Not a do-or-die affair: Freelance Journalists in Nigeria and Ethical Dilemmas

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Not a do-or-die affair: Freelance Journalists in Nigeria and Ethical Dilemmas

Tolulope Olasoji

Thesis submitted to the Reed College of Media at West Virginia University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Journalism

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Keywords: Freelance Journalist, Nigeria, Ethics, Ethical Dilemma, Journalism, Media

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Abstract

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Tolulope Olasoji

This study explores the ethical dilemmas Nigerian freelance journalists face and their implications for their work. It will use in-depth interviews with select freelance journalists. Several studies have established that ethical concerns are rife in—and indeed the bane of—journalism in Nigeria. However, these pieces of research reflect the reality across conventional newsrooms, where, ideally, there is some organizational structure and support. No scholarly attention has been given to freelance journalists, otherwise known as entrepreneurial journalists, due to their autonomous nature, to understand the ethical dilemmas they may be entangled in primarily. This study seeks to address this gap in research. Two relevant ethical frameworks guide this study: the social responsibility theory of the press and the ethics of care. To interrogate the issue of ethical dilemmas, it explores six of the ethical concerns common in Nigeria's mediascape: Brown Envelope Syndrome (BES), public relations, media ownership (and government control), press freedom, patriarchy, and Covid-19 precarity (which recently became a factor due to the novel coronavirus pandemic and had a significant effect on the media industry worldwide).

Keywords: Freelance Journalist, Nigeria, Ethics, Ethical Dilemma, Journalism, Media
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To myself. For not giving up.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

To ensure fair news coverage of the global south, Western media outlets staged foreign bureaus across regions like sub-Saharan Africa. Until recently (Vicente, 2013), as a result of economic downturns, cutbacks and downsizing in newsrooms extended to these bureaus, and with the burgeoning practice of freelancing—aided by technological advancement, social media, and an entrepreneurial drive—these organizations turned to freelancers as a financially viable model (Gollmitzer, 2014). Also, the foreign correspondent culture has been critiqued in the region for fostering “representational deficits” in international news (Vicente, 2013). This partly created a demand for freelance reporting, with local independent journalists or fixers needed to provide context, nuance, and proper representation in reporting the region (Vicente, 2013).

The autonomous nature of freelancers, however, revived the discussion around professionalism. Generally, professionalism in journalism is a tricky concept (Fredriksson & Johansson, 2014; Matthews & Onyemaobi, 2020). That could not be truer in freelance journalism, a model detached from the organizational structure. The low barrier to entry appeals to just about anyone—a fledgling journalist, a seasoned one, or even a regular person (Mathisen, 2017). It is also a viable transitional model for journalists laid off due to the economic recession (Edstrom & Ladendorf, 2012). According to Kelly (2005), freelancers are entrepreneurs managing their own media businesses and are also referred to as entrepreneurial journalists (Vos & Singer, 2016). Aside from performing regular journalism tasks in multiple newsrooms, freelancers are solely responsible for maintaining healthy enough relationships with editors in various organizations and developing a business model that keeps them afloat and cares for their overall mental and physical well-being (Kelly, 2005). The question of how they approach ethics
or navigate ethical dilemmas is an essential layer to the professionalism discourse—as is their autonomous mode of operation.

To this end, this study focuses on Nigeria, where freelancers have become the primary newsmakers for international news organizations and, to some extent, their local counterparts (Oji & Albert, 2021). Ali Ibbi (2016) explores the broader journalism landscape in the country, stating that it is rife with several ethical issues. These issues range from a lack of professionalism to ownership (and government control), the restriction of press freedom (Oji & Albert, 2021), Brown Envelope Syndrome (Ekeanyanwu, 2012; Okor & Chinweobo-Onuoha, 2013), patriarchy (Blumell & Mulupi, 2020; Matthews & Onyemaobi, 2020), involvement in public relations (PR) work (Fröhlich, Koch & Obermaier, 2013), and recently, the precarity introduced by the Covid-19 pandemic (Radcliffe, 2021). All of these impede journalism’s duty to citizens in a democracy. Since freelancers are a product of this industry and society, this study will explore how these factors influence their ethical reasoning, despite the autonomy they enjoy.

In global journalism ethics, several ethical frameworks—often in line with the traditional models: deontology, consequentialism, and virtue ethics (Jones, 2021)—have been proposed as suitable for navigating ethical dilemmas. However, no consensus has been reached (Hussein & Aucoin, 2018). As Jones (2021) notes, the complexity and diversity of human nature make an all-in-one ethical framework unfeasible. Some have proposed that these traditional ethical frameworks have limitations in solving ethical dilemmas and are susceptible to producing moral harm (Meyers, 2011). Instead, an ethics of care, usually a situational approach to ethics and ethical dilemmas, is apt. Jones (2021) states that such a theory does not call for a total banishment of traditional ethical theories as it subsumes some aspects.
Given the frequency and variation with which freelance journalists encounter ethical dilemmas, the ethics of care—a situational ethical framework—seems a fitting theoretical framework for freelancing. Freelancing as a model of journalism practice is based on relationships with several newsrooms, often with several ethical dispositions, which leads to encountering several ethical dilemmas. Care ethics resolve ethical dilemmas in a discursive manner, with the concept of relationship at its core (e.g., Larrabee, 1993; Steiner, 2009).

Freelancers retain a high level of independence in their dealings. It is why they maintain an advantage regarding their ethical decision, regardless of outside influence. This study will readapt the tenets of the social responsibility of the press as checks against freelancers’ supposed libertarian excesses. The theory originated from the “intellectual ferment of the postwar United States” (Gunaratne, 1998). It placed “an obligation to be socially responsible” (Siebert et al., 1956, p. 5) on news media. Day (1991) further clarifies that it does not aim to stifle the free press but imposes that responsibility is necessary for freedom. While this theory was developed with a conventional newsroom in mind, it seems relevant for contemporary journalism models, including freelance journalism, given the level of autonomy it should enjoy.

This study will focus on freelance journalists in Nigeria, their ethical challenges, and the implications for (impact on) their work. The study fills a gap in the literature on journalism studies, seeing as ethics regarding freelance journalism is not the most exhaustive topic in the field. Furthermore, there has yet to be any visible or tangible work that focuses on the local reality (Matthews & Onyemaobi, 2020) of freelancing in Nigeria, least of all one that expounds on freelancing ethics in the country. Thus, this work will build on the growing literature on ethics and freelance journalism across Western countries. It will be achieved via in-depth interviews with five freelance journalists (3 males and 2 females), and analyses of their
journalistic works. For its theoretical framework, the study will employ the ethics of care and the social responsibility theory of the press.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Social Responsibility Theory of the Press

The social responsibility theory of the press and ethics of care underpins this study. The former originated as a means to check the excesses of the libertarian press (Siebert et al., 1956), believing that specific responsibilities should accompany freedom. According to Day (1991), this is the reason why the code of ethics is essential to journalism in a democratic climate. It steers the profession in the direction of social responsibility. For the sake of this study, though, we will explore and adapt the social responsibility theory to freelance journalism. Specifically, how freelance journalism, typically known or expected to operate with more freedom, makes ethical decisions that do not aim to exploit this libertarian privilege. In applying this theory and adapting it to this study, the writings of McQuail (2010) will be put into perspective. A responsible (freelance) journalist has an obligation to society, a duty to an objective, accurate, fair, and truthful report. Additionally, they must follow agreed-upon codes of ethics and professional conduct and not engage in practices such as Brown Envelope Syndrome (BES), which skew objectivity.

Ethics of Care

Regarding codes of ethics, this study advocates for an ethics of care because of the belief that its situational and relational approach is essential for freelance journalism. Building on feminist discursive theory (Buzzanell, 2011), Hossein & Aucoin (2018) define the ethics of care as “a paradigm shift in theories related to moral reasoning because it emphasizes universal ethical behavior based on ‘caring for’ and ‘caring about,’ placing universal ethical decision-making in the personal realm and expanding it into the community and globally” (p. 202). In
other words, ethics of care is not doing away with universal ethics but applying them fittingly in a contextual manner.

This ethical theory has its roots in psychology, with Carol Gilligan, its proponent. In 1982, Gilligan published a critique of Lawrence Kohlberg’s theories of cognitive moral development (Reiter, 1996). Gilligan’s research was a harrowing response to Kohlberg’s argument that boys were more ethical than girls. It excluded women, positioned men as the purveyors of morals, and was abstract, Gilligan (1982) noted. In response, she developed a theory that was reminiscent of real-life situations. Human beings, she posited, are usually situated in complex, interwoven, and nuanced (caring) relationships. It was unlike Kohlberg’s theory (Jones, 2021). Jones further argued that this is emblematic of traditional ethical theories—deontology, consequentialism, and virtue ethics—which dominate global ethical frameworks discourse in journalism. In their articulation of ethics of care and its application to journalism, Jones (2021) and Buzzanell (2011) advocate subsuming the ethical framework with the other traditional ethical frameworks, which are dominant in journalism ethics application but incapable of solely resolving ethical dilemmas in journalism.

It is worth noting that ethics of care is not as pronounced in journalism as traditional ethics (Jones, 2021; Hussein & Aucoin, 2018; Jenkins, 2017), but scholars agree that its discursive approach can help interrogate and solve ethical dilemmas, as the concept of the relationship remains at the core of the practice (e.g., Larrabee, 1993; Steiner, 2009). Held (2006) believes that ethics of care can end the search for global journalism ethics.

Since freelance journalists are frequently faced with ethical dilemmas and managing relationships is at the core of their dealings, this study will establish how the ethics of care remain the most feasible ethical framework to operate with. On the other hand, the social
responsibility of the press can act as a check against the perceived excesses of freelancers due to the liberty they enjoy. Following are examinations of scholarly studies relevant to the variables considered in this study as causes of ethical dilemmas for freelance journalists in Nigeria.

**Brown Envelope Syndrome (BES)**

Brown Envelope Syndrome (BES) is considered the most common form of bribery in journalism in Nigeria (Asemah, 2011; Okunna, 1995). According to Okunna (1995), it pressures journalists into doing whatever the bribe giver wants. In her applied definition, Okunna established that a brown envelope does not necessarily have to be in cash form. The definition presents the concept as any form of gratification expected to skew the process of objectivity in a journalist’s work, which automatically poses a serious ethical problem. She further explained that “monetary bribes and other gifts tie the hands of journalists, who then become incapable of being objective in reporting events and issues involving people who give the gifts” (Okunna, 1995, p. 57). Also, indulging in the practice of brown envelope parallels bribery. Therefore, it violates the social responsibility theory or journalists’ ethical obligation to provide care since their judgment might sometimes be skewed.

While the definition of the concept retains some similarity, there is little consensus as to the root of the brown envelope practice in Nigeria. It has been speculated that its roots could be traced to the “culture of presenting kola nuts to visitors, a hospitality practice common in many African societies” (Nwabueze, 2010, p. 498), which informs news sources' decisions to hand journalists incentives as an appreciation for their coverage. However, Okoro & Chinweobo-Onuoha (2013) believe the term ‘brown envelope’ originated from a practice common among Ghanaians' covert presentation of bribe money in envelopes, not necessarily brown ones.
According to Uko (2004), the second republic (1979–1983) ushered in Nigeria’s brown envelope era. He claimed it was common for government ministers to bribe journalists for their stories to be published in national dailies and that by 1983, it would be the norm for journalists to demand bribes before performing their duties. Ekeanyanwu & Obianigwe (2012) maintained that the practice reflects the pervading “moral decadence” in the wider Nigerian society and remains an issue in the 21st century. Omenugha & Oji (2008) believe the commercialization of news, the withdrawal of government support in journalism and journalists’ poor welfare, combined with publishers’ complicity, led to a brown envelope epidemic.

Although scholars and journalists have varied perceptions and origins of the Brown Envelope Syndrome, the familiar themes within their studies are the ethical implication and the characterization of the concept, aptly captured by Skjerdal (2010). Whatever the context for using the term brown envelope is, he established that three characteristics are usually present. It usually occurs personally, has some degree of confidentiality, and is an informal contract between a source and the journalist. It is an informal contract in that no one presents a “gift” in anticipation of a result against them, and this alone, no matter how journalists view it, is a somewhat binding agreement.

This study draws from Okunna’s (1995) articulation of the concept to ensure that the Brown Envelope Syndrome remains rooted in its initial conceptualization. Thus, it goes beyond fiat currency exchange from a source to a journalist. Brown Envelope Syndrome is defined in this study as any form of gratification a journalist receives that skews objectivity. This, as a result, establishes an ethical dilemma and, more importantly, violates a moral norm (per the social responsibility theory).
This study will explore the definition from the study by Fredriksson & Johansson (2014). They define journalists’ affiliation with public relations work through the lens of identity and professionalism, further arguing that journalists’ identities are socially constructed. Hence, context is needed to understand whether or not a journalist involved in public relations work is professional enough.

Scholars have explored and argued the relationship between public relations and journalists through various lenses. For instance, age-wise, older journalists are said to be more favorable toward public relations (Mellado & Hanusch, 2011; Yun & Yoon, 2011). However, this was disputed in Sallot and Johnson’s (2006) study. Gender is another factor, with Yun and Yoon (2011) highlighting the positive relationship between women and the public relations industry. Again, Sallot and Johnson (2006) thought otherwise. While it’s well established that there is a significant hostility between journalism and public relations, making such a consensus would be inaccurate, according to Fredriksson and Johansson (2014). They make the argument that a perceived general attitude towards the industry does not negate situational opinions, especially as an industry (public relations profession) is distinguishable from its workers (public relations practitioners) (Sallot & Johnson, 2006).

Niskala and Hurme (2014) opined that both industries are mutually dependent and that their relationship is essential to the information ecosystem of society, hence the merit of their interrelationship. Also, (freelance) journalists often seek secondary employment in this field (Meyen & Springer, 2009) to balance their books (Weischenberg et al., 2006a). Although a conflict of interest is not far off (Hellmeueller & Mellado, 2015), some scholars argue that (freelance) journalists’ autonomy is likely to be influenced due to their relationship with the
public relations industry or professionals (Mellado & Humanes, 2012; Thomas & Obermaier, 2014). Furthermore, Kasoma (2008) explored the interrelationship between public relations work and unethical practices in journalism in Zambia, specifically how public relations practitioners consider parting with brown envelopes or freebies as a routine in their news-management strategy.

For this study, public relations will be defined as involvement in public relations, whether or not it skews what would be considered professional or the autonomy of the freelance journalist.

**Media ownership (and government control)**

This study will employ Obalanlege’s (2015) explanation of the importance of media ownership in the news production cycle as an anchor to how this study operationalizes this concept. He wrote, “Journalists and the organizations they work for produce news. Essentially, (the) news is both an individual and an organizational product” (p. 68). Ojo (2018) examined the issue of media ownership concerning media sustainability in Nigeria, where private ownership has a short span “because news media’s business purposes are generally defined in terms of socio-political functions, not in (a) business economic sense” (p. 1271). Government ownership thrives because “Nigerian journalism was born of anti-colonial protest, baptized in the flood of nationalist propaganda, and matured in party politics” (Golding & Elliot, 1979, p. 21). Furthermore, Ojo (2008) highlights the influence of the government in the ownership of media in the country, stating that while they control broadcast journalism, privately-owned digital/print media firms have owners with political affiliations.

In a climate like this, journalism tends to be conflicting, argues Ojo (2018). While it looks to perform its social responsibility duties, it has an obligation to political advocacy or its

Thus, in this study, media ownership is defined as the body that owns the media outfit and, as such, influences a freelance journalist’s autonomy.

**Press Freedom**

According to Onagoruwa (1985), press freedom is a journalist’s right to publish without intimidation, molestation, or blackmail. The definition of press freedom has several variations, depending on the scholars, but they mostly agree that journalists have the right to operate as the fourth estate of democracy without any form of reprisal (Asemah, 2011; Sambe & Ikoni, 2004; Agee, Ault, & Emery, 1979). However, Apuke (2016) questions the practicality of the concept, asking how free is free enough—especially in the Nigerian journalism industry.

Several authors had sought to dive deeper into press freedom as it concerns Nigeria, with Momoh (2002) providing historical context as to when the Nigerian government started gagging its media with legislation (1903)—at the behest of the colonial administration, as Nwanne (2014) clarifies. Still, Nigeria is adjudged to enjoy one of Africa's most unrestricted media landscapes (Demarest & Langer, 2018), a claim backed by its constitution. In practice, however, the government pressures prying journalists through various means, and in several cases, it has led to journalists' deaths (Nwanne, 2014), which has led to a significant decrease in investigative reporting in Nigeria (Onyenankankeya & Salawu, 2019).
This study will define press freedom as the right of a freelance journalist to publish factually correct information without fear of reprisal, especially from the government or any of its agencies.

**Patriarchy**

Across the world, the news industry is still considered male-dominated, and gendered norms are still reinforced within formal settings such as journalism newsrooms; there is no more accurate manifestation of this than in Nigeria (Byerly, 2011; Enwefah, 2016). This study will build off the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression’s (2018) explanation of women’s restrictions in the media setting due to a patriarchal society. It describes them as “specific threatening environments that restrict their work and/or have a disproportionate impact on exercising their right to freedom of expression” (p. 11). It further explains how this subjects them to misogynistic behaviors, sexual violence, or even worse, femicide, with colleagues, media organizations, or state authorities complicit.

Agbalajobi (2010) stated that the patriarchal nature of newsrooms in Nigeria is representative of the wider society, where culture and religion, in that order (Jibril & Abubakar, 2017), subjugate women in the social order. It also manifests in the sort of news beat handed to women in newsrooms (Blumell & Dinfin, 2020) or preferred by them (Alao et al., 2015; Ememyeonu, 1991). Furthermore, the emasculated nature of the profession has seen males lead in all ramifications, from teaching, practising, scholarship and studentship (Abubakar & Dauda, 2016; Odunlami, 2014).

This study defines patriarchy as a gendered difference or nuance limiting women’s freedom to express themselves in the newsroom and having a disproportionate impact on their experience.
The Covid-19 pandemic impacted economies, and several industries worldwide (Boone et al., 2020), and the media industry was not spared (Santos, Phillip, & Mare, 2021). According to the CDC (2019), Covid-19 is a respiratory disease caused by SARS-CoV-2, a coronavirus discovered in 2019. The contagious disease drastically morphed into a pandemic, with its impact felt worldwide, forcing countries and economies into lockdown. This lockdown disproportionately affected the news media and freelancers (Radcliffe, 2021), shoving them towards precarity.

This study will define Covid-19 precarity as the adverse economic effect felt by freelance journalists due to the Covid-19 pandemic. They were affected in a way that could significantly affect their disposition of ethics, especially when weighed against economic benefits and realities.
Research Questions

After explicating the concepts above, significant relationships have been established between these concepts and freelance journalists’ ethics application. RQ1 asks precisely how these concepts influence freelance journalists in Nigeria.

**RQ1:** What factors influence Nigerian freelance journalists’ application of ethics?

Several kinds of literature have established that the mediascape in Nigeria is riddled with ethical concerns ranging from Brown Envelope Syndrome (BES) to media ownership (and government control) to press freedom (Ali Ibbi, 2016), RQ3 is not asking about “if” but “how” these influence freelance journalists.

**RQ2:** How does the journalism landscape in Nigeria influence freelance journalists?
Chapter 4: Method

Freelance journalists of Nigerian descent working within the country were selected for this research. They are central to understanding how freelance journalists in the country navigate ethical dilemmas, some of which are unique to the West African nation’s journalism landscape. In-depth interviews were chosen to offer an encompassing understanding of each individual’s responses.

Sampling

Over five months, from January 2023 to April 2023, five interviews were conducted with Nigerian freelance journalists. Participant selection was driven by the convenience sampling method (Galloway, 2005). To ensure a diverse selection of participants and knowing that this sampling technique tends to not reflect a consensus because of the subjectivity of the researcher in selecting participants, three male and two female journalists (Blumell & Mulupi, 2020; Gollmitzer, 2014; Hayes & Silke, 2019) who were at various stages of their freelance journalism careers were selected: mid-career freelance journalists (7–4 years) and early-career freelance journalists (below four years).

It is, however, worth noting that this study aimed to interview 20 journalists (10 male and 10 female). However, the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria introduced a scheduling conflict not anticipated in the proposal stage. Freelance journalists were incredibly busy providing coverage for international and local media outlets. To a larger extent, it underscores the importance of freelance journalists to Nigeria's media landscape. Hence, the importance of this study.
**Procedure**

A qualitative research design was used to accomplish this study's aims, where the researcher used in-depth interviews to interrogate these five Nigerian freelance journalists. Once IRB approval was granted, the researcher emailed potential freelance journalists within the stated sample range. The convenience sampling method (Galloway, 2005) was used. Notably, the researcher’s experience as a Nigerian freelance journalist who worked in the country made them privy to networks of Nigerian freelance journalists.

Potential participants were provided with an Informed Consent Sheet that informed them of their rights and the appropriate use of their data. It also provided information about the study and the contact information for the researcher and institution. Once participants granted consent, interviews were scheduled and conducted.

The interviews spanned 20-60 minutes, recorded and transcribed using the Zoom platform. It was semi-structured, with questions based on the concepts highlighted and explicated (in the literature review section), such as Brown Envelope Syndrome (BES), public relations, media ownership (and government control), press freedom, patriarchy, and Covid-19 precarity. The prepared interview questions included follow-up questions to responses. They were open to additional participant comments and can decline responses to questions.

**Analysis**

After transcripts were vetted, the researcher conducted a thematic analysis to identify the patterns of meaning and recurring themes across a dataset that provide an answer to the question being addressed (Clarke & Braun, 2013). The four primary stages for conducting a thematic analysis, as described by Cartwright (2020), are as follows: immersion in the data, generating initial codes, developing themes by combing and linking the relevant codes, and finally
reviewing the themes. First, each interview transcript was reviewed and cleaned by the researcher (who does so while viewing the video recordings). Following this was reaffirming the accuracy and authenticity of all the written words against the participants’ responses, including the noted non-verbal cues (e.g., facial reactions, body language). Memos relating to critical insights emerging from each interview were also added.

Questions from the in-depth interviews with the freelancers already addressed the concepts this research explores: Brown Envelope Syndrome (BES), public relations, media ownership (and government control), press freedom, patriarchy, and Covid-19 precarity.
Chapter 5: Findings

An overwhelming sense of belonging

The interviewed freelancers for this study highlighted the positive aspects of being a journalist in Nigeria, such as a sense of belonging and the opportunity to tell stories of their communities. Some participants also emphasized the critical role of journalism as the fourth estate in a fraught democracy and their desire to use journalism as a tool to address social problems.

Additionally, the types of journalism they engage in have been shaped by issues that are important to them. One interviewee who waxed a lot on journalism's role as a watchdog focuses on investigations, which takes him from health to business. Another interviewee, interested in the social responsibilities of journalism, veers towards issues otherwise swept under the rug and stigmatized, such as health, mental health, and social justice.

Despite their passion for their work, the respondents also faced challenges stirred by a negative perception of journalists, according to over half of the respondents. Participants highlighted how political interference in the Nigerian news industry had left the public lacking trust. They all acknowledge poor welfare for journalists and the lack of funding for newsrooms. Over half of the participants pointed to an immature journalism industry.

Access to interview subjects, including government officials and ordinary people, was also highlighted as a challenge due to, according to one respondent who covers culture and entertainment, a "culture of silence" and harassment of journalists. The security of journalists was another concern shared across the board. The participants who carried out investigations shared instances where they have been harassed by government enforcement agencies and civilians who feel threatened by their presence.
### Figure 1. Profile of interviewed freelance journalists.

**An unethical landscape overlooking journalism**

Ethical journalism in Nigeria is fraught with several challenges. Over half of the freelance journalists interviewed emphasized that ethical journalism should be grounded in truth, accuracy, and humanity. At the same time, some also highlighted the need to adhere to guidelines and processes. However, as reported by participants, these standards are difficult to maintain in Nigeria, particularly in local newsrooms.
The respondents said that journalism is underfunded in the country, and as a result, the welfare of journalists is poor. Moreover, one respondent said political elites often use the industry to advance their selfish desires, and journalists are “pawns in the game.”

Transitioning to working as a journalist in a freelance capacity did not solve all the challenges either. Several respondents shared similar experiences of providing freelancing services for international platforms and compromising ethical standards to meet the Western gaze. They faced situations where the audience served by publishers was perceived to matter more than those whose stories were harvested. In the experience of one respondent:

As a freelance writer, I have had to rewrite things in a way that is more (sensational) especially when it comes to international journalism and working for international organizations. I've had to rewrite, reword my article sometimes to be easily digestible for a wider audience. It's not necessarily harming the story but in trying to reword and rewrite and whatnot, some part of the story gets diluted in your whole process. It just inadvertently happens. It's not always a conscious thing where you try to dilute your story. But in the process of taking it out, because you're not writing it for the people that the story is about, it becomes like a thing where you take critical parts of the story out unconsciously and the story doesn't feel as whole as it should. But it was before you had to make those edits.

(Male Journalist 2, Personal Communication, February 6, 2023)

Another interviewee who covered developmental stories emphasized the need for representation and diverse voices in crucial positions in foreign media platforms. This, according to him, would address how stories are framed and told. Also, it would help to bridge the power dynamics between local freelancers (keen to make ends meet) and foreign editors (perhaps keen to provide their audience with yet another irresistible headline).

It taught me two things basically. Representation is very important. That won't happen with a Nigerian editor. "Mr. X, this is what I found on the field." What happened basically in that story is, she wants to confirm something to her audience. Secondly, it taught me to have a free say. Because, to be honest, one thing I personally believe as a person is, morality is not a matter of black and white. When it comes to you surviving, for like 99.9% of people, that's where your morality ends.
A female respondent said she nitpicked on the places she reports for and only agreed to work with editors who accord her respect, and that includes not attempting to dumb down her reports for their audience and being collaborative. She said: “They don't even want any troubles themselves, so they’re quite rigorous.”

One respondent began interrogating editors when he realized he was a cog in the value chain of newsrooms requesting his services. He said: “When I first started, I used to just take edits, like if you told me to change this, I would just change it because I felt there's this thing where you feel grateful for just the opportunity.” Additionally, he mentioned the importance of being financially secure, as that gave him more confidence to challenge the decisions of editors.

According to the respondents, safety for freelancers is a significant issue. They do not have the security of local or international newsrooms (however frail that looks considering the clime they operate from). “You're on your own. It's easy to disappear, really, because you're freelancing,” a female respondent said. She also shared her experience with predatory male sources (government officials and civilians) and navigating the ethical dilemma of caring for vulnerable sources (some who had requested money) while maintaining objectivity.

Most participants questioned their ethical stances when working in local newsrooms. Some spoke about when editors kill stories because no brown envelopes were involved or because of government ownership and control. However, they agreed it was a significant reason they decided to freelance. However, they found that with freelancing, they faced some old and new challenges, and the freedom promised by freelancing is not entirely absolute. These findings elaborate on the significant challenges in practicing ethical journalism in Nigeria.
Brown Envelope Syndrome (BES)

The study reveals that brown envelope syndrome is prevalent in Nigerian journalism, with all but one respondent admitting to being offered and accepting monetary compensation for their work. While over half of the respondents encountered this practice during their tenure in newsrooms, two experienced it as freelancers.

One respondent attributed the need for brown envelopes to the poor welfare of journalists and described it as customary and expected in the workflow. He had gone unpaid for the first three months, working as a correspondent at a national business publication. The others stated that editors expected a share, and failure to remit enough money could result in a story not being published. One respondent said:

When I started, this brown envelope money, it was sweet when we started getting it (laughs). I used to collect a lot of it then as an intern. I kept collecting it, kept collecting it, kept publishing. (My editor and I) kind of shared the money together. When I started having reservations or issues about it was when, maybe, I attend an event and the organisation did not give me money, and the editor was telling me to kill the story or not publish the story.

(Male Journalist 1, Personal Communication, March 27, 2023)

While all respondents acknowledged that brown envelopes have ethical and editorial implications, some saw them as a necessary evil to sustain themselves when they worked in local newsrooms because of their poor welfare.

The way writing worked with us, and still works for this publication, is they have very little funding. So they run on ads. And ads are brought most times by these organizations. And also, as a writer, I'm not even going to deny this, when you come to cover events, they sort of give you.

(Male Journalist 2, Personal Communication, February 6, 2023)
One respondent noted that this was a factor in eventually leaving a local publication due to its heavy reliance on them to make ends meet, which presented ethical implications for their audience.

Furthermore, some respondents described their experiences as intimidating, such as being isolated in a room with a public officer and their security details while being offered a brown envelope while working on a social justice story in a bid to sway objectivity. Despite the prevalence of this practice, one respondent, citing cultural and perception issues, rejected an elderly source's offer of a brown envelope. Both were carrying out their jobs in a freelancing capacity.

**Public Relations**

According to the findings, more than half of the interviewees agreed that journalists' engagement in public relations or maintaining relationships with public relations professionals could influence their ethical disposition. However, some respondents believed that the ethical implications of such relationships solely depended on the journalist's ethical hierarchy.

Among the interviewees who acknowledged the impact of public relations on journalistic ethics, many had relationships with or had worked for public relations firms. For example, one respondent reported maintaining a positive and healthy relationship with NGOs to promote their causes, emphasizing that public relations can benefit journalism as long as it does not promote propaganda.

(If) it is purely PR, that is fine. You know that, yes, you are trying to help the organization you are working with to amplify their work without influencing the decisions of journalists, who you have probably reached out to do stories about them. But if it is propaganda, please, I'm not interested in it.

(Male Journalist 1, Personal Communication, March 27, 2023)
However, the respondent recognized that there could be editorial implications because PR professionals often expect positive coverage. “It can affect a journalist's editorial decision,” he said.

Another respondent refused to rely on "tailor-made" sources and avoided associating with public relations. He believed that stories should be experienced rather than predetermined, and therefore, he ignored the flurry of PR materials that flooded his inbox.

A third respondent, who had experience as a managing editor for a start-up newsroom and an advertising background, highlighted the significant issue facing Nigerian newsrooms. She acknowledged that they receive overwhelming press releases. As a result, newsrooms might have to please PR firms by bidding to maintain positive relationships that could translate into advertising dollars. This, as a result, means an editorial and ethical implication as there is an obligation to do the bidding of the PR firms.

While a few interviewees did not agree with the direct impact of public relations on journalists' ethical dilemmas, one conceded that using PR materials (which sometimes come with incentives) for culture and entertainment coverage created a "silent obligation for positive news coverage."

Consequently, he felt compelled to impress a PR company when writing a story. As a result, he avoided writing anything negative or nothing to maintain a positive relationship.

If I'm working with a PR team that sends me a package or something, to review or write about, there's a high chance that I'm going to want to write something good about it. Either I'm going to write something good about it, or I'm not going to write about it at all. I'll rather choose that route than write something bad about it. But for a journalist who has gotten to a certain level where they have their word; I don't know how to describe it, but they have like a standing.

(Male Journalist 2, Personal Communication, February 6, 2023)
However, he recognized the ethical implications of relying too heavily on PR materials and reduced his use of them accordingly.

**Media ownership (and government control)**

Respondents who started in the local newsroom decried their experience with the ownership of their organizations. They said it was a significant factor in moving to freelance and that they might never work in another.

It played a significant role (in going freelance). Because to me, I would say politicians have hijacked (the) media or media organizations in Nigeria. For example, we have some media organizations that are being owned and controlled by politicians. In a sane society, that is not supposed to happen. Because, one, there will be unethical practices; there will be kind of imbalanced stories.  
(Male Journalist 1, Personal Communication, March 27, 2023)

Respondents without newsroom experience are either hesitant or open to the idea but at start-ups because they felt, from observations, the ownerships and affiliations of newsrooms wield influence over newsrooms’ journalism and their ethical disposition. With freelancing, one respondent said: “Your ethical and moral compass is solely yours.” However, most outlets controlled by the government have no interests. In addition, while new media outfits are springing up, most interviewees thought there is insufficient funding to carry out stories and not enough for reporters.

**Press Freedom**

Of the selected 180 countries, Nigeria ranks 129th in the latest Press Freedom Index. “Absolutely unsafe,” all the interviewees we spoke to for this study agreed. One interviewee stated that journalists are routinely attacked, arrested, and dealt with by government agencies and, on occasion, citizens. He had similar experiences a couple of times while investigating
stories. Another respondent highlighted some of the horrific realities when journalists act as
watchdogs for Nigerian society, which include the disappearance of journalists.

She spoke of a dire outcome for freelance journalists who lacked the security of a
newsroom. She relied on passing travel information to friends and family upon embarking on
journalistic assignments.

There's no real backing of a media organization. So, it's a really weird place to be
because anything can go wrong and you'll just be alone, because there's no
insurance, there's no…you understand. You're just really on your own…as a
freelance journalist, you're vulnerable.
(Female Journalist 2, Personal Communication, February 13, 2023)

It is an overwhelming agreement across the board that the lack of press freedom and
threats and censorship from the government impact their ethical obligation for stories they take
on, with one saying, “Journalism is not a do-or-die affair,” and they want to stay alive to take on
another assignment.

They all agree that it also impacts the stories they chase, with one pointing out that
freelancing for international outlets shines a greater spotlight on issues. However, the
consciousness of the resulting witch hunt makes it unsafe. His beat includes writing about the
LGBT+ community, a marginalized group legally persecuted in Nigeria.

Generally, the participants said they do not attempt more deep dives and investigations
and often weighed the risk of threats before chasing stories. Thus, newsroom security is critical.

**Patriarchy**

All participants in this study believed that Nigerian newsrooms are patriarchal, with one
respondent characterizing them as a "men’s club." Except for one participant, all felt women
would leave traditional newsrooms due to various issues, from casual misogyny to sexual
harassment. The female journalist who interned in a newsroom before settling for freelancing said of her experience:

In an average newsroom, you don't get to see many women there. Let's say for example, a newsroom of 10 people, you get only two or three women. And I don't know why this is so. I don't know maybe it's because women are kind of scared. I don't know if it's the fear of getting hurt or affected.
(Female Journalist 1, Personal Communication, February 12, 2023)

The other female journalist who had not worked in a local newsroom says patriarchy manifests differently, especially as a freelance journalist.

As a freelance journalist, the major issue for me was just navigating predatory or annoying male (sources) asking for something or expecting you to go out with them. Because they wouldn't do that with a guy. Those are ways that misogyny rears its head in journalism.
(Female Journalist 2, Personal Communication, February 13, 2023)

The male participants agreed that female journalists are a rare presence in newsrooms and that those who are present are subjected to sexual harassment and made to feel uncomfortable by misogynistic remarks. They also noted that management does not address these issues even when reported, reflecting broader societal trends.

According to one respondent, female reporters are also used as bait for advertisers, chosen for assignments that make them appear powerful but also appeal to male audiences who bring in advertising dollars.

As reporters outside male-dominated newsrooms the female respondents said they were only hypervigilant and overly sensitive because they were still operating in a patriarchal society.

It's just knowing that I have to really protect myself. I would not know how a man that is going into the field thinks. But as a woman, I just feel like I have to protect myself. I have to not disclose where I'm staying. If I'm staying in a hotel because I don't know. Who knows if a random person can just come and knock on my door. Also, there's just that subtle anxiety of, I shouldn't laugh too much with this person—(even) the person I'm interviewing I shouldn't. You just have to be
cautious, really. You just hold back in some ways because you don't want them thinking… Even though you're not doing anything. You're not actively trying to send any message, but you're also trying to manage how they perceive you, which is annoying.
(Female Journalist 2, Personal Communication, February 13, 2023)

Despite these challenges, this respondent thought that women journalists must remain in newsrooms out of necessity because leaving does not solve the problem. “We still need the perspective of women. Women are important to the newsroom. What should change is the system,” she said.

Another female respondent viewed the patriarchal nature of newsrooms as positively impacting their ethical disposition instead. As a result, they sought out stories that diversified coverage and better reflected the diversity of their sources, with a heavy emphasis on female experts and ordinary voices. She added that it was the reason why she remained independent.

I have noticed something: generally, we don't have a lot of women voices in media. If you pick up a news report or just a feature story, you get it that majority of the voices or the sources are male. So because of this, I'm sort of consciously inclined to telling more female-related reports. And in cases where I cannot write (these) stories, I kind of make sure that okay, in one report, I have at least a woman's voice. If not as just a normal source, but as an expert source. I try to do that.
(Female Journalist 1, Personal Communication, February 12, 2023)

One male respondent believed that the patriarchal nature of newsrooms could affect female journalists’ ethical disposition, particularly regarding the stories they tell and how far they are willing to go. As a result, they advised several female colleagues to consider leaving newsrooms and going freelance.

**COVID-19 Precarity**

Fifty percent of the respondents in the study acknowledged that the precarious situation introduced by the COVID-19 pandemic had a substantial impact on their work. For example,
one respondent noted that there had been no commission for over six months due to the closure of outlets, and they struggled to adapt to this sudden new reality. “It was a difficult period for me and for other freelance journalists that I also know about. You will start writing pitches, sending pitches, they'll tell you: ‘Sorry, our funding has been cut short. It is because of Covid 19’,” he recalled.

While the respondents did not engage in unethical activities, the pandemic impacted how far they were willing to go to secure commissions from news outlets. Consequently, one respondent explored new areas of journalism, such as aquaculture and food journalism. Another respondent mentioned that, while he did not explicitly engage in unethical activities, he was willing to sign an NDA with an international news organization that stated they were not responsible for any health complications arising from their reporting activities during a period when vaccines had not yet been rolled out in Nigeria. This presented an ethical dilemma as freelancers had to report to make ends meet, putting their lives, the lives of their sources, and the public at risk in the process.

One respondent received emergency COVID grants from foreign outlets to mitigate the effects of the pandemic, while another found alternative employment that allowed them to practice multiple beats. For some freelancers, the slow pace introduced into the journalism industry by the pandemic provided an opportunity to explore new and beneficial ways of working. However, one respondent had not commenced freelancing or journalism in 2020.
Chapter 6: Discussion

The research results provide insights into the dealings of freelance journalists in Nigeria and how they navigate ethical dilemmas. While the ethical hierarchy of the five freelance journalists interviewed for this study was forged differently, one thing they agreed upon was their responsibility to society. Therefore, they suggested they have a duty to society and should adhere to codes of ethics and professional conduct (McQuail, 2010). The social responsibility theory posits that journalists must report truthfully, objectively, and fairly. They agreed upon this.

Furthermore, care was central to their approach and a significant factor in solving ethical dilemmas. Most of the study's respondents started their careers in local newsrooms, where they faced many ethical dilemmas that were solved by the newsroom's hierarchy. On most occasions, they did not care about their audiences. However, going freelance allowed them to consider the implications of their ethical dealings on their audiences. This is akin to the ethics of care, which, according to Hossein and Aucoin (2018), places universal ethical decision-making in the personal realm and expands it into the community and globally.

It is essential to highlight that during their engagements with foreign media, some individuals encountered circumstances that compelled them to perpetuate "representational deficits" (Vicente, 2013), which stemmed from the foreign correspondent culture that existed before the proliferation of freelance journalism. Some participants reported experiencing power imbalances as freelance journalists due to the imperative to be profitable. International newsrooms needed to reorient these freelancers’ reportage to cater to their primary audiences. However, consciousness to care for their community and, in certain instances, improved financial stability aided these individuals in resolving ethical dilemmas.
Scholars agree that the ethics of care's discursive approach can help interrogate and solve ethical dilemmas because the concept of the relationship remains at the core of the practice (Larrabee, 1993; Steiner, 2009), which is similar to how the respondents in this study solved their ethical dilemmas. First, they mentioned entering journalism because of their sense of belonging and community. Then, that communal feeling guided them to make the right choices for their audiences, with hints that as they encountered more ethical dilemmas in their careers, they would veer towards caring for their audience.

**Brown Envelope Syndrome (BES)**

The findings of this study align with the previous literature on the prevalence of Brown Envelope Syndrome in Nigerian journalism. For example, Asemah (2011) and Okunna (1995) established the concept as the most common form of bribery in Nigerian journalism, with journalists being pressured to do whatever the bribe-giver wants. Similarly, Uko (2004) asserts that the practice has existed since the Second Republic in Nigeria, with government officials bribing journalists to publish their stories.

The study also corroborates the findings by Omenugha and Oji (2008) and Ekeanyanwu and Obianigwe (2012), attributing the brown envelope epidemic to the commercialization of news, journalists' poor welfare, the withdrawal of government support for journalism, and publishers' complicity. One respondent's experience of going unpaid for three months while working as a correspondent at a national business publication highlighted the issue of poor welfare for journalists.

While some respondents in the study saw receiving monetary rewards from sources as a necessary means of sustaining themselves due to their poor welfare, their experiences revealed the ethical and editorial implications of the practice, as established by Okunna (1995). One
respondent noted that accepting brown envelopes has ethical implications for their audience. Simultaneously, another person described their experience as intimidating when offered a brown envelope while working on a social justice story. Skjerdal (2010) noted that the informal contract between a source and a journalist, characterized by confidentiality and personal interactions, must be addressed to ensure objectivity in journalism.

**Public Relations**

The findings of this study support existing literature on the relationship between public relations and journalistic ethics. As Fredriksson and Johansson (2014) argue, the context in which a journalist engages in public relations work is crucial for understanding its impact on professionalism and identity. The findings of this study suggest that the impact of public relations on journalistic ethics is not straightforward and depends on various factors, including the journalist's ethical hierarchy, the nature of the relationship with PR professionals, and the type of coverage produced.

As one respondent highlighted, the interviewees' responses suggested that public relations can benefit journalism if it does not promote propaganda. However, there can be ethical dilemmas, as PR professionals often expect positive coverage. This is consistent with the findings of Mellado and Humanes (2012) and Thomas and Obermaier (2014), who argued that journalists' autonomy could be influenced by their relationships with PR professionals.

As Weischenberg et al. (2006a) noted, many freelance journalists seek secondary employment in the public relations industry to balance their books, leading to potential conflicts of interest. While no respondent worked in PR, one worked with NGOs to sustain himself financially. The study also highlights the issue of overwhelming press releases and their impact on journalistic ethics in newsrooms. An interviewee's response suggested that newsrooms may
feel compelled to please PR firms by maintaining positive relationships, which could translate into advertising dollars. This reinforces the need for journalists and newsrooms to maintain ethical standards and independence.

**Media ownership (and government control)**

The issue of government ownership and press control in Nigeria has been discussed for decades. According to respondents, the impact of this on journalists and their ethics is a particularly relevant concern, given the political influence on ownership of legacy media (Obalanlege, 2015; Ojo, 2018) and the history of Nigerian journalism, which was “born of anti-colonial protests, baptized in the flood of nationalist propaganda, and matured in party politics” (Golding & Elliot, 1979, p. 21).

These findings indicate that the influence of the government on media ownership in Nigeria is pervasive and complex. Journalistic integrity can be compromised in such a climate, with journalists being pulled between their social responsibility duties and their obligations toward political advocacy for funders (Ojo, 2018). Moreover, the lack of legislation to check government excesses in government-owned media exacerbates this problem (Ali, 2015).

The findings of interviews with freelance journalists with a history in local newsrooms in Nigeria shed light on the impact of government ownership and control on journalistic ethics. These respondents decried their experiences and cited them as significant in moving to freelance work.

**Press freedom**

The findings from the interviews with freelance journalists on their experience with press freedom in Nigeria align with those of previous studies on this topic. As highlighted by Momoh (2002) and Nwanne (2014), the Nigerian government has a history of using legislation
and various means to pressure journalists, leading to a decrease in investigative reporting (Onyenankeya & Salawu, 2019). In addition, Nigeria's ranking of 129th in the latest Press Freedom Index also indicates that press freedom in Nigeria is limited (Reporters Without Borders, 2022).

The interviewees' experiences further illustrate the challenges freelance journalists face in Nigeria. The lack of freedom, threats, and censorship from the government significantly impacts their ability to fulfill their ethical obligations and pursue stories that would benefit Nigerian society. In addition, the fear of reprisals, including arrest and violence, limits their ability to investigate and report critical issues for public knowledge.

In addition, the study shows that the lack of press freedom in Nigeria impacts the stories freelance journalists choose to chase. For instance, the fear of government reprisals limits a participant’s of the LGBT+ community, a marginalized group legally persecuted in Nigeria. This situation has profound implications for the country's human rights and freedom of expression.

Furthermore, the impact of limited press freedom in Nigeria is not limited to freelance journalists but affects the wider Nigerian society. Investigative journalism is crucial for holding those in power accountable and promoting transparency and good governance (McNair, 2009). However, owing to government pressure, the lack of investigative reporting can lead to increased corruption and abuse of power, further limiting the potential for progress in Nigeria (Onyenankeya & Salawu, 2019).

**Patriarchy**

The findings of this study reinforce previous research suggesting that Nigerian newsrooms are patriarchal and have a significant impact on the experiences of women
The results indicate that female journalists in Nigeria face various issues, including misogyny, sexual harassment, and limited opportunities for career advancement. These issues can lead to women leaving traditional newsrooms or even being used as bait for advertisers, reinforcing gendered norms and restricting their ability to report objectively.

The findings also highlight the need for policy changes and the creation of enabling environments to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in Nigerian newsrooms. These changes address gendered norms and biases that limit women's freedom of expression in the newsroom and disproportionately impact their experiences. Moreover, creating an enabling environment can promote diversity and better reflect the variety of sources in news coverage.

Interestingly, one respondent mentioned that the patriarchal nature of newsrooms has positively impacted her ethical disposition. Now a freelancer, she sought stories that diversified coverage and better reflected the diversity of sources, heavily emphasizing female experts and ordinary voices. This suggests that women journalists can use their experiences and skills to challenge gendered norms and biases in newsrooms.

**COVID-19 precarity**

The findings of this study indicate that COVID-19 precarity has had a significant impact on the work of freelance journalists in Nigeria, with many experiencing reduced commissions and struggling to adapt to sudden changes in the industry. This situation has forced freelancers to explore new areas of journalism or alternative sources of income. However, while respondents did not engage in unethical activities, the pandemic affected their willingness to
secure commissions from news outlets. Some were willing to sign NDAs that presented ethical
dilemmas, as they risked their lives, the lives of their sources, and the public.

These findings are consistent with previous research on the impact of COVID-19 on the
media industry worldwide (Boone et al., 2020; Santos, Phillip, & Mare, 2021). For example,
Radcliffe (2021) noted that freelance journalists were disproportionately affected by the
pandemic and likely to experience job loss and precarity. This situation is particularly
concerning, as freelancers often face a challenging ethical balancing act between economic
benefits and their ethical obligations to report the truth and protect their sources.

The findings also highlight the positive impact of support such as emergency grants on
freelance journalists. Additionally, there is a need for more explicit ethical guidelines and
financial support for freelancers facing ethical dilemmas related to COVID-19.

With pandemic-induced precarity still a reality, it is crucial to continue monitoring the
impact of the media industry and provide support and resources for freelancers facing economic
and ethical challenges.
Chapter 7: Conclusion and Implications

This thesis is the maiden scholarly work focusing on freelance journalists in Nigeria, and it delves straight into ethical dilemmas considering the peculiar media landscape in Nigeria. It sought the main actors directly but nuancedly by engaging them via in-depth interviews. It employed thematic analysis to identify the patterns of meaning and recurring themes across a dataset that provide an answer to the question being addressed (Clarke & Braun, 2013).

The results from this research shine a light on the general practices of freelance journalism in Nigeria, but more importantly, how freelancers navigate ethical dilemmas in the course of their duties, seeing as studies have established that freelancers are susceptible to encountering more ethical dilemmas due to their autonomous nature—and the precarity that accompanies it (Hayes & Silke, 2019).

Despite their challenges, respondents remain passionate about their work and the role of journalism as the fourth estate in a democracy. They used journalism to address social problems, focusing on health, mental health, and social justice. The ethics of care helps freelance journalists navigate these ethical dilemmas by considering the specific contextual circumstances of their reporting. Additionally, the social responsibility theory of the press can act as a check against the perceived excesses of freelancers because of the liberty they are expected to enjoy.

The social responsibility theory of the press and the ethics of care are essential frameworks for freelance journalists in Nigeria. Freelance journalists in Nigeria must adhere to codes of ethics and professional conduct, avoid engaging in unethical practices, and consider the specific contextual circumstances of their reporting while navigating ethical dilemmas.
Furthermore, the Nigerian government should address freelance journalists' challenges by creating an environment that enables journalism to thrive.

With this study being a maiden foray into the works of freelance journalists in Nigeria, it could open up a critical discourse. It raises concerns about this model of journalism in the West African country. It also leaves foreign newsrooms and their editors—often the beneficiaries of Nigerian freelance journalists—with an insight into the country’s media landscape, especially concerning ethics.

**Limitations and further research**

This study marks the first attempt to examine freelance journalism in Nigeria. This practice has been prevalent for some time (Vicente, 2013), but there is still much ground to cover regarding examining freelance journalists in academic discourse. They are becoming increasingly important in a country with a youthful population heavily reliant on new technology for news and civic engagement.

In particular, freelance journalists play a central role in providing coverage of the cultural landscape and governmental affairs. This was evident during the #EndSARS, a social justice movement against police brutality, in 2020. More recently, they were crucial to the coverage of the 2023 national elections. Moreover, their work makes economic sense for local and foreign media outlets such as the Washington Post, Al Jazeera, The Guardian, and the New York Times, all of whom used their services to cover these events mentioned above. As such, it is imperative to examine the issues faced by freelance journalists, such as how they respond to general ethical dilemmas facing traditional journalists and those peculiar to journalists operating in a freelance capacity.
Moving forward, a genre-based study focusing on the ethical dilemmas freelance journalists face covering sports, politics, music, and other beats could yield valuable insights. The thesis researcher was a freelance journalist operating out of Nigeria who covered several beats, including sports, politics, tech and business, for outlets such as Al Jazeera, VICE, FourFourTwo UK, the Mail and Guardian. With firsthand experience, he can attest to each genre's peculiar ethical dilemma. It was also evident in some of the responses from participants in this thesis.

In conclusion, much is to be learned about freelance journalists' experiences in Nigeria and how they shape public discourse as the fourth estate of one of the world's largest democracies.
References


Vicente, P. N. (2013). Foreign correspondence from sub-Saharan Africa: An evolving communicational paradigm shift.


Appendix A

Email Script

Dear Participant,

I hope this email finds you well. This is a letter of request for your participation in a research project to better understand the ethical dilemmas Nigerian freelance journalists face. This research is part of a graduate thesis conducted by Tolulope Olasoji, a West Virginia University Reed College of Media student. The project aims to gain insight into how certain factors influence Nigerian freelance journalists and make them aware of those factors.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to participate in an in-depth interview over video via Zoom. Participation in this project will take approximately 20 minutes to an hour. To participate, you must be a Nigerian freelance journalist who has covered stories in Nigeria.

During the interview, you will be asked questions about your experience as, first, a Nigerian journalist generally, especially if you have worked in a conventional newsroom before going freelance. Furthermore, your experience as a freelance journalist covering stories across Nigeria would be asked of you. And questions bordering on ethics, not necessarily explicit, would be asked. On specific occasions, how your ethical disposition is affected by certain factors, however unique they are to the climate in Nigeria. Lastly, you’ll share what, in your opinion, has affected your ethical disposition the most.

Your involvement in this project will be kept as confidential as legally possible, and your name will not be reported or attached to the research project in any way. Additionally, the recording will be erased as soon as it has been transcribed. Your participation is entirely voluntary. If you feel uncomfortable answering a question at any time, you may ask to skip it. WVU’s Institutional Review Board acknowledgement of this project is on file.

The interview will be recorded to ensure that nothing is missed. The recording will be transcribed. The information you and the other people we interview will be gathered and analyzed for common themes across interviewees. Again, any research write-ups will not include names or other personally identifiable information.

To indicate an interest in participating in this research project, please respond to this email from Tolulope Olasoji at too00003@mix.wvu.edu. For any questions about this research project, please contact Tolulope Olasoji at +1 (973) 908-1094 or by e-mail at too00003@mix.wvu.edu or Stephen Urbanski by email at steve.urbanski@mail.wvu.edu, the principal investigator. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the WVU Office of Human Research Protection by phone at 304-293-7073 or by email at IRB@mail.wvu.edu.
I hope you will participate in this research project, as it could help us better understand how Nigerian freelance journalists navigate ethical dilemmas and improve their awareness of them as they go about their journalistic duties. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Tolulope Olasoji
Appendix B

Informed Consent

Background/Purpose of the research: This interview will gather information for a graduate thesis about the ethical dilemmas faced by Nigerian freelance journalists. The goal of the project is to gain insight into the factors that influence their ethical decisions.

What you will do in this research: If you volunteer, you will be asked to participate in a one-on-one in-depth interview in which you will be asked a series of questions. These questions will ask about your experience as a freelance journalist including topics ranging from Brown Envelope Syndrome (BES), patriarchy, ownership and government control, Covid-19 precarity, press freedom and public relations, as well as how these realities affect your ethical disposition. With your permission, the interview will be recorded to best capture the discussion. You will not be asked to state your name on the recording.

Time required: The interview will take approximately 30 minutes to one hour

Risks/Discomforts: While there is minimal risk, it is possible that thinking or talking about ethical dilemmas could bring up difficult memories that may make you feel uncomfortable or upset. If at any time you wish to skip a question or end the interview, you may do so.

Benefits: This is a chance for you to describe your unique experiences while faced with ethical dilemmas as a Nigerian freelance journalist. Your participation can contribute to knowledge which improves other freelancers’ stances on ethics.

Confidentiality: Your responses in the interview will be kept confidential by the researcher. At no time will your actual identity be revealed by the researcher or anybody outside the interview. Your identity will not be attached to the transcription of the interview. The recording will be erased as soon as it has been transcribed. The transcript, without your name attached, will be kept indefinitely. The data you give us will be used for a graduate thesis project. Your name or information that would identify you will not be used in any publications or presentations.

Participation and Withdrawal: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled at any time. You may withdraw by informing the interviewer you no longer wish to participate (at which point, no additional questions will be asked of you). Alternatively, you may skip any question during the interview, but continue to participate in the rest of the study.

To Contact the Researchers: If you have questions or concerns about this research, please contact Tolulope Olasoji at +1 (973) 908-1094 or too00003@mix.wvu.edu.
Who to contact about your rights in this research, for questions, concerns, suggestions, or complaints that are not being addressed by the researcher, or research-related harm: Research Compliance Administration at West Virginia University, 886 Chestnut Ridge Road, Morgantown, WV 26506; phone: (304) 293-7073.

Agreement: The nature and purpose of this research have been sufficiently explained and I agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time without incurring any penalty.

Name (print): _________________________________________________________

Signature: ____________________________ Date: ______________________
Appendix C

Research Questions

RQ1: What factors influence Nigerian freelance journalists’ application of ethics?

RQ2: How does the journalism landscape in Nigeria influence freelance journalists?

Research Instrument: Interview Script

Brief Introduction
Thank you so much for agreeing to meet with me today. As discussed via email, this research aims to better understand the ethical dilemmas faced by Nigerian freelance journalists. Additionally, the hope is that this research will increase the journalists’ consciousness of their ethical disposition to improve their role as the fourth estate in democracy. I appreciate the time you took to participate in this study.

Before we begin, I want to remind you that this interview will be recorded and transcribed for research purposes. Do you consent to be recorded?

Wait for confirmation

Okay, great. We’ll get started then.

Start recording

Opening Question

First, we will start with a few opening and introductory questions to get warmed up.

[Demographic]: Could you tell me how you got your start as a journalist?
    Probe: Alright. Could you tell me about your transition into freelance journalism?
    Probe: How long have you been a freelance journalist?

Introductory Questions

[Background]: What are some of the best things about practicing journalism in Nigeria?
    Probe: Could you tell me a bit about these things?

[Background]: What are some challenging things about journalism here?
    Probe: Could you tell me more about these challenges?

Transition Questions
That’s great! Now we will transition to discussing questions more central to the topic, Nigerian freelancers and the ethical dilemmas they face.

[Topic Introduction]: Journalism in Nigeria has been riddled with ethical concerns, which are considered to weigh on the quality of journalistic work produced in the country. What, in your opinion, would be considered ethical journalism?

Probe: Could you tell me a bit more about this?

Probe: What made these challenges so tricky?

[Topic Introduction]: Could you tell me a little about your experience with ethics as a freelance journalist in the country?

Probe: Have you ever had to reconsider your ethical stance?

[Topic Introduction and Stakeholders]: As a freelance journalist, when were you in a situation that made you question your ethics?

Probe: How did you navigate it?

Probe: What has that taught you?

Key Questions

You’re doing an excellent job responding to and discussing these complex topics. We will now move into the most detailed part of the interview. Our discussion will continue to expand upon ethical dilemmas and specific factors that might affect them. As a reminder, you may skip a question or completely end the interview at any time. Are you ready to proceed?

Wait for confirmation—Okay, excellent.

[Press Freedom]: On April 26, 2020, the Reporters without Borders World Press Freedom Index ranked Nigeria 115th out of 180 countries surveyed. How safe of space do you think Nigeria is for freelance journalists like yourself?

Probe: How impactful is the reality of threats and censorship from the government on your ethical disposition as a freelance journalist? (General)

Prompt: Would you have carried out some journalistic assignments differently if Nigeria was considered a safer climate for freelance journalists?

Follow-up: Could you give an example of one such case?

[Ownership and Government Control]: As ownership of media space is constantly subjected to government control or political influence, how much of a role did this play in your decision to go freelance?

Probe: Could you tell me a bit more about your experience?

Follow-up: Does it still wield influence on your ethical dispositions?

Probe: Do you see a reason why some journalists would go freelance because of this?

Follow-up: Does it still wield some sort of influence on their ethical dispositions?
[PR]: Could you share your thoughts on whether working with a public relations firm affects a freelance journalist’s ethical disposition?

Probe: In what ways do you see it affecting them while making ethical decisions?
Follow-up: What has been your relationship with PR firms as a freelance journalist?
Follow-up: How often do you use PR materials made available by PR firms?
Probe: Would you say it had an effect on your work as a freelance journalist?

If Freelancer has no relationship: do you think this is due to how you built your ethical hierarchy?
Follow-up: Do you see this as an issue for other freelance journalists?

[Brown Envelope Syndrome]: Could you share your thoughts on whether being offered freebies or monetary favors by a source(s) or anyone associated with a story affects a freelance journalist’s ethical disposition?

Probe: In your experience, how frequently does this happen?
Probe: Do you have experience with this, and could you elaborate a bit on this experience?

[Patriarchy]:

Female Journalist: How patriarchal would you say the Nigerian newsroom is?
Probe: Could you shed some light on this?
Prompt: How much of it do you face as a freelance journalist?
Follow-up: Does being a female freelance journalist operating in a patriarchal society affect your ethical disposition or skew objectivity?
Follow-up: Would you say it’s enough to leave the conventional newsroom and settle for freelance roles?

Male Journalist: How patriarchal would you say the Nigerian newsroom is?
Probe: Could you shed some light on this?
Prompt: Do you think a patriarchal setup can influence the decision of female journalists to go freelance?
Follow-up: How much can it affect their ethical disposition or skew objectivity? (in the terms of the types of stories they are allowed to tell or the ones they choose to tell).
Probe: How much better is it to be a female freelance journalist?

[Covid-19 precarity]: Can you share your experience with the COVID-19 pandemic’s effect on your income as a freelance journalist?
**Probe:** How much has this encouraged you to take on tasks you’d normally not do?

**Follow-up:** How unethical/ethical would you consider these tasks?

Prompt: Could you tell me what these tasks are?

**Follow-up:** Tell me a time you had to renegotiate your ethical hierarchy based on the problem introduced by the pandemic.

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**Closing Questions**

*Thank you so much for taking the time to meet with me today. We are just about finished with the interview. Before we wrap up, I want to ask a few closing questions.*

**[Final Thoughts]:** Is there anything else you would like to add that was not covered in the interview?

**[Response Confirmation]:** Do you feel your responses accurately reflect your feelings towards the topic?

**[Expanding the Sample]:** Lastly, are you aware of any other Nigerian freelance journalists who may be interested in participating in this research?

*Great! Thank you so much for meeting with me today. Your responses will significantly help and contribute to developing this thesis and hopefully will further the understanding of ethical dilemmas Nigerian freelancers face. I will now stop the recording.*