

## Legal and extra legal issues in journalism practice in Nigeria

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**Abstract** - This research investigates the impediments faced by Nigerian journalists in upholding press freedom. Employing a mixed-methods approach that incorporates scholarly literature, legal documents, and media reports, the study identifies both legal and extra-legal challenges journalists encounter. Hinge on Libertarian Media Theory, these challenges include restrictive legislation, political influence, economic hardship, societal prejudices, safety concerns, self-censorship, and threats to media autonomy. Methodologically, the paper used a mixed-methods approach, combining analysis of scholarly literature, legal documents, and media reports with in-depth interviews with NUJ members. The interviews explored journalists' experiences with legal and extra-legal challenges, and the data were analyzed to identify themes. The research also explores the Nigerian Union of Journalists' (NUJ) role in supporting journalists and press freedom. Findings from in-depth interviews with NUJ members reveal the significant impact of these constraints on media professionals. The study concludes with a call for increased engagement and proactive measures to address the systemic issues undermining press freedom in Nigeria. Among the recommendations, the research emphasizes the need for legislative reforms to revise or repeal outdated laws that restrict free expression. This effort should involve collaboration between government officials, legal experts, and civil society organizations to ensure alignment with international standards.

**Keywords:** document analysis; journalism; legal document; professionalism; Nigerian media

### I. INTRODUCTION

Journalism, as a vital social institution, relies on freedom to fulfill its role effectively within society. It serves as a watchdog, constantly providing information, education, and socialization. Soeze (2005) emphasizes the responsibility of the media to keep the public informed about government activities and to ensure that the government is aware of public sentiment. However, to carry out these functions successfully, press freedom is essential.

According to Ogunkwo (1999) cited in Suntai and Vakkai (2014), the media gathers, analyses, and disseminates news and information through various mediums to a diverse audience. Journalism also shapes public discourse, interprets issues, and advocates for the marginalized (Sambe, 2008). Despite its importance, Nigerian journalism has long struggled for

freedom. Aliede (2003) traces this struggle back to the inception of modern journalism in Nigeria in 1859, citing government control as a significant obstacle.

Uche (1989) describes the relationship between the media and the government as contentious, hindering the free flow of information. Journalists often face risks, including harassment, imprisonment, and even violence, in their pursuit of accurate reporting (Ezeah et al, 2020). Malayo (2012) underscores the urgent need for legislation guaranteeing press freedom, recognizing its positive impact on society.

Historically, the Nigerian mass media has faced numerous legal and extra-legal challenges that impede journalistic freedom and ethical practice (Henry & Philip, 2022; Holloway, 2014; Lukács, 2021; Malemi, 2017; Marvin, 2015; Thomson, 2018; Ward, 2018). Legal challenges in Nigeria's media landscape, including restrictive laws, defamation statutes, and government censorship, hinder journalists' ability to report freely and hold power accountable (Henry & Philip, 2022; Lukács, 2021; Thomson, 2018). Conversely, extra-legal hurdles such as threats, intimidation, and violence against journalists, economic pressures, and editorial interference also impede media freedom (Malemi, 2017; Nyitse et al, 2023).

These challenges not only affect individual journalists but also undermine the broader functioning of a free and independent media (Marvin, 2015; Pew Research Americans and Cyber Security, 2020). The Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) plays a crucial role in advocating for press freedom, protecting journalists' rights, and addressing these challenges (Nyitse *et al.*, 2023). Evaluating NUJ's effectiveness in tackling these issues is vital for assessing media freedom and ethical journalism in Nigeria.

This study aims to comprehensively understand the legal and extra-legal challenges confronting Nigerian journalists by examining NUJ's practices. Employing a mixed-methods approach involving secondary data analysis and in-depth interviews with NUJ members, the research seeks to provide insights into the state of media freedom and NUJ's efficacy in upholding ethical journalism principles in Nigeria. The findings are expected to inform policymakers, media practitioners, and the public about the status of media freedom and the role of NUJ in Nigeria.

Despite its critical role in society, journalism in Nigeria has long grappled with challenges, notably concerning press freedom. Since the inception of modern journalism in 1859, the Nigerian media has struggled to achieve the necessary freedoms to fulfill its societal obligations due to government control (Aliede, 2003), leading to a tense relationship between journalists and the authorities (Uche, 1989).

These challenges, both legal and extra-legal, have hindered journalists' freedom and ethical practice. Therefore, the research problem seeks to comprehensively examine these obstacles faced by Nigerian journalists in their pursuit of press freedom and ethical standards. By analyzing the role and effectiveness of the Nigeria Union of Journalists, this study aims to provide valuable insights for policymakers, media practitioners, and the public, enhancing understanding of the state of media freedom and ethical journalism in Nigeria.

The primary objectives of the study are to (1) delineate the scope of legal and extra-legal challenges encountered by media professionals in Nigeria. (2) Understand the impact of these challenges on journalistic freedom. (3) Assess the efficacy of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) in addressing these challenges

Journalism encompasses the collection, evaluation, creation, and presentation of news and information, distinguishing itself through specific characteristics and practices that render it vital to democratic societies. History demonstrates that more democratic societies tend to possess greater access to news and information (American Press Institute).

At its core, journalism involves the gathering, selection, and processing of information or ideas for dissemination to the public, typically through print or broadcast channels (Akpan & Oloke, 2017; see Igbashangev, 2024). As noted by Ekhareafu *et al.* (cited in Oluniyi, 2020), the power of journalism lies in its potential to either uplift or degrade society, depending on its usage. When employed to advocate for societal progress, journalism may challenge individuals and systems resistant to change. However, when it loses its transformative and critical capacity, it can devolve into a tool for propaganda and uncritical praise (Oluniyi, 2020).

During General Sani Abacha's tenure in Nigeria, the Freedom of Information (FOI) Bill was initially introduced. Various organizations, including the Media Rights Agenda (MDA), Civil Liberties Organization (CLO), and Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), played active roles in advocating for the passage of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Finally, on May 28, 2011, President Goodluck Jonathan signed the Freedom of Information Act into law. Apart from establishing procedures for achieving its objectives, the FOIA also safeguards public records and information, enhances public access to certain government information, and provides protection for serving public officials who appropriately disclose specific categories of official information.

Legal issues refer to challenges or obstacles faced by journalists that are directly related to laws, regulations, and legal actions that inhibit the freedom of the press. These issues can include restrictive media laws, defamation laws, government censorship, and other legal constraints that restrict journalists' ability to report freely and objectively (Thomson, 2018, Waisbord (2019).

On the other hand, non-legal or extra-legal issues encompass a broader range of factors that go beyond legal frameworks and include political interference, economic coercion, societal prejudices, threats, intimidation, violence against media professionals, and editorial interference. These extra-legal pressures exert significant influence on the work of journalists and can impede their ability to operate independently and ethically (Marvin, 2015; Holloway, 2016; Malemi, 2017; Lukács, 2021).

The literature on the challenges faced by Nigerian journalists in their pursuit of journalistic freedom and ethical practices highlights the significant impact of legal and extra-legal constraints on press freedom and media independence.

Scholars such as Stavelin (2014) and Burum (2016) have emphasized the role of restrictive media laws, defamation laws, and government censorship as key legal challenges that impede journalists' ability to report freely and hold power to account.

Moreover, researchers like Nnadozie (2013) and Hadland (2015) have explored the extra-legal pressures faced by media professionals in Nigeria, including threats, intimidation, and violence against journalists, economic pressures, and editorial interference. These factors not only affect individual journalists but also have broader implications for the functioning of a free and independent media [Nnadozie, 2013; Hadland, 2015].

The practice of journalism involves gathering, verifying, reporting, and analyzing information on current events, trends, issues, and people, with the aim of preparing and disseminating news to the public. Different societies may have varying approaches to journalism due to the influence of political philosophies prevalent in those societies. As noted by Siebert et al (1956) in their *Four Theories of the Press*, the structure and aesthetics of a country's media often mirror the ruling authority's ideology, whether it be authoritarian, libertarian, Soviet-Communist, or based on social responsibility.

However, despite the crucial role of journalism in providing information to the public, journalists often face risks and dangers in their line of work. According to a report by Article 19 (2020), a global human rights organization, 60 Nigerian journalists were attacked between January 2020 and October 2020. Among these attacks, three journalists lost their lives, with one killed by security personnel during a protest in Abuja and the other two by unidentified assailants in Adamawa and Nasarawa. Additionally, 34 journalists were assaulted in various regions, including the Federal Capital Territory, Lagos, Ondo, Osun, Abia, Anambra, Bauchi, and Edo, during the coverage of the nationwide #ENDSARS anti-police brutality protests in October. Some journalists were also unjustly detained, with six held for a few days before being released, while six others were accused of terrorism or cybercrime when they appeared in court. Fatou Jagne Senghore, the Regional Director of Article 19 West Africa, criticized the authorities for failing to adequately protect journalists from such attacks.

Media regulation traces its origins back to the introduction of the printing press for book production in Western Europe during the mid-15th century. With the proliferation of printed materials, both religious institutions and the state took interest in controlling the content being

disseminated. This led to the requirement of obtaining licenses or church approval before engaging in printing activities, along with regulations on the export and import of books.

The emergence of public broadcasting from the 1920s onwards saw media regulation become more formalized through national laws, often influenced by international agreements related to technical requirements like radio frequency allocation. Regulation served various interests including those of the state, military, and economic considerations. State bodies or public monopolies frequently exercised control, while in some cases; powerful governmental bodies such as the Federal Communication Commission in the United States oversaw regulation. Additionally, the establishment of cinema film during the early 20th century brought about local regulations primarily concerning safety (such as fire safety) and content (moral standards).

Throughout history, religious institutions have also played a role in regulating speech and expression in the media. Different religious beliefs have imposed regulations on free speech, setting limitations on expression. For instance, in Christianity, there are constraints on what can be expressed based on religious doctrines (Newth, 2001).

The regulation of freedom of expression and the press in Nigeria is governed by various laws and provisions outlined in the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria. While Section 39(1) guarantee these rights, Sections 39(2) and (3) allow for restrictions in certain circumstances deemed justifiable in a democratic society. These restrictions include preventing the disclosure of confidential information, imposing limitations on government officials, and safeguarding national security interests (Malemi, 2009).

To regulate media activities further, several laws and regulations have been enacted:

**The Nigerian Constitution:** While guaranteeing freedom of expression, it also imposes restrictions on press freedom, such as requiring presidential authorization for owning broadcasting stations and prohibiting the publication of certain information.

**Official Secrets Act:** Prohibits the disclosure of confidential information related to defence establishments and other protected areas.

**Law of Defamation:** Protects individuals from defamatory statements and publications.

**Law of Sedition:** Prohibits seditious acts and publications.

**Law of Contempt:** Prevents interference with legal proceedings or disrespect towards the administration of justice.

**Obscene and Harmful Publication Laws:** Prohibits the publication of immoral or harmful content.

**Copyright Act:** Protects intellectual property rights and prevents infringement of copyrighted works.

**Advertising Law:** Regulates advertising practices and ethics.

**The Nigerian Press Council Act:** Establishes the Nigerian Press Council to regulate media conduct and uphold ethical standards.

**The National Broadcasting Commission Act:** Regulates radio and television broadcasting activities.

**Nigerian Communications Commission Act:** Regulates telecommunications services and activities.

**Printing Presses Regulation Law:** Controls the printing and publication of printed materials.

**Publication Law:** Imposes restrictions on publications and serves as a form of prior restraint.

**The Nigerian Television Authority Act and The Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria Act:** Regulate government-owned media.

**Professional and Non-Statutory Bodies:** Bodies like the Nigerian Union of Journalists, Nigerian Guild of Editors, and Newspapers Proprietors Association of Nigeria enforce professional ethics and codes of conduct.

**Beat-Based Associations:** Associations focused on specific journalism sectors provide informal regulation.

**Individual Self-Regulation:** Media organizations implement self-regulatory measures to align with organizational policies.

Despite these regulations, journalism in Nigeria faces challenges, including attacks on journalists. A report by Article 19 highlighted attacks on journalists in 2020, including assaults, killings, and arbitrary arrests, often in connection with their coverage of events such as the #ENDSARS protests (Article 19, 2020).

Odugbemi and Norris (2010) highlighted several challenges faced by journalists, including low professional standards, limited financial resources, inadequate technical skills, fragmented legal frameworks, and an undemocratic political system. Additionally, journalists may encounter risks associated with patronage, where media outlets operate within political constraints or are influenced by private interests.

In Nigeria, journalism faces numerous challenges, including:

(1) **Digital Age:** The emergence of citizen journalism blurs the distinction between professional journalists and ordinary citizens who produce news content. This trend threatens traditional journalism, leading to fears of job loss among professionals.

(2) **Global Challenges:** Media outlets often prioritize coverage of global challenges such as climate change and cultural conflicts, reflecting the interests of elites who control media ownership and influence economic survival.

(3) **Ownership Patterns:** Media ownership by business moguls may hinder the pursuit of development journalism, as editors and reporters may align with the interests of publishers to secure their jobs.

(4) **Lack of Modern Equipment:** Insufficient resources and outdated equipment limit journalists' ability to reach marginalized communities and report on their issues effectively. Control of media by those who own production means exacerbates this problem.

(5) **Deadline Pressure:** Journalists' focus on meeting deadlines and securing by-lines often prioritizes news that maintains the status quo and serves elite interests. This emphasis on prominence sidelines developmental issues and concerns of ordinary people.

Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort to improve professional standards, invest in training and technology, diversify media ownership, and prioritize coverage of developmental issues and marginalized communities. By overcoming these obstacles, journalists can better fulfill their role as watchdogs of society and advocates for positive change.

Libertarian media theory, endorsed by influential figures such as Lao Tzu (Laozi, 2003; see Ames & Kaltenmark (2024), John Locke (1968), John Milton (2003), John Stuart Mill (1944), and Thomas Jefferson (1776; see Ellis, 2024) provide the foundation for examining press freedom and media independence. According to this theory, the press serves various functions, including informing, entertaining, selling, and uncovering the truth, with individuals being able to publish their ideas and opinions without censorship or licensing restrictions, as long as they adhere to ethical standards.

Key principles of Libertarian media theory include:

(1) **Absence of Censorship:** Publications should not be subject to censorship, allowing for the free flow of ideas and information.

(2) **No Licensing Requirements:** there should be any licensing requirements for publications, ensuring unfettered access to the media.

(3) **Unrestricted Data Collection:** Data collection should not be limited by legal constraints, allowing journalists to gather information freely.

(4) **Journalistic Independence:** Journalists should operate independently of their employers or organizations, ensuring unbiased reporting.

In line with these principles, the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) underscores the importance of press freedom and the right to express information. The media play a crucial role in providing comprehensive information and viewpoints to the public, enabling individuals to make informed decisions.

Moreover, Libertarian media theory emphasizes the absence of government control over the media, allowing journalists to interpret information freely and select content based on its



credibility and relevance. Applying Libertarian media theory to the study highlights the significance of advocating for journalists' rights and protecting media independence against legal and extra-legal challenges. By examining these issues within the framework of Libertarian principles, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of media freedom and ethical journalism practices in Nigeria.

Hassan et al (2024) explore the complex relationship between journalism and social-political conflicts, with a focus on Nigeria. The study identifies significant challenges for journalists, such as physical dangers, ethical dilemmas, and economic pressures that shape media narratives. Grounded in Peace Journalism principles, the research emphasizes the need for accuracy, fairness, and dialogue. The findings reveal that these conflicts lead to shifts in the media landscape, including increased media polarization and the rise of citizen journalism. The study concludes with recommendations to address these challenges, including safeguarding press freedom, promoting ethical reporting, and investing in journalist training.

Acheampong (2024a) investigates the impact of social media on mainstream journalism in Ghana. Through interviews with 200 journalists in the Sunyani Municipality, the study finds that while social media positively influence journalism, most respondents also perceive negative impacts. The research highlights the dual nature of social media's effect, advocating for careful use by journalists to maintain public trust. Acheampong (2024b) examines the influence of 'Brown Envelope Journalism' on news coverage in Ghana. Surveying 300 journalists, the study reveals that a majority believe this practice leads to biased reporting, either underreporting or overemphasizing certain issues. The research underscores the need for better compensation and ethics training for journalists to combat this problem and restore public confidence in the media.

Amos and Joseph (2023) discuss the pivotal role of information in various fields and the implications of media ownership on news production. The study highlights how the profitability and political interests of owning media shape the characteristics of news media ownership. The research emphasizes that in recent years, Western media systems have seen a shift towards diverse ownership motives as economic benefits of news production decline.

These studies collectively shed light on the evolving challenges and dynamics within journalism, particularly in relation to media ethics, ownership, and the impact of social media, providing a comprehensive view of contemporary media landscapes in different contexts.

Akinfeleye (2009) discusses the challenges facing the newspaper industry in Nigeria, particularly focusing on the declining readership. This *Day Newspaper* article highlights the struggle traditional media faces in the digital age. Aliede (2003) examines the media consumption habits of different demographics in Nigeria, providing insight into how urban and rural populations engage with media differently. This is a scholarly article published in "*The Nigerian Journal of Communication*."

Aliede (2007) evaluates the impact of the Nigerian Federal Government's decision to withdraw from newspaper ownership, discussing the implications for national development. The work is part of a larger volume on communication for sustainable human development.

Daramola et al (2008) proposes a grid-based framework for pervasive healthcare in developing nations using wireless sensor networks. This paper is likely technical, published in the "*Asian Journal of Information Technology*."

Daranda (2008) focuses on public petitions and investigations within Nigeria, published by Lethal Publications. This book appears to address procedural and legislative aspects of governance.

Dare (2010) analyses the role of citizen journalism in Nigeria, using Sahara Reporters as a case study. This is a scholarly examination of new media's influence, published by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.

Edwards (1998) was exploring the uses and gratifications of rap music among African American teenagers. This research would likely delve into cultural studies and media effects.

McQuail (2005) studies a comprehensive overview of mass communication theory, now in its 5th edition. McQuail's work is a foundational text in media studies, providing theoretical frameworks for understanding media's role in society.

Ekenyere (2009) discusses the logistics and challenges involved in distributing newspapers and magazines in Nigeria. This online source addresses a key aspect of the media business in Nigeria.

Ekwehe (1989) chronicles the evolution of print media in Africa, providing historical context for mass communication in Nigeria. This book chapter is part of a collection on mass communication. McBride et al (1980) known as the "MacBride Report," this UNESCO publication discusses the challenges and needs for a new world communication order. It's a seminal work in media development and communication rights.

Ndolo (2005) examines the relationship between mass media systems and society in Nigeria, focusing on how media influences social dynamics. This is likely a textbook or reference work. Nielson (2015) provides comparative data on newspaper and magazine readership in Nigeria, based on Nielson's National Readership Survey. This is an important reference for understanding media consumption patterns. Okunna (1999) review an introductory text on mass communication, likely used in Nigerian universities for foundational courses in the field.

Onanuga (2014) discusses the challenges facing news magazines in Nigeria, particularly their endangered status in the digital age. This is an online article that reflects concerns about the future of traditional media. Oyewole (2014) covers stakeholder concerns about declining magazine readership in Nigeria. This is a news article that provides industry perspectives on the issue. Randle (2001) offers a historical analysis of how new mass media have affected magazine publishing throughout the 20th century. This peer-reviewed journal article would be useful for understanding media evolution and adaptation.

## **2. METHOD**

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, incorporating secondary data analysis from scholarly literature, legal documents, and media reports. A thorough content analysis of these secondary sources was conducted to identify and categorize instances where legal and extra-legal challenges had emerged. In addition, in-depth interviews with NUJ members were conducted, and the data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes related to legal and extra-legal challenges faced by Nigerian journalists. Ryan and Bernard (2003) stated that themes should be derived from the data and receive meaning from connections to expressions within the sample. The steps of Braun and Clarke (2006) were modified for use within the analysis. An inductive process was used to analyze and code the data. The integration of findings from secondary data analysis and thematic analysis of interviews aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issues and evaluate the role of NUJ in mitigating these challenges.

### **2.1 Participants**

The interview participants in the study on the challenges faced by Nigerian journalists are selected from the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ). A total of five NUJ members in Kaduna branch were chosen to participate in the interviews. This number was selected to ensure a diverse range of perspectives and experiences within the journalism profession in Nigeria while also allowing for in-depth insights from a manageable sample size of NUJ members.

## **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **3.1 Theme 1: Legal Constraints**

The findings from the interviews revealed that media professionals in Nigeria face considerable challenges due to legal constraints. These constraints encompass a range of issues including restrictive laws, regulations, and legal actions that inhibit the freedom of the press. The interviews underscored how media professionals in Nigeria grapple with a plethora of legal challenges that stifle their ability to report freely and objectively. One significant issue highlighted was the existence of archaic laws that are often wielded as tools to silence dissenting voices. "One of the interviewees expressed frustration with the legal environment, stating, *'We often struggle with old laws that are used to quiet people who disagree and limit our ability to report fairly.'*" Another journalist recounted a specific incident, saying, *'A colleague of mine faced a defamation lawsuit simply for*

*exposing corruption within a government agency*". It's a clear example of how these laws are weaponized against journalists.

### **3.2 Theme 2: Extra-legal Pressures**

The interviews shed light on the pervasive influence of extra-legal pressures on media professionals in Nigeria. Beyond legal frameworks, factors such as political interference, economic coercion, and societal prejudices exert significant influence on the work of journalists. Beyond legal constraints, media professionals in Nigeria confront a host of extra-legal pressures that impede their work. Political interference emerged as a pervasive challenge, with journalists facing coercion from political actors to toe the official line or refrain from scrutinizing government actions. Economic pressures also feature prominently, with media organizations often beholden to powerful interests that dictate editorial content or withhold advertising revenue as a means of exerting control. Additionally, societal prejudices and cultural norms pose barriers to balanced reporting, particularly on sensitive issues such as religion or ethnicity. Interviewees lamented the pervasive influence of tribalism and nepotism in shaping media narratives, undermining efforts to uphold journalistic integrity.

An interviewee highlighted the influence of political interference, stating, *'Political interests often dictate what can or cannot be reported, leading to self-censorship among journalists to avoid repercussions.'* Regarding economic pressures, another journalist noted, *"Media organizations often find themselves beholden to powerful interests that dictate editorial content or withhold advertising revenue, compromising our independence."*

### **3.3 Theme 3: Safety and Security**

Safety and security emerged as a critical theme in the findings, underscoring the physical risks and threats faced by media professionals in Nigeria. Journalists frequently encounter intimidation, harassment, and violence while carrying out their duties.

Safety concerns were underscored by one interviewee who said, *'We operate in an environment where journalists are routinely targeted, both verbally and physically, for exposing corruption or criticizing powerful figures.'* Another journalist shared a harrowing experience, stating, *"I have personally received threats of violence for investigating sensitive topics. It's a constant fear we live with."*

### **3.4 Theme 4: Self-Censorship**

The findings from the interviews illuminated the pervasive influence of legal and extra-legal challenges on media professionals' propensity for self-censorship. One interviewee candidly admitted, *"The fear of legal repercussions or violent reprisals often leads us to second-guess our reporting and avoid sensitive topics altogether."* Another journalist echoed this sentiment, stating, *"We constantly find ourselves walking a tightrope between journalistic integrity and self-preservation. It's disheartening to see important stories left untold due to fear of backlash."*

### **3.5 Theme 5: Media Independence**

The impact of challenges on media independence emerged as a significant concern among interviewees. Many lamented the erosion of autonomy and editorial freedom within media organizations, attributing it to external pressures exerted by political, economic, and social forces. *"Media houses are increasingly becoming mouthpieces for vested interests, compromising their role as watchdogs of society,"* remarked one journalist. Another interviewee voiced apprehension, saying, *"The dwindling financial viability of independent media outlets further exacerbates our vulnerability to external influence."*

### **3.6 Theme 6: Public Access to Information**

The implications of challenges on public access to information were underscored by interviewees, who highlighted the detrimental effects of censorship and information control. *"The public's right to know is systematically undermined when journalists are coerced into self-censorship,"* noted one respondent. Another journalist expressed concern about the proliferation of misinformation and propaganda in the absence of robust journalistic scrutiny, stating, *"When people don't have free and varied access to information without censorship, they can't get the important knowledge they need to make good choices"*

### **3.7 Theme 7: Advocacy and Legal Support**

NUJ's role in advocating for press freedom and providing legal support to media professionals was a prominent focus in the interviews. Many interviewees commended NUJ for its proactive



stance in defending the rights of journalists and pushing back against attempts to curtail press freedom. *"NUJ has been instrumental in raising awareness about the challenges faced by media professionals and lobbying for legislative reforms to safeguard press freedom,"* remarked one respondent. Another journalist highlighted NUJ's role in providing legal aid and representation to journalists facing legal threats or harassment, stating, *"NUJ's legal support services have been a lifeline for journalists navigating the complex legal landscape."*

### **3.8 Theme 8: Training and Capacity Building**

NUJ's initiatives to enhance the capacity and skills of journalists in confronting legal and extra-legal challenges were widely acknowledged by interviewees. Training workshops, seminars, and capacity-building programs organized by NUJ were cited as valuable resources for journalists seeking to navigate the intricacies of media law and ethics. *"NUJ's training programs have equipped journalists with the knowledge and tools needed to assert their rights and uphold professional standards in the face of adversity,"* expressed one interviewee. Another journalist praised NUJ's efforts in fostering a culture of ethical journalism, stating, *"NUJ's emphasis on ethical conduct and responsible reporting has been instrumental in enhancing the credibility and integrity of the profession."*

### **3.9 Theme 9: Collaborative Networks**

NUJ's collaborative efforts with other stakeholders, organizations, and international bodies to address challenges faced by media professionals were highlighted in the interviews. Collaborative initiatives such as joint advocacy campaigns, partnerships with civil society organizations, and engagement with international bodies underscored NUJ's commitment to simplifying the voices of journalists and defending press freedom on a broader scale. *"NUJ's collaborative networks have enabled journalists to leverage collective strength and resources in confronting common challenges,"* noted one respondent. Another journalist emphasized the importance of solidarity within the journalism community, stating, *"NUJ working together with other groups has made us stronger as a team and helped us stand together against efforts to silence or control the media".*

### **3.2 Discussion**

The study reveals various findings related to the challenges faced by media professionals in Nigeria, particularly focusing on legal and extra-legal constraints. These challenges include restrictive laws, political interference, economic pressures, societal prejudices, safety concerns, self-censorship, and threats to media independence.

Legal constraints, such as archaic laws used to silence dissenting voices and restrict objective reporting, hinder press freedom (Henry & Philip, 2022; Thomson, 2018). Extra-legal pressures, including political interference and economic coercion, also impede journalists' work by influencing editorial content and compromising independence (Malemi, 2017; Nyitse et al, 2023).

The implications of these challenges on public access to information are significant, as censorship and self-censorship limit the public's right to know and access diverse, uncensored information (Thomson, 2018; Lukács, 2021). The erosion of media independence further exacerbates vulnerabilities to external influences, impacting the role of media as watchdogs of society (Marvin, 2015; Pew Research Americans and Cyber Security, 2020).

In response to these challenges, the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) has taken proactive steps to enhance journalists' capacity and skills in confronting legal and extra-legal pressures. NUJ's training programs and collaborative networks with other stakeholders and international bodies have been instrumental in advocating for press freedom and providing legal support to media professionals [Nyitse et al., 2023; Ward, 2018].

Hence the findings underscore the complex landscape in which Nigerian journalists operate, facing a multitude of challenges that require concerted efforts from both media professionals and supportive organizations like NUJ to safeguard press freedom and uphold journalistic integrity.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

The findings of this study shed light on the formidable challenges confronting media professionals in Nigeria's media landscape, encompassing legal constraints, extra-legal pressures,

self-censorship, and compromised media independence. The pervasive influence of restrictive laws, political interference, economic coercion, and societal prejudices creates a hostile environment for press freedom, undermining the ability of journalists to report freely and objectively. The prevalence of self-censorship underscores the chilling effect of these challenges on media independence, leading to underreporting of critical issues and a lack of diversity in media coverage.

Despite these challenges, the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) plays a crucial role in advocating for press freedom, providing legal support, and enhancing the capacity of media professionals. NUJ's efforts to raise awareness about the challenges facing journalists, lobby for legislative reforms, and offer legal aid contribute to the resilience of the media community in Nigeria. However, challenges persist, and there is a pressing need for greater engagement and proactive measures to address systemic issues undermining press freedom.

### Recommendation

The Nigerian government should prioritize legislative reforms to revise or repeal outdated laws that restrict press freedom. This effort should involve collaboration between lawmakers, legal experts, and civil society organizations to ensure alignment with international standards of freedom of expression.

Law enforcement agencies must establish dedicated units tasked with investigating attacks against journalists and ensuring the swift prosecution of perpetrators.

Additionally, media organizations should advocate for improved safety protocols and provide training on risk mitigation strategies to journalists working in high-risk environments. Regulatory bodies should enforce transparency measures requiring media outlets to disclose ownership structures and funding sources. Civil society groups can play a crucial role in monitoring compliance and advocating for policies that promote media independence and diversity.

Journalism schools and professional associations, including the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), should collaborate to develop comprehensive training programs on media ethics, legal rights, and safety protocols. These initiatives should be tailored to address the specific needs of journalists working in diverse media environments across Nigeria.

International organizations, such as UNESCO and the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), should provide technical assistance and advocacy support to Nigerian media organizations and civil society groups. This can include funding for safety training, legal support programs, and advocacy campaigns aimed at promoting press freedom and combating impunity for attacks against journalists.

Civil society organizations, in partnership with media outlets and educational institutions, should launch public awareness campaigns to educate citizens about the importance of press freedom and the role of journalists in a democratic society. These campaigns can help mobilize public support for reforms aimed at protecting journalists and promoting media independence.

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