

## **Article 7 of NUJ Code of Ethics and Journalism Practice in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

Journalists are engineer of public opinions and the public depend on them for information affecting their lives. This therefore makes it imperative for journalists to perform their functions in such a way that the public would trust and place confidence on them. In Akwa Ibom State, political environment has further given journalists additional tasks to carry out their functions in line with article seven of the code of ethics for Nigerian journalists. This study examined compliance with article 7 (reward and gratification) of the NUJ code of ethics by practicing journalist in Akwa Ibom State. It discussed with some selected journalists in the state using focus group discussion and personal interviews to reach the conclusion that poverty (economic recession) and poor remunerations are the major causes of non-compliance with the above article. The paper also established the fact that this ignoble practice influences journalism practice negatively as some important issues are downplayed while unimportant ones are exaggerated in a bid to satisfy the givers of these gratifications. The paper concludes that giving and/or accepting of gratification in any form is a corrupt and unprofessional conduct that must be punished and stopped. It therefore, recommends that media professional bodies in Akwa Ibom State be serious in maintaining ethics in the media industry by sanctioning defaulting journalists and by so doing, ensure highest professional conduct of members in all situations.

**Keywords:** Journalism, Nigeria Union of Journalists-NUJ, Ethics, Journalism Code of ethics, Article 7 of NUJ code of ethics.

### **Introduction**

Code of ethics is an important requirement for any job to be called a profession, and the importance of code of ethics in the practice of any profession cannot be over emphasized. Every profession has codes of ethics which guide the professionals in the discharge of their duties, and journalism is not an exemption. Journalism practice in Nigeria is based on ethics approved by Nigerian Press Organisation. Journalism is a dignified profession that demands high ethical conduct in the discharge of its duties. The reason as provide by Udoudo (2013) is because journalists are not to hurt any person, group or entire society in the course of discharging their duties, and they are also expected to be fair, accurate and objective in their reporting. The journalistic code of ethics with a total of 15 articles is provided to serve as companion to practising journalists and provide guideline and information which practising journalists can judge and be judged It is the journalism code of ethics that is used to interpret any perceived misconduct by practitioners and for disciplinary action to be taken where necessary.

Despite the provision of the journalistic code of ethics which is meant to guide journalists to avoid unethical behavior in journalism practice, there has been increased public concern about journalism practice in Nigeria. Such public view is necessitated by the gradual shift from public interest in News and view to the promotion and generation of wealth for reporters and their publishers. Could it be that journalism is now a business venture and not a humanitarian profession? If so, then where is the place of article 7 (reward and gratification) of the code of ethics (for Nigerian journalists).It will be appropriate to remind oneself that an underlying challenge in business decision-making remains conflict of interest. The essence of that conflict is between ethical and economic interests. Business is seen to include the pursuit of self interest, and ethics is recognised as involving consideration of others. Interest for self and interest

for others clash; therefore, business and ethics clash”, Okpo (2013). When this happens in journalism, the core responsibility of this noble profession is put to question.

From its early days, journalism has a social responsibility for individuals, groups, and the society. It is the only profession that watches over the society, bringing to limelight such ills that tends to put citizens into social and economic dangers. Journalists are the guardians of public interest. They invariably hold elected officials and political office holders accountable for their action or inactions watchdog of a society and mouthpiece for a common man. Considering the great impact Journalism has on individuals and society, it is expected that practitioners too adhere to its ethical principles. Today, the reverse seems to be the case as there is much gap between what is expected and what is practiced. The most violated ethical principle is the article 7 which prohibits a journalist from collecting reward and gratification. Such reward and gratifications come in different forms such as; gifts, money popularly known among journalists as brown envelope or transport, trip sponsor and political appointment etc. The situation informed the statement of Eke(2014) that “the brown envelope syndrome(reward and gratification) constitute a powerful tool for making journalist indulge in unethical practices of journalism...,and it is an open secret today that Nigerian journalists openly demand bribe variously known as brown envelop, seek sponsored trips”.

Accepting and collecting reward and gratification which come in various forms, in the process of carrying out journalism task has become a serious ethical challenge and cankerworm that has eaten deep into journalism practice in Nigeria including Akwa Ibom State. The report of Edeani (1990) cited in Ogbole (2012) attributes the situation to economic situation of the country where he states that “the Nigerian press is operating in a depressed economy and is barely managing to keep its head above waters, leading to poor remuneration of journalists, poor pay package and welfare, and exposure to unethical behaviours in the course of their practice”. Udoudo (2013), also mentions Societal pressure to be another contributory factor to violation of this article when he states that “journalists operate under society’s pressures which include; ownership and control, political, business and economic pressure in the course of their reportage. These may either consciously or unconsciously influence reporters leading to violation of article 7 of the code.

Collecting of money, PR, gift, communiqué, *egunje*, transport, well landing or any other form of reward and gratification at the end of event has become a perpetual habit among journalists There are several cases where journalists would not hesitate waiting to ensure that they collect food, drinks, transport money or brown envelope at the end of event they go to cover. Even when owners of the do not give, some go as far as asking for it. Udoudo (2013) who also observes this unethical behaviour among journalists states as follows;

There are cases of journalists receiving gratification from one party to slant the news report in favour of one that has been able to pay. There are also many allegations that journalists receive gratifications in order to distort news stories. Some reporters report news from sources they cannot confirm... (p.126).

These practices are unethical, and they seem to be getting worse day by day leading to distortion of objective, fairness and balance in reporting as well as put the integrity of journalism at stake. Worried by this sad situation in the profession, Williams (2014) postulates thus;

...since reward and gratification collecting (brown envelope syndrome) found its way into Nigerian journalism, it has refused all attempt to be curbed. In fact, it is now fast assuming a conventional status, as most journalists now

demand and take bribe monies and other forms of bribery as prerequisites for performing their traditional duties of providing information, education and entertainment

The practice of collecting reward and gratification irrespective of the forms is now seen among journalists as a normal tradition, and this has caused serious threat to journalism. The painful and embarrassing situation which depicts journalists as beggars and irresponsible. The intensity of this unethical behavior and problem in journalism practice in Nigeria is also made glary by Effiom(2005) which states as follows:

In some circumstances, reporters are known to have been offered money in form of gratification to influence their reports. Some reporters have been guilty of this, and this accusation has intensified with the poor remuneration of reporters who sometimes easily succumb or even solicit for such “bribes”. This clearly breaches one of the provisions of the ethics of the profession and would certainly have the effect of influencing the reporters’ handling of the report, having committed himself. Some reporters have even been offered money to kill stories, while others have found themselves slanting a story in favour of an interested party. This perhaps is one of the major problems facing the profession (p.140).

Therefore, can we truly say journalists in Akwa Ibom State are carrying out their statutory function in line with article 7 of their code of ethics? These call for critical examination of Article 7 of NUJ Code of ethics –reward and gratification, with a view to ascertaining awareness of this article , how journalist perceive it and finding out if article 7 truly has a legitimate place in the practice of journalism in Akwa Ibom State.

As the various religions and government not able to adequately restore morality in the society, the public seems to have come to look up to journalists as purveyors of information and engineers of public opinion to help them to make informed decision about their daily living. In such circumstances, journalists have an obligation to the society to operate from a high moral platform. Showing reward and gratification come into play. Therefore, can we truly say journalists in Akwa Ibom State are carrying out the above statutory functions in line with article 7 (reward and gratification) of the NUJ code of ethics. This is what this paper also seeks to find out.

## **Objectives**

This study aims at examining the knowledge, perceptions and compliance of Akwa Ibom State practicing journalists to article 7 of journalistic code of ethics. It also explored the implications of such compliance or otherwise in the professional practice.

The study is therefore guided by the following objectives:

1. To determine the level of awareness of the provisions of article 7 (reward and gratification) of NUJ code of ethics among practicing journalists in Akwa Ibom State.
2. To identify the reasons for violation or non violation to the article 7 by journalists in Akwa Ibom State.
3. To find out the level of compliance or otherwise of article 7 of NUJ code of ethics by journalists in Akw Ibom State.

4. To ascertain whether non-compliance to Article 7 or otherwise influences the journalists' reportage.

### **Research Questions**

- (i) What is the level of journalists' awareness on the provisions of article 7 of the code of ethics for Nigerian journalists?
- (ii) What are the reasons responsible for journalist violation or non-violation to the article 7 by journalists in Akwa Ibom State?
- (iii) What is the level of compliance or otherwise with the article?
- (iv) How does the level of compliance or otherwise affect or influence the journalist's reportage?

### **Literature Review**

#### **Conceptual Explanations**

In this presentation, some key concepts have been chosen to aid our discussion. They are: Article 7 (Reward and gratification), The Nigeria Union of Journalists-NUJ The Nigeria union of Journalists-NUJ code of ethics, journalism, and Article 7 of NUJ code of ethics(Reward and Gratification).

#### **Journalism: An Overview**

Journalism means different thing to different people. While some scholars see journalism as a profession that has to do with the gathering, verifying and dissemination of information, to others it is a privileged role of gathering information and communicating to people, and to some it is a process. Different scholars have different views and meaning to journalism. Wikipedia defines journalism as "the discipline of collecting, verifying, reporting, and analyzing information gathered, regarding current event including trends, issues and people". For Anola (2003, p. 3) cited in Ogunyombo (2016, p.13), Journalism means "the gathering, preparing, and communicating of news and current affairs". In the words of Onwubere (2016, p. 230) "journalism is the work of distribution of report on the interaction of events, facts, ideas, and people that are "the news of the day" and that informs. As the world becomes more global and more complex, the meaning of journalism is starting to vary from person to person and country to country. Going by these definitions, it is obvious that Journalism is one profession that provides people with information they need for relaxation, daily living and development. After the 1970s, the concept of cultural media imperialism by British scholar, I. Oliver Boyd Barrette emerged. "He believed that the globalization of communication had been driven entirely by Western technological advances and as such constituted a form of rule by the West over other countries..." Avsaroghe (2014).

Journalism is no longer just collecting, writing, and publishing articles in newspapers and magazines or broadcasting them on the radio and television. What is the meaning of a "journalist" in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? One key reason cited for this transformation of journalism is the changing nature of technology, which impacts directly upon the practice of journalism and access to the profession.

In addition, before now newspaper reporting was seen as the only act of journalism until much later when broadcast media were accepted as performing the act of journalism through their reports, Udouo (2013).

Another key issue in the consideration of journalism is the role of the social media, which has made the profession an all-comers affairs. The recent rise of social media has resulted in the arguments that journalism should be considered as a process rather than attributing it to particular news product, (Robinson, 2011). For this reason, Avsaroghe (2014) thinks journalism should be divided into two

categories, “professional” vs. “citizen”. For indebt explanation and understanding of journalism, Wikipedia divides journalism into various types, they are:

- . Advocacy journalism- writing to advocate a particular viewpoint or influence the opinion of the audience.
- . Broadcast journalism-written or spoken journalism for radio or television.
- . Citizen journalism- is a kind of participatory journalism.
- . Investigative journalism- indebt reporting that uncovers social problem, it often  
Leads to major social problems being resolved.
- . Photojournalism- the practice of telling the stories through images.
- . Tabloid journalism- writing that is light hearted and entertaining.
- . Yellow journalism (sensationalism)- writing which emphasizes exaggerated

Claims or rumours. Irrespective of the type of journalism one is practicing, ethical consideration especially article seven is very important, this is because a consideration and obedience to this article may lead to obedience to all.

According to Avsaroghe, Professional journalists mostly share (or at least should share) common element such as accuracy, impartiality, objectivity and accountability, which creates trust for their audience. She added that the idea of citizen journalism is nice, but it only works best when people understand journalistic ethics. There is no barrier to entering into “citizen journalism” so a 140 – character tweet can get re-tweeted and treated seriously even though 15 minutes of research could prove the claim as false. In the view of Anola (2003) quoted in Ogunyombo (2016,p.13), journalism means “ the gathering, preparing and communicating of news and current affairs”. To Onwubere (2016, p. 230), journalism “is the work of distribution of reports on the interaction of events, facts, ideas and people that are the “news of the day” and that informs the society to at least some degree”, while Wikipedia defines journalism as “the discipline of collecting, verifying, reporting and analyzing information gathered, regarding current events, including trends, issues and people”. By these definitions journalism has to do with an occupation that has to do with the gathering and dissemination of information that are useful to the public. It is the only profession that is said to serve the role of a “fourth estate”, acting as watchdog on workings of government. Taking cognizant of the various definitions, it is glary that journalism is one profession that provides people with information for development and daily living. To some communication scholars, these roles of journalism are privileges and those who are trained in journalism are expected to observe the ethical rules of the profession as provided the NUJ code. In line with this view, Akinfeleye (1990, p. 21) submits that, “journalism is a profession for those who want to help to save the world, he also likens journalists to hired labourers whose responsibilities are not to their employers but to the human race.

## **Ethics**

In defining the term “ethics”, emphasis shall be placed on its applicability in journalism. But first, ethics in general has to do with right or wrong. It is a set of rules which provide pathways to moral judgment. Omole (2000) put it aptly that “ it sets out the minimum of acceptable behaviour which any member should attain to be regarded as a good ambassador of that society,” adding that, “ethics is the shared normative values, which any society holds dear, and are used to judge the behaviour or performance of any members of that society.” Akpan (2001) and Okunna (2003) are of the same school of

thought about ethics. These communication experts on their part see ethics as moral philosophy which is concerned with standards of good or bad conduct in society using societal norms as a basis for the evaluation of human conduct or behavior. This explains that, yard sticks such as societal norms, codes etc. are used as basis for the evaluation of human conduct or behavior. Ethics can also be seen as a value system by which a person determines what is right or wrong, fair or unfair, just or unjust. It is expressed through moral behavior specific situation. It is also worthy of note that an individual's conduct is measured not only against his or her conscience but also against some norms of acceptability that has been socially, professionally, or organizationally determined. The difficulty in ascertaining whether an act is ethical lies in the fact that individuals have different standards and perception of what is right and wrong. Ethics is voluntary by nature; an individual or a group of individuals chooses to take and not forced to take. In contrast to official legislation, which is characterized by law, ethics is self-regulation such self-regulation could be professional such as the NUJ code of ethics or personal regulations.

Professional ethics is that which is enacted by professional bodies for their members. It is the foundation for credible practice. Therefore, professionalism in any discipline means performing the professional chores responsibly by following the tenets of the profession. Therefore, ethics in this context defines the moral and social responsibility of journalists. In line with this, Etukudo (1993,p.13) describes ethics as “guidelines or moral rules about how professional communicators should behave in situations where their activities may have negative effects on others.”

On the other hand, personal ethics is personal commitment to doing what is right. No matter how altruistic professional ethics are, if they are not backed up by personal ethics of integrity, honesty, high moral standard and commitment to best practices, such professional ethics would remain largely on pages of books, Ogbole (2012). Therefore, to have a working professional ethics, the personal ethics need to be developed and nurtured to maturity. This is where the role of parents, school, church and the society comes in.

### **Journalism Code of Ethics**

Journalism entails a high degree of public trust. To earn and maintain this, it is imperative for every journalist and every news medium to observe the highest ethical standard. This gave room for journalism code of ethics. In the word of Etukudo (1998) this code of ethics is the standard or conduct of moral judgement based on the principle that the responsibility for ensuring its faithful observance rest upon the practitioner. The journalism code of ethics can be described as a standard of moral judgement for journalists. It is the yardstick which the activities of journalists can be judged as good or bad, while also guiding them in the course of practicing. Okunna,(1993) on her part defines journalism code of ethics as “ that branch of philosophy that helps journalists determine what is right to do”, the code provides them standard by which they can judge actions to be right or wrong, responsible or irresponsible. This communication scholar sees journalism ethics as being tied to the problems and issues that concerns journalism practice and that which provides norms, rules and a guideline that can serve as checks in the practice.

The journalistic code of ethics became necessary since the twentieth century during the practice of libertarian theory when the press were given the complete freedom to publish what it likes was abused,( Okunna,2003 p.37). This situation led to yellow journalism where act of irresponsibility, sensationalism and character assassination were glaringly found in journalism. The situation called for free but responsible press and gave rise to professional journalistic association who came out with journalism code of ethics as a guide in the practice of the profession. Akpan(2001,p.49) confirms this by postulating that “ the code of ethics for journalists is based on the principle that freedom entails responsibility and obligation which devolve upon mass media practitioners by reason of their privilege in the society”. This

therefore led to the first code of ethics for Nigerian journalist in 1979, when it was initially introduced by the Nigerian press organization.

The 1979 Code of Conduct, according to Okunna (2003) eventually came to be seen as narrow in scope, limited and deficient in vital areas. It lacked boldness, forthrightness and clarity. This led to the enactment of new code of ethics in 1996. The decision to introduce a new code was triggered by a paper presented by Dr. Etim Anim at a seminar at Ota in 1996. The code was drafted at a workshop at Abeokuta sponsored by NPC. It was finally ratified and adopted in Ilorin. The new code was renamed “Code of Ethics” rather than “Code of Conduct” in 1998, (Folarin, 1999).

The NUJ code of ethics has 15 number of articles which are: editorial independence, accuracy and fairness, privacy, privilege/non-disclosure, decency, discrimination, reward and gratification, violence, children and minors, access to information, public interest, social responsibility, plagiarism, copy right and press freedom/responsibility(NUJ code,1998). The new code therefore addresses 15 main obligations of journalists. These obligations include, but not limited to; obligations of journalists to publish the truth always, facilitate public access to news, eschew corruption in all ramifications, observe principle of confidentiality of news sources, eschew plagiarism, resist all temptations to suppress facts relevant to the reports, and obligations to correct all confirmed errors of facts in their reports and shun all forms of reward and gratifications.

Ekanemesang (2015), however summarized journalistic ethics into three basic categories:

1. That the public is entitled to the truth and that only correct information can form the basis for sound journalism and ensure the confidence of the people.
2. That the moral duty of every journalist is to have respect for the truth and to publish or prepare for publication only the truth to the best of his knowledge.
3. That the duty of the journalists to publish only facts never to suppress such facts as he knows, never to falsify either to suit his own purpose or any other purposes.

Every journalist is expected to internalize the code for it to be meaningful and avoid violation.

#### **Article Seven (Reward and Gratification) of NUJ Code**

Article seven of the code of ethics for Nigerian journalists came as a result of dire need for members of the pen profession to carry out their responsibility with the highest decorum. It is an attempt to ensure that journalists are not induced with financial reward for the purpose of suppressing a news report.

Accordingly the article states thus:

1. A journalist should neither solicit nor accept bribe, gratification or patronage to suppress or publish information.
2. To demand payment for the publication of news is inimical to the notion of news as a fair, accurate, unbiased and factual report of an event, code of ethics for Nigerian journalist (1998).

This article came into being as a result of the desire to make journalists as objective as possible in their reportage, and any journalist that compromises reward and gratification shall be deemed to have violated the letters and principles of this article and may be liable to sanctions. Yet today, the issue of reward and gratification has come to stay in journalism practice. Reward and gratification are being rebranded with metaphor, phrases and slangs such as *communiqué*, press release, “*egunje*”, welfare,

freebies, thank you gesture, brown envelop, kola, etc. In Cameroon, it is known as *Gombo*, cheque book in South Africa, hospitality in the West.

According to the International Federation of Journalists, IFJ, cited by Chonoko (2015), “journalism for sale is one of the greatest challenges facing the media today” and added: “the practice erodes public confidence, undermines professionalism and makes a mockery of ethical values”. Irrespective of the name or form, collecting monetary gifts and other inducement amount to violating the article 7 (reward and gratification) making it a serious challenge in the practice of journalism profession. Okunna (1993, p. 59) on her part says reward and gratification (brown envelop) is probably the commonest type of bribe in journalism which are usually received by unethical journalists to pressurize him or her into doing what the bribe givers wants. Once this article is violated by collecting any form of reward or gratification, such journalist would then become incapable of being objective in reporting events and issues involving people who give the gifts. For Akobogu (2005,p.202) reward and gratification otherwise known as brown envelop refers to “the form of gift, drinks, food or money given in order to influence the judgement of journalist”. He further notes that this can barrier the freedom of journalists in exercising professional judgement and reduce the integrity of journalist before the right thinking members of the society.

The electronic media are not left out. National and states owned media have hidden under the cover of news commercialisation to demand payment for publication or airing of news against the provision of article seven of the Code of Ethics. No salary, low-salary and non-payment of salary, coupled with poor journalistic training are usually adduced as the main reasons journalists resort to the humiliating practice of asking for and collecting reward and gratification popularly known as brown envelope journalism. In the view of Mpama (2015), “it is quite unfortunate that many media houses in the country do not pay their staff, how many journalists have gainful employment?” the scholar asked. The practice, especially in the print media, is that they prefer to retain journalists as freelance with no pay attached.

Worried by the situation, the Nigerian press council at the end of its two-day workshop on “conflicts and crisis reporting’ held in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State in 2013, called for better remuneration, insurance and other welfare incentives for journalists. But what about those working for national and state governments, yet still indulged in brown envelope journalism? Poor salary you may say, but I think it is more of maintaining personal ethics.

The continued violation of this article will deny journalists the sacred duty to guard and guide the society on the path of equity and fairness, and expose acts of injustice and their perpetrators. These therefore call for concern.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This work is supported by the social responsibility theory of the mass media, because the public is so heavily dependent on the media for its construction of reality, there is an obligation on the part of the media to strive at a creditable and credible performance. The social responsibility theory of the press came as an improved on the libertarian theory, it is believed that freedom comes with commitment and obligation, hence the press should be responsible to the society by ensuring that the media carry out its functions with trust, fairness, objectivity, accuracy. The media should follow agreed codes of ethics, be free, but self-regulated. They should strictly observe the journalistic code of ethics especially article 7 which strictly warns journalists against soliciting and accepting bribe, gratification or patronage. The mass media (journalists) are not only to gather and provide the required information to the public, they are to do it with all amount of objectivity, fairness, truthfulness. To achieve these they must not demand, solicit or accept payment or any form of reward and gratification or patronage for publication, suppress or killing of news. This theory is relevant to this study because it has the function of calling the press



(journalists) to order especially when the press tries to abuse the libertarian theory afforded it by violating article seven of NUJ code. According to the theory the media have to perform their professional functions within the context of social responsibility, meaning that journalists should act responsibly since they have certain obligations towards the public and must serve the public, and also be socially responsible for all their actions to the public (Anaeto, *et. al.*, 2008). The social responsibility theory of the press is essentially an American concept because it was conceived to provide practical guidelines for the operations of the media in a republican democracy. The theory provides an ideal way for journalists to practice in order to maintain public trust and confidence. Eke (2014, p. 15) citing Mc Quail (1987, p.118) notes among other provisions “that the media should regulate itself within the framework of law and ethics \ established institutions to be able to carry out its functions”. Should the media, perform their duties as it pleases them by accepting reward and gratification? What should the media do or not do for a community? Should the media, in trying to fight corruption, for instance, use dishonest means to expose corrupt politicians and their surrogates. It is in line with the above that Anim (2013) maintained that the basis of social responsibility is ethics. The social responsibility theory of the press is essentially an American concept because it was conceived to provide practical guidelines for the operations of the media in a republican democracy, hence the relevance of the theory to this study.

## **Methodology**

This study adopted a survey research method and used focus group discussion as the research instrument for data collection. According to Onabajo (2011, p. 75) focus group discussion group interview is to find out how people act or feel about issues, products or services. In it, a group of people are assembled and a free – form discussion is held by a moderator to obtain the desired information. This method of research involved the collection and analyzing of information. This research method was adopted due to reliance on the analysis of verbal data (words) that reflect daily experience and attitude of Akwa Ibom journalists. This is based on Wimmer and Dominick (2011, p.123) idea on “focus group discussion research as a research strategy for finding out and understanding of people’s attitude and behaviour”. Onabajo explains that this research method is less concerned with numbers but typically involves the collection of data via interviews, focus groups, and oral history.

Additionally, Krueger (2002) opine that a focus group is a small group of six to ten people with 12 as maximum, led through an open discussion by a skilled moderator. Krueger explains that the group needs to be rich enough to generate discussion, but must not be so large. This instrument was chosen to encourage a range of responses that would provide a greater understanding of the attitudes, behaviour, opinion or perception of the participants on the research issue. The population for this work is made up of practicing journalists in Akwa Ibom State, which is put at 588. The sample size, as focus group participants were drawn from members of NUJ Akwa Ibom State Council. This is supported by Krueger (2002) who states that in recruiting focus group participants, all should be members of the same group. This means that an already existing group (like NUJ) serves as an ideal. To produce a valid result, 4 focus groups from Akwa Ibom State NUJ on the same topic were used. This was on the premise that it takes more than one focus group on one topic to produce valid results, usually 3 to 4 (Krueger, 2002). From the 14 chapels at the NUJ in the state, the study focused on members of all the chapels.

For equal representation of all the chapels, the Principal Officers comprising the chairmen, the secretaries and the treasurers were chosen from each of the chapels of NUJ in Akwa Ibom State. This means that each of the chapels had three representatives making a total of 42 persons. This was based on the application of Krueger (2002) suggestion that a focus group should have a minimum of six and maximum of ten people led through an open discussion.

The 42 journalists were divided into 4 focus groups making approximately a total of 10 participants for each of the group. This was done using Eliot (2005) recommendation which states thus:

“it takes more than one focus group on any one topic to produce valid results, usually 3 to 4 focus group with same set of questions.

Personal interview was also adopted in extracting data from the state chairman of NUJ Mr. Patrick Albert and the secretary Mr. Joseph Robert, bringing to a total of 30 respondents. The focus group discussions was held in a conference room with a moderator, and a secretary who did the note-taking and recording. The discussion took one hour for each group. This was done using the guidelines provided by Eliot (2005) who states that “the ideal amount of time set aside for focus group is anywhere from 45 to 90 minutes, and beyond that most groups are not productive.” The researcher adopted engagement type of focus group questions which involves introducing participants to, and making them comfortable with the topic of discussion.(Eliot, 2005). The moderator made use of the moderator’s guide that dwells strictly on article 7 of NUJ code of ethics, abiding on the common language of journalists in Akwa Ibom State to make it participatory. Wimmer and Dominick (2011, p. 136) states that “in preparing a focus group materials there is need for the moderator’s guide that is clear and dwells on only one topic..., and uses the vocabulary of participants”. The ground rule were read for the participants and was followed by the questions. Participants were given opportunities of answering the questions and voicing out their views in a conscious and relaxed mood.

For an elaborate and complete description of the respondents’ views and happenings during the data gathering process, a tape recorder was used in recording happenings, with a written summary of the focus group interview, transcribed for easy scanning and development of a category system as suggests by Onabajo (2015, p. 75). Each participant was given two minutes to say his/her mind on each question. The same questions were asked in the four focus groups the questions are:

- (i) Are you aware of the provisions of article 7 of the code of ethics for Nigerian journalists?
- (ii) Can we boldly say journalists in the state comply with provisions of this article?
- (iii) What is the level of compliance or otherwise with the article?
- (iv) How does the level of compliance or otherwise affect the journalist’s reportage?

The group discussion and interview were held as follows:

Responses by the participants were presented summarily and in order of response. The researcher made use of tape recorder to extract the responses from participants, after which category system were developed, coded and calculated using simple percentages.

### **DataAnalysis and Discussion**

From the group interactions with the participants, it was obvious that all of them are aware of the provisions of Article 7 (reward and gratification) of the Code of Ethics for Nigerian journalists. This was the only area members of the group did not vary in their responses. However, for others aspects, the participants gave varied opinions which are presented and data gathered

### **Data Analysis and Discussion**

**Table 1: Respondents’ awareness of article 7 of NUJ code of ethics**

<b>Awareness of Article 7</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Total</b>
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	40	95	2	5	-	42
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The table shows that 40 or 95% of journalists agree being aware of article 7 of the NUJ code, while 2 or 5% claim no knowledge of the article 7 bordering on reward and gratifications.

In other words, journalists based in Akwa Ibom State claim awareness that it is not ethnically good to either solicit or accept bribe, gratification or patronage to suppress or publish information; and that to demand payment for the publication of news is inimical to the notion of news as a fair, accurate, unbiased and factual report of an event. This is in tandem with the postulation of Udoakah (2014) that journalistic ethics is one of the best defined for understanding based on the fact that it is frequently taught in higher institutions offering communication and journalism studies. Thus providing the tendency of greater awareness among journalist.

**Table 2: Respondents' Compliance to Article 7 of NUJ code of ethics.**

Do you comply to Article 7	Yes	%	No	%	Neutral	%	Total
	10	23	28	67	4	10	42

Table 2 indicates that 10 or 23% say that they comply, 28 or 67% say they do not comply and 4 or 10% choose to remain neutral. This shows that despite their knowledge of the article, a larger percentage of journalism practitioners in Akwa Ibom State still indulge in accepting bribe, gratification or patronage.

**Table 3: Respondents' reasons for collecting reward and gratification.**

Reasons for acceptance of Gratification	Poverty	%	Vested Interest	%	Ignorance	%	Total
	10	23	30	72	2	5	42

Table 3 was to find out reasons that journalist engage in collecting gratifications. It was seen that 10 or 23% of journalist say it was due to poverty, 30 or 72% mentioned that it was due to vested interest that they collect gratifications or are even given to them by those involve in organizing events while 2 or 5% say they collect gratifications due to ignorance of the consequences.

**Table 4: Responses on whether non-compliance to article 7 of NUJ code of ethics affect their reportage .**

Effects on Work	Yes	%	No	%	Neutral	%	Total

	39	93	2	5	1	2	42
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Table 4 indicates that 39 or 93% of journalists agree that the acceptance of gratifications affect their reportage, 2 or 5% say no, while 1 or 2% stick to being neutral.

### **Implications of the Findings**

The study sought to find out the level of awareness of article 7 of journalistic code of ethics by practicing journalists in Akwa Ibom State. It also sought to ascertain their level of compliance to the said article and, how the journalists' compliance or non-compliance to the article 7 affect their news reportage.

Data in table 1 shows that respondents are aware of reward and gratification as article in the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) Code of ethics and a greater percentage of them are aware that collecting reward and gratifications is a violation of the NUJ code of ethics as majority of them claim and prove knowledge of the issues bordering on reward and gratifications.

This is an indication that journalists in Akwa Ibom State are aware that it is ethically wrong to either solicit or accept bribe, gratification or patronage to suppress or publish information, and that to demand payment for the publication of news is inimical to the notion of news as fair, accurate, unbiased and factual report of an event. They know that violating this code is contrary to rules and principle of journalism which is punishable. This is in tandem with the postulation of Udoakah (2014) that journalistic code of ethics is one of the most defined for awareness and understanding based on the fact that it is frequently taught in higher institutions offering communication and journalism studies, thus, providing the tendency of greater awareness among journalists.

It was also found out that although journalists in Akwa Ibom State are aware of the NUJ code of ethics bordering reward and gratifications, they do not know it to be article number 7 in the NUJ code of ethics. This therefore implies that they do not have deeper knowledge of the journalistic code of ethics. It therefore calls for indebt study and awareness creation of articles in the code.

On the compliance to article 7 of NUJ code of ethics which dwells on reward and gratification, findings in table 2 indicates that a greater percentage of journalists in Akwa Ibom State do not comply to the said article in the journalistic code of ethics as their attitude to this code that they do not comply were made open and known without fear. Data gathered from their responses explain that despite their awareness and knowledge of the article, journalism practitioners in Akwa Ibom State still indulge in collecting reward, gratification, payment and patronage for news publishing and airing. The data shows that collecting reward and gratification is so popular among journalists that they can hide asking for it after coverage of events. This study revealed that this unethical behavior is known among journalists in Akwa Ibom State as; envelop, well landing, transport fare, and PR.

Responses during the focus group discussion and personal interviews also revealed that violating the NUJ code on reward and gratification manifests in all groups of journalism practice in Akwa Ibom State. However, further analysis also shows that it manifests in every aspect of journalism practice in the state.

This supports William's (2014) position that "since brown envelop found its way into Nigerian journalism, it has refused all attempt to be curbed...it is now fast assuming a conventional status"

It is also in tandem with the views of Rich (2000) which states that "many journalists have come to accept reward and gratification as standards even though the NUJ code of ethics clearly prohibits reporters from collecting reward and gratification". This means that journalists are now taking the practice of receiving reward and gratification for the publication or airing of news as normal tradition, this is a serious threat to

journalism as profession. The profession tends to lose its trust, causing the inability to uphold to the important elements of journalism like fairness, objectivity, accuracy and independence.

This is in line with Ekeanyanwu and Obianigwe's (2012) idea that "money and other gifts could pressurize journalists into doing what the givers want and this makes journalists unable to be objective in their reporting of events and issues involving the people who give such gifts". Further analysis shows that the violating of this article (reward and gratification) popularly called brown envelop syndrome manifest most in the sourcing and reporting of news stories. More so the level of violation according to data in table 2, is so high while also becoming a norm that journalist must be given money, gift, food and any form of entertainment at the end of every event they cover.

Findings also indicate that the journalists feel article 7 should not have been made part of NUJ code of ethics, and called for a review of the said article. To further expose the position of the journalists in relation to the said article, data gathered from personal interview with the Akwa Ibom State NUJ executives shows that despite the high level of non-compliance, there is no formal report nor punishment for the violation. This is a proof and indication that that journalists in the state have come to accept this unethical behaviour as norm in the profession.

This support the postulation of Nwocha (2004, p.68) that "journalism in Nigeria see reward and gratification (brown envelop) as normal and conventional" as a means of survival in the profession especially in this era of economic recession in Nigeria.

The insistence of journalists for gratifications in spite of knowledge on the implications conflicts with the Apostle Paul positions in the Holy Bible KJV (Romans 6: 1 – 6) questions, "... shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" so is the question; "shall journalists in Nigeria continue to violate article 7 of journalistic code of ethics and lose integrity of the profession for them to survive?"

The sanctity and integrity of the noble profession must be maintain as watchdog and custodian of law in the society. In the words of Skjerdal (2010, p. 370) "... gratifications by journalists denote a corrupt practice which involves transfer of various types of reward from news sources to journalists who are regarded as custodians of the truth". This indicates neglect of ethical requirement of the journalism career as well as undermines the primary role of journalism.

In addition, the non-compliance to article 7 of journalistic code of ethics conflicts with the social responsibility theory of the press as the media(journalists) who ought to be socially responsible by disseminating news free are now selling and collecting money, gifts and other reward/ gratifications for publishing, airing and even suppressing/killing of news. The non-compliance to the provision of the article has exerted negative influence on journalism practice because it has caused important issues to be downplayed while unimportant ones are exaggerated.

More so, it is pathetic to know that poor remuneration, poverty and vested interest are the major reasons for non-adherence to NUJ code on reward and gratification. The journalists during the data gathering process made no pretence about their receiving gifts and payment for themselves and/or for their media houses to publish or air stories. From the data gathered from the respondents, while some journalists receive poor and irregular salaries, some media houses do not have salary system at all and chances of their survival depend on collecting reward and gratifications (brown envelop) from news sources. This implies that it may be difficult to be ethical in an unethical environment. From this perspective, it is clearing why journalists who violate the article 7 defend their action by blaming it on poverty, as well as pressure from events' owners. This is in tandem with the position of Ogbole (2012) which states that "various reasons behind the unethical behaviour of collecting reward and gratification are; poor pay package and welfare as well as exposure to unethical behaviour in the course of the

practice". The revealed situation in other words means that journalists are ever ready to make money for themselves at the field, thereby propagating the violation of article number 7 of the NUJ code of ethics.

According to table 4, majority representing 93% of the respondents attested that accepting of reward and gratification affects their approach to such report in one way or the other. Although some said they are always at liberty to either write or not write when money (brown envelopes) are not given, majority also attested that they give greater attention with positive approach to stories they good receive payment and transport money (reward and gratification) from their sources and also ensure that such stories do not fail. This proves the negative effects of non-compliance to the said article in the code. Journalists indulged themselves into this without taking cognizant of the provisions in the article which explains that no essential fact (news) should be deliberately suppressed for reward sake, as doing this means violating article 7 of the code of ethics, and that seeking of personal interest or reward is not comparative to the article.

This means that a journalist who is involved in accepting reward and gratification does his duty at the dictates of the giver the reward. Sometimes, stories that are of no consequence to the society are published or aired while good and relevant stories are killed, due to compromise on the part of journalists. The implication is that real news is watered down while irrelevant issues are overblown. In most cases the truth is suppressed or not published/aired at all. The result will be a decline in productivity and professionalism among journalists. Although minute number of journalists claims that receiving gratification does not prevent them from reporting objectively, it is better to play safe morally than battle with your conscience and pretend to be in control.

Considering the importance of article 7 of NUJ code of ethics, Rich (2000) stresses, "violating ethical issues of reward and gratification leads to the violation of others, and adhering to this issue also enhances adherence to others to a greater percentage". It is on evidence that other articles in the code is at stake, meaning that the professionalism of journalism is also at stake. If the place, value and integrity of journalists as watchdogs of the society and custodians of law must be upheld, then their code of practice must be maintained and complied.

## **Conclusion**

The fact that there is issue of non-compliance to article seven of the code of ethics is about to destroy (if not already destroying) lofty height, which the journalism practice has attained in Akwa Ibom State. It should be a source of concern to journalism practitioners and stakeholders in the profession as violation of the said code can lead to violation of others. Where ever the brown envelop culture and syndrome exists, truth is often suppressed and the highest bidder usually gets away with injustice and unfair treatment. This is the major reason this paper calls for concerted efforts in dealing with the monster and cankerworm.

To achieve this, the paper therefore recommends that professional bodies within the media industry should improve on the implementation of the various ethical codes in the industry and efforts should be geared towards an improved welfare package for members. Subsequent professional misconduct by members should be squarely dealt with and erring members adequately sanctioned. This is the way to go in curbing the ill effects of non-compliance with article seven of the code of ethics for Nigerian journalists. The practitioners must not forget that complying with the article 7, gives room for reputation of individual journalist or media house to be respected and to gain integrity.

## **Recommendations**

- 1 The NUJ should intensify the monitoring of their members to desist from accepting gratifications in all forms.

- 2 The NUJ should spell out appropriate discipline measures on members found to have violated provisions of the NUJ code particularly article 7 concerning the acceptance of gratifications.
- 3 Journalists should endeavour to comply with the provisions of Article 7 to maintain their reputation, their employers and sustain the integrity of the journalism profession
- 4 The various regulatory agencies on the journalism profession should undertake a summit to deliberate on the strengthening of the NUJ Code of ethics or consider the expunging of some unenforceable provision such as article 7 on the acceptance of gratifications.

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