose credibility when included in a narrative, much as a journalist's reputation can depend on the reliability of his or her sources. The pursuit of "objectivity" in reporting, despite the fact that concerns of truth are hotly argued and have preoccupied philosophers for centuries, is essential to journalism's goal. It must be noted that despite the fact that the idea of "objectivity" in journalism has been hotly debated and nearly universally rejected by scholars, journalism practitioners continue to be professionally committed to pursuing fairness and independence in reporting, ideals that are still enshrined in current journalism codes of ethics.

In order to present an unbiased account of events, journalists have historically used a quasi-scientific technique known as "objectivity" in which they put themselves in a position of separation from the story and its sources (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014).

The journalist's handling of previously disclosed material, such as whether it was reported properly and ethically, will affect the source's trust. The accuracy and relevance of the information presented will be the basis for the journalist's evaluation of the source's credibility. The assessment is likely to contain some scepticism based on knowledge of the communicative expectations between the two actors, regardless of how reliable the journalist or source is assessed to be in the end (Brown, 2011).

When faced with a tight schedule and limited resources, journalists frequently resort to their trusted sources for material that is timely, entertaining, and trustworthy. This practise has raised fears that "elite" sources including politicians, elected officials, and corporate leaders may dominate traditional mainstream news coverage (Reich,

2011). However, the introduction of digital media platforms has helped to address this issue by making it possible for several varied views to be heard without relying on the mainstream news media. Some claim that using Twitter, particularly for political reporting, has simply served to amplify the views of elitist players who hold power (Brands, Graham, & Broersma, 2018). Some people have discovered that using social media has given journalists access to a larger range of sources and enhanced the diversity of voices in their articles (Hermida, 2010).

It has been lauded that the public's capacity to use mobile devices to provide eyewitness descriptions of events has enabled a wider diversity of voices in the news, thereby undermining the supremacy of elite viewpoints. However, the introduction of digital media platforms has helped to address this issue by making it possible for several varied views to be heard without relying on the mainstream news media. Some claim that using Twitter, particularly for political reporting, has simply served to amplify the views of elitist players who hold power (Brands, Graham, & Broersma, 2018). Some people have discovered that using social media has given journalists access to a larger range of sources and enhanced the diversity of voices in their articles (Hermida, 2010).

It has been lauded that the public's capacity to use mobile devices to provide eyewitness descriptions of events has enabled a wider diversity of voices in the news, thereby undermining the supremacy of elite viewpoints. A media company must have the trust of its audience in order to be able to give back to the community that it serves and to rely on that audience for information that will aid in news and information collection. Despite the fact that it is common knowledge that journalists cannot be present at all events or happenings, it is the sources of information that would be trusted to fill in the gaps and produce reliable news articles and information.

People today frequently express reluctance when asked to give interviews or supply information to media outlets, especially when the subject matter is one that is deemed delicate. In some cases, people's unwillingness to share information contributes to the prevalence of immorality and immoral acts in society. If people withhold information, evil doers will be able to carry out their crimes with impunity, but if information is shared with the media, which then shares it with law enforcement, society will be free of these crimes and of such individuals.

While it is common practise in journalism to withhold information's sources due to the necessity to protect and safeguard such sources. Another purpose is so that local residents of the neighbourhood or region where the media station is located can learn to appreciate and trust the station as a group of individuals who can be trusted with information and to act ethically with it.

It is anticipated that locations where residents trust the media and supply the appropriate information when required will enjoy the peace and development that are lacking in modern Nigerian societies. Additionally, this will benefit the practice of journalism because media companies or groups will gain respect and be recognised as safe havens.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To find out the reasons why sources of information are not disclosed in the practice of journalism.

- To study impacts of non-disclosure of sources of information on news gathering and dissemination.

- To examine the impacts of non-disclosure of source of information on the reputation of a media station.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the reasons for non-disclosure of news sources in the practice of journalism?

2. What are the impacts of non-disclosure of sources of information on news gathering and dissemination?

3. What are the impacts of non-disclosure of source of information on the reputation of a media station?

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Gate Keeping Theory

The gate keeping theory was created in the era of mass media to describe how journalists and editors made judgement about what should and shouldn't be covered in the news. In the words of Shoemaker and Vos (2009), "Gate keeping is the process of culling and crafting countless bits of information into the limited number of messages that reach people each day." New gatekeepers have, however, evolved in the setting of a hybrid media system, where the democratisation of online content production has significantly reduced the traditional power of the news media over the flow of information.

Primary and secondary gatekeepers were the two main categories of gatekeepers identified by Nielsen (2016). Primary gatekeepers are represented by journalists and news editors who acquire, process, and publish information according to established practises and decide what is commonly understand as 'news'. Politicians, NGOs, businesses, and the general public are examples of nontraditional journalism content creators that fall under this category. Secondary gatekeepers, in contrast, filter already-available news content.

This modern framework for gate keeping illustrates how journalists and sources can flip between main and secondary gate keeping responsibilities by either producing new content as primary gatekeepers or editing, and publishing the content of the other as secondary gatekeepers.

The theory in general talks about the process journalists put in place to ensure that they get truthful and factual information from their news sources and also deciding whether or not to use the received information as received or pad-up/tone down before using such information. Gate keeping also has to do with the meticulous efforts that are put into news writing and the number of professionals it would pass through before being certified as something that could be used to passed to the general public.

METHODOLOGY

The scope and Case study is a radio station known as Fresh 107.6 Fm in Abeokuta in 2019. The radio station is one of the foremost and highly rated radio stations in Abeokuta, Ogun state.

The study made use of qualitative research design. The use of case study on a media station which is a radio station as well as key informant interview were used to elicit information from three respondents who are majorly those practising journalism in the aforementioned radio station. Three journalists interviewed were management members of the radio station who had practised with both government and privately owned media stations for years before they joined Fresh FM, Abeokuta.

FINDINGS

On reasons why sources of information are not disclosed in the practise of journalism, two of the three respondents confirmed that it is part of journalists' right not to disclose their sources of information. They also attributed reasons why sources of information are not disclosed as; so as to gain the trust and loyalty of their sources, protect their sources' lives and properties against those who may want to take vengeance on them for talking with journalists or media organisations and to encourage more people to free safe and ssfree to discuss and divulge information that can help the society in getting rid of immoralities and violent acts.

According to the three respondents, effects of non-disclosure of information on news gathering and dissemination are; it makes the process smoother and faster. This is because with eye witnesses who are ready to provide factual reports of what had happened, journalists do not have to labour much over trying to establish what had happened, he only need to verify facts and ensure that he present news that is fair and balanced. Another effect is that non-disclosure of sources lead to news being released or broken quickly. If the sources can be corroborated and facts are established on time, news can then be presented and disseminated to the general public on time rather than holding on, being careful or working to pad-up stories and news . This is not trying to push aside overzealousness on the part of some sources that may embellish or exaggerate facts and figures in other to impress. This is the reason why journalists need to verify facts and data received from sources of information before dissemination of news.

All the three respondents are of the opinion that a media station gains a lot from non-disclosure of sources of information because the media station through this will gain confidence and loyalty of their sources and audience

generally. Also, it is expected that the media station will be a force to be reckoned with especially when it comes to breaking news, having scoops and places where factual, fair and balanced news and information are received from. On the other hand, the media stations or organisations that have active, vibrant sources of information unarguably become treasured and an integral part of the society can be counted on for developmental news and be relied upon for news that can be trusted and factual.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From findings of this study, it is very obvious that sources of information are important vessels towards gathering and dissemination of news. It has also been established that non-disclosure of sources of information is what makes most media stations to thrive and excel in the area of news gathering and dissemination.

Also, sources of information are not only important to journalists, but also media organisation as it serves as ways through which the general public contributes as active audiences to what goes on in media stations.

Media practitioners are therefore enjoined not to take non-disclosure of sources with levity hands as it can affect the practise and continual existence of media organisations.

It is however recommended that further studies be carried to know the extent t o which disclosure of sources of information can affect both the media practitioners and organisations. There is also the need to study how media organisations can involve more of their audiences in the news gathering processes.

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