

Lecturers' Perception of Students' Compliance with Ethical and Legal Provisions in Communication Research

EZEAH, Gregory Herbert, *Ph.D.*

Department of Mass Communication
University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu State
&

IDOKO, Fidelis Ugochukwu

Department of Mass Communication
University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Abstract

This study examines lecturers' perception of students' compliance with ethics and legal issues in communication research drawing from various ethical provisions which were mainly derivations from biomedical sciences and behavioural or social sciences. A total of 58 lecturers in the Departments of Mass Communication and Film & Theatre Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka were sampled. Subjecting the data gathered to SPSS analysis, the lecturers' responses show low compliance as only two items: respect for respondents' privacy and researchers' maintenance of confidentiality, did the students show remarkable compliance while other 10 items in this category show low compliance. Plagiarism was identified as the most violated ethical issue in communication research. While adopting Social learning theory as a frame work of analysis, we argue that researchers should be held liable for their omission and commission. The respondents suggested ways of ensuring compliance with ethics and legal provisions in communication research which formed part of recommendation to include building of institutional capacity to check unethical practices in communication research and adequate punishment of offenders which confirms the theoretical bases of this study.

Keywords: Moral Responsibility, Plagiarism, Authorship, Ghost Authorship, Ethics, Law, Communication Research.

Introduction

Research is an essential way of improving on the lives of the members of the society. It is the major way of advancement in knowledge and adoption of new skills in the various disciplines. The desire to advance and breakthrough in the various spheres of studies has increased man's penchant for research and inquiry into different manifestations and phenomena. Man seems to be insatiable in his quest for knowledge

and understanding of the universe, he found himself and even beyond.

The quest to know and understand things in nature have given man great concern over the years. This effort to understand why events occur the way they do and the reason for the existence of certain phenomenon calls for detailed inquiry - hence research. According to Ikeagwu (1998, p.3), research is a systematic, objective and thorough investigation of a subject or problem in order to discover relevant information or principles. Research covers every spheres of human endeavour from physical sciences, humanities, arts and social sciences.

The abuse of research activities necessitated the need for research ethics. The rationale for research ethics is to avoid harm on human subjects and ensure that research projects are carried out for the purposes of human development and advancement. In the past, some research activities violated the human subjects as found in the Tuskegee syphilis study carried out between 1932 and 1972; the Guatamela research on prisoners, prostitutes and infidels of 1942 in US and the Nazi experiment on Prisoners of War (POWs) during the Second World War (Ogungbure, 2011, p.77). All these violated the fundamental human rights of the subjects hence the need for legal frameworks and ethical regulations to ensure that during research, human persons are prevented from harm.

It was Schram and Roberts (1981, p.495) who observed that laboratory and field surveys have been of great concern to mass communication researchers. Going by this, Schram and Roberts identified field survey research to belong to quantitative research. Okpoko and Eze (2011, p.1) also identified qualitative research as very relevant in the study of mass communication. Okpoko and Eze (2011, p.2) cited in Trochim define qualitative research "as the collection of any information that is not numerical in nature."

In view of the increasing push for research in the various fields of endeavour, the need for ethical and legal control becomes germane. McQuil (2012, p.14) observes, "A good deal of research into mass media has been stimulated by the wish to apply norms of social and cultural performance." This by extension explains the need to observe both ethical and legal considerations in carrying out research activities as assurance to public good. Burt (2003) quoted in Pope (2012, p.251) states, "Research must comply with the laws as well as ethical standards."

Since the examples enumerated by Ogungbure above were coming from biomedical practice, one may ask, "Can human subjects be exposed to harm in communication research?" What are the ethical and legal provisions that can forestall harm or danger to human subjects in Mass Communication research? Are there ethical and legal frameworks peculiar to Mass Communication research? Are there ethical and legal frameworks peculiar to the digital media that do not affect the traditional media of Mass Communication?

Statement of the Problem

The Tuskegee debacle in the United States drew world attention and emphasised the need to have legal framework and ethical guidelines to ensure that the human subjects are not exposed to avoidable danger so that man's inhuman use of his fellow man as guinea-pigs will be forestalled. The problem in Nigeria is that such legal frameworks and ethical codes are not yet clear. The Pfizer misadventure in Kano in 1996 (Nwabueze, 2003; Smith, 2011) during which they were sued over the eleven Nigerian children who died as a result of their drug test on the children suffering from meningitis without due clinical trials was a local case similar to the Tuskegee incident. More so, while the need for the observance of ethics has been harped, most studies available were mainly in biomedical and physical sciences (Page and Nyeboer, 2017). Writers like Gbenga (2015) identified some unethical practices in communication research to include the falsification of research outcomes; falsification of data; falsification of sample selection procedures; deliberate selection of wrong respondents; drawing of biased inferences; and asking leading questions to respondents. To the best of our knowledge, there have not been clear studies on assessment of students' compliance to the ethics and laws of research especially in communication studies thus this study which seeks to evaluate lecturers' assessment of students' compliance to ethical and legal expectations in doing communication research.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Assess lecturers' perception of students' level of compliance with ethical and legal issues in communication research.
2. Identify lecturers' perception of ethical and legal provisions in communication research that is mostly violated by students of Mass Communication and Theatre & Film Studies Departments.
3. Identify lecturers' views on measures to ensure students' compliance to the ethical and legal provisions in Communication research.

Research Questions

1. How do lecturers rate the extent students comply with ethical and legal provisions in Communication research?
2. Which of the ethical and legal provisions of communication research do students violate most?
3. What measures do you suggest to ensure students' compliance to the ethical and legal provisions in Communication research?

Conceptual Review of Mass Communication Research

Every aspect of mass communication emphasises research in all its ramifications and at every stage of planning. Okoro (2015, p.160) asserts that research plays a role in development communication as opposed to the role of research in either communication in general and development in particular. This also implies that research plays great role both in communication and development as areas of studies and development communication as a specific discipline.

In advertising for example, Okoro (2013, pp.187-188) argues that research helps to determine the size of the market for a product or service in terms of volume and value and also predict how economic, social, political and technological factors affect market trend in relation to demand and response to seasons of the year. Okoro further argues that research in advertising helps to understand market structure and aggregation in terms of income groups, sex, age and geographic distribution and informs the market operators on how to handle and take care of the various groups.

Holloran (2011), writing as part of Resolution 100 and the Guidance Notes of Medium Term Plan adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO at its nineteenth session states that mass communication research laid emphasis on historical, economic, political, organisational, technological, professional, personal factors which affect the production process and determine what is produced. Halloran asserts that this requires close scrutiny of these factors and how they influence the use of what is produced. He notes that previously, researchers were mainly interested on the use, reaction, effects, influence, etc. not on ownership, control, structure, organisation and production relationships. The resolution clearly defines the scope and areas of communication research.

Van Dijk (2005) in his analysis of mass communication research posited that this area of study ranges from content analysis to discourse analysis of media messages; discourse analysis to analysis of complex communicative events; and the cognitive and social context. The first two, according to him, deal with macro aspect of communication involving media and society while the last one deals with the micro study of media processes both in production and in reception. These aspects concern the traditional media of newspaper, television, radio and even the online communication.

Ethical Issues and Legal Provisions

Research is an organised and systematic approach to inquiry or gathering of data and information for the purposes of solving problem (Nwosu and Nkamnebe, 2006, p.145). The above indicates that research is a fact finding activities aimed at explaining a problem or phenomenon. Nwodu (2006, p.3) posits that research is a systematic probing of the relationship existing between variables. This suggests that research involves critical investigation into cause and effects in the relationship between variables. The practice of mass communication through its various divisions

namely journalism, broadcasting, public relations, advertising, film production etc. involves research at every process. Since mass communication practice involves research, ethical and legal considerations abound given its implications on the society and susceptibility to the abuse of human subjects

It was Ogungbure (2011, pp.76 - 77) who asserted that the aim of research ethics was to ensure that research projects involving human subjects were carried out without causing harm to the subjects involved. The media research most of the times involves the use of human beings to solicit for information. Ogungbure traced the history of ethical practice to 4th or 5th BC when medical practitioners used to take the Hippocratic Oath – an ethical allegiance classical scholar Ludwig Edelstein (1943) claims was written by Pythagoreans.

The Tuskegee experience necessitated the United States Congress to create, “The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioural Research.” The Commissioners included prominent experts and scholars in the fields of medicine, psychology, civil rights, law, ethics and religion. In 1979, they published *Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research*, commonly referred to as “The Belmont Report” (see NCPHSBBR 1979 as Ogungbure 2008, p.87).

While every legal issue constitutes ethical problem, some ethical problems may not constitute legal issue (Mckee, 2008, p.105). Mckee recognised the fact that ethical decisions occur throughout the research process and declared that “every method based decision” is also ethical decision.

According to Capuro and Pingel (2002), the principle of autonomy enables the researcher to have control of his or her research project. By this, the researcher is in control of all the elements of his work such as strategy and methodology. The principle of maleficence often associated with the deontological and teleological perspectives of ethics, discourages harm and insists that research should be conducted for the good of the society. The principle of beneficence suggests that the outcome of research should be beneficial to every member of the society. It is inclined to the utilitarian principle of Kantian deontological paradigm (Capurro and Pingel, 2002, p.192) – serving the purpose of the larger members of the society. The principle of justice enunciates the fundamental rules of research, guards against deception and ensures fairness to all human subjects in the research process.

In the same vein, Gbenga (2015, pp.5-6) identifies the following as part of ethical guide in the conduct of research activities. They are as identified in the sub-heads below:

1. **Confidentiality:** The confidentiality of respondents must be maintained. This indicates that the researcher should develop trust, intimacy and assure the respondent that he or she meant no harm. In this regard, Mckee (2008, p.113) opines,

Researchers, conducting human subject researches that are

affiliated particularly with medical and educational institutions are often subject to regulatory governance shaped by the Code of Federal Regulations, Section 45, Part 46. He asserted based on the principles of respect for persons (autonomy and choice), beneficence (do no harm), and justice (equitable distribution of risks and benefits) expressed in *The Belmont Report* (National Commission, 1979), 45CFR46 calls on researchers to obtain informed consent from all participants.

This invariably would create rapport between the researcher and the respondents thereby facilitating the research process without suspicion.

2. **Consent:** Information elicited from respondents must not be used for other purposes such as taking actions toward an individual respondent as a result of his or her participation in the survey. Based on this, anything in the contrary amounts to deception. Mckee advised that person being invited to participate in a research study should be informed that participation is voluntary and the research subject is at liberty to withdraw whenever he or she chooses. His or her consent should be obtained possibly in writing and given the freedom to pull out if he or she finds his or her participation inimical to his or her person.
3. **Objectivity/Dishonesty:** The use of respondent information for non-research purposes can only take place if the respondents specifically grant permission to do so. In the course of confidence building the researcher assured the subject on the objectives of the study with specific undertaking that information given shall not be used outside the research work. Gbenga quoted above maintains that if there is need to use such information outside the research work, the researcher should seek for the permission of the respondent. A researcher must not tacitly permit interpretations that are inconsistent with the data available. This amounts to manipulation or falsification of research findings. Based on the above, Gbenga explains that acts of dishonesty ranges from falsification of data; manipulation of sample size; deliberate selection of wrong respondents; drawing of biased inferences to asking of leading questions. He warned that the researcher should not deliberately attempt to influence the opinions of respondents or engage in multiple completions of questionnaire by a single respondent. He or she should neither manipulate the actual outcome of findings nor write reports without methodologically conducting the research. These acts of dishonesty could be misleading to the research users and makes the entire process useless, unprofitable and dangerous.
4. **Adherence to Time Table:** Potential respondents should not be misled regarding the length of an interview. Generally, wastage of time may create boredom. This can affect the mood of the respondent and affect his or her response thereby the research outcome. Strict adherence to time schedule and careful and intelligent handling of discussion will boost the research process.

5. **Ethical Errors after Publication:** While Gbenga holds that ethical errors should be handled carefully after publications, the American Psychological Association (APA, 2002, pp.348-349) reinforced this and advised research writers to be careful in the preparation of manuscripts for publication. APA notes that if errors occur in the publication, the author has the responsibility to make such error public if they are discovered after publication. APA suggests that the first thing the author should do is to inform the editor and the publisher so that a correction notice could be published noting that the rationale for this is to correct the knowledge base so that the error is brought to the attention of future users of the information. The implication of this is that sending erroneous publication or information to the public is dangerous as research outcomes are meant to be utilised and applied in life.
6. **Authorship and Plagiarism:** APA Code of Ethics (Authorship; Standard 8.12 a-c, 2002), defines authorship as an exclusive reserve for persons who receive primary credit and hold primary responsibility for a published work. In accordance with the above, Kamat (2006, p.9) submits that "... a person should be listed as the author of a paper only if that person made a direct and substantial intellectual contribution to the design of the research, the interpretation of the data or the drafting of the paper".

Contrary to the above, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) (September/October, 1989, p.75) defined plagiarism as "taking over the ideas, methods, or written words of another, without acknowledgment and with the intention that they be taken as the work of the deceiver." This indicates deliberate intention to usurp the works of an author. Related to plagiarism is the issue of ghost authorship. This is a very common dishonest practice in academics whereby a student uses a friend or relation or paid agent to carry out a research activity only to claim the authorship.

Capuro and Pingel (2002, p.189) writing on online research ethics identified the following as some unethical practice that take place in the conduct of online research. They include online identity, online language, online consent and confidentiality, and online confidentiality. While these identified online communication research ethical challenges are similar to ones earlier discussed as identified in Gbenga above, they have unique implications to the online users.

Gbenga (2015) was specific in pointing out some of the glaring unethical practices in communication research to include, falsification of data; falsification of sample selection; deliberate selection of wrong respondents; drawing of biased inferences and asking of leading questions. Other unethical practices include deliberate attempts to influence the opinions of respondents; multiple completions of questionnaires by a single respondent; manipulation of actual findings and writing of reports without conducting any research. It is obvious that for the outcome of any research to serve its purpose these ethical violations must be avoided so as not to

mislead and cause harm to the public. He identified the following as possible consequences of such unethical practices to include misleading findings; wrong conclusions; inappropriate recommendations; faulty foundations for further researches; formulation of wrong policies and lack of public trust in academic research.

Legal Issues in Communication Research

In Nigeria, there are laws that regulate some aspects of research studies especially as it pertains to some research institutions. Obeng (1990) quoted in Ayozie, Ayozie, and Ayozie (2011, p.52) defined law or legal issues as “the written and unwritten rules on human conduct derived from enactments, customs, and judicial precedents which are recognised as generally binding in a human community in the sense that the state enforces it directly on all members of the community through the imposition of appropriate sanctions.”

The earlier laws regulating the conduct of research came as result of the establishment of research institutes to undertake research studies in specific areas. The establishment of University College Hospital (UCH) Ibadan which serves as the teaching hospital of the University of Ibadan was a case in point. The mandate of UCH was to carry out clinical research or other medical experimentation (Nwabueze, 2003, p.91). Nwabueze observed that at the point of establishment of UCH in 1952, there was no research guideline given to the College. This implies that there was no consideration for ethical code of conduct. There were indications that subsequent universities established in the country followed the same pattern. Nwabueze further narrated that the Federal Military Government promulgated Decree No. 1 of 1972 that established the Medical Research Council of Nigeria. This Decree, Nwabueze recalled was replaced by Decree No. 5 of 1977 that established National Science and Technology Development Agency. However, agriculture, biomedical and technology had a fair share of such establishment of research institute as Nigeria was poised to boost research activities to accelerate development.

Constitutional Right to Privacy and Right to Life

The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended in 2011 provides in Section 37 for the respect of the privacy of citizens. Section 37 states that “the privacy of citizens, their homes, correspondence, telephone conversation and telegraphic communications is hereby guaranteed and respected”.

This obviously demands that the consent of a research subject must be sought before engaging him or her in any research process. Consent remains the only remedy that can destroy an action in court brought against a person accused of invasion of privacy (Okoro and Okolie, 2004, p.85). Okoro and Okolie reaffirmed the maxim *volenti non fit injuria* which means, “that to which a person consents cannot be considered an injury.” In other words, this means “voluntary assumption of risks”.

Section 33 of the same 1999 Constitution also guarantees right to life of every citizen. It provides that only a court of competent jurisdiction can sentence a person to death when found guilty of a criminal offence. It implies that only on the grounds of conviction of criminal offence that somebody's life could be taken. Therefore, based on the provisions of the Nigerian Constitution, the Tuskegee and Kano experiences grossly violated the fundamental right of the citizens used in the research process as guinea pigs.

Official Secret Act of 1962 and the Freedom of Information Act 2011

Greenwood and Welsh quoted in Okoro and Okolie (2004, p.86) states that the rationale for the promulgation of Official Secrets Act was to prevent spying of state secrets and forestall the breaching of official trust. Okoro *et al* identified the following as areas the Act forbids persons including research officers from carrying out their duties. They are:

- A. Entering or inspecting a protected or prohibited place or even being in the vicinity of such a place;
- B. Photographing or sketching a protected place or describing anything situated in a protected place;
- C. Obstructing, misleading or interfering with anyone engaged in guarding or securing a protected place or
- D. Obtaining, reproducing or retaining any photograph, sketch, model, document or plan which has to do with anything situated in protected place (see Section 2 of the Act).

A critical look at the law shows that it can limit the effort of a research officer in search of data or information. While the Freedom of Information Act 2011 was to leverage journalists or researchers to have access to information, the Act also provides some exemptions or restriction. Even the explanatory memorandum states

This Act makes public records and information more freely available, provide for public access to public records and information, protect public records and information to the extent consistent with the public interest and the protection of personal privacy, protect serving public officers from adverse consequences for disclosing certain kinds of official information without authorization and establish procedures for the achievement of those purposes (FOIA, 2011).

It is clear that what the Act provides, it also takes in its effort to protect public interest, personal privacy and national security. Although the FOIA also states the procedure for any member of the public to access information, such process downplays the essence of the law. However, the Act itself buttresses the emphases on social responsibility as a way forward to ensuring public good both in research and the general media practice.

Theoretical Framework

The Social Learning Theory was propounded by Albert Bandura of Stanford University in 1971. This theory explains that people can learn new behaviour by observing others through modelling. The theory suggests that through modelling, individuals should pay *attention* to models so as to learn new things, imbibe the habit of *retention* that is storing new information, *reproduction* that is putting the new behaviour into practice so as to master it and *motivation* which espouses punishment and reward as effective means of upholding the success stories of models and shunning behaviour of those act in the contrary (McQuil, 2012).

Health Communication Capacity Collaborative – An HC3 Research Primer (2013, p.1) explains that “social learning theory stresses the reciprocal relationship between social characteristics of the environment, how they are perceived by individuals, and how motivated and able a person is to reproduce behaviours they see happening around them.” Bandura expounds the theory saying that man was neither driven by inner forces nor helplessly subjected to environmental influences. The theory insists that psychological functioning of an individual can best be understood through persistent interaction between behaviour and other influencing conditions. The theory emphasises the place of socialisation and application of various models of action to bring about conformity. Through its motivational strategies using punishment and reward, researchers may develop some norms by imitation of successful research fellows. Since the theory postulates that most human behaviour is not controlled by immediate external influences but through previous experiences, people tend to accept that certain actions may gain them outcome they value while others nothing. Some others bring some undesirable effects. This creates room for adherence and conformity to rules.

Methodology

This study adopted quantitative research approach as a basis for analysis of students' level of compliance with ethical and legal issues in communication research. The quantitative research method therefore made use of survey using questionnaire to obtain data from lecturers who supervise students' research and project works in the Departments of Mass Communication and Theatre and Film Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Using purposive sampling method, two departments were selected out of nine departments in the Faculty namely Departments of Mass Communication and Theatre and Film Studies. The rationale for this sampling technique was as result their direct relevance to modern and traditional communication studies. The populations of lecturers from the two departments were 35 from the Department of Mass Communication and 23 from Theatre and Film Studies giving a total of 58 lecturers. Therefore 58 copies of questionnaire were distributed to the lecturers in the two departments. The questions in the questionnaire were derived from the research questions and expanded to capture various views

necessary in drawing informed conclusion. The questionnaire consists of four sections beginning with respondents' biographic data. The section two contained 12 questions that sought to determine students' level of compliance to ethics and legal provisions in communication research while section three made up of ten questions dealt with the quest to find out the most violated ethical and legal items. Section four sought the respondents' views on how to combat ethical and legal violations. Findings were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) while the analysed data were presented in tables using percentages. Findings were also analysed in discursive and descriptive terms.

Research Findings

While a total of 58 copies of questionnaire were distributed to lecturers from the two departments, only 53 copies representing 91 percent were received back as some of the lecturers were on vacation or study trips. In terms of academic qualifications, 33 respondents or 62.3 percent have Master degrees while 19 or 37.7 percent have Doctor of Philosophy degrees. A total of 46 or 86 percent of the respondents are males while 7 or 34 percent were female lecturers. From the findings, a total of 22 or 41.5 of the respondents have worked between 0 and 5 years. In the same vein, 16 or 30.2 percent and 3 or 5.7 percent have worked between 6 and 12 years; and 13 and 20 years respectively. Two sets of three other respondents or 5.7 percent have worked between 21 and 30 years and 31 years and above.

Research Question One: How do lecturers rate the extent students comply with ethical and legal provisions in Communication research?

The instrument identified ethical issues and legal provisions that affect or influence communication research using the four Likert scales of measurement. Based on this, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software used indicated that given the mean of 1,2,3,4 which is 2.5, anything below the mean shows low compliance with ethics and legal provisions. From the foregoing, only respect for respondents' privacy and maintenance of confidentiality show high level of compliance. Other items like plagiarism/authorship; seeking of respondents' consent; objectivity and honesty; capability to credit source; use of referencing style (APA, MLA etc);

Table 1: Rating of the students' level of compliance to ethical issues and legal provisions in communication research

| Ethical Principles & Laws | Very Low | Low | High | Very High | No Response |
|--|-----------------|------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Compliance with Plagiarism/Authorship | 7(13.2) | 28(52.8) | 17(32.1) | 1(1.9) | 0(0) |
| Students seeking respondents' consent | 8(15.1) | 25(47.2) | 15(28.3) | 4(7.5) | 1(1.9) |
| Respect for respondents' privacy | 4(7.5) | 16(30.2) | 27(50.9) | 5(9.4) | 1(1.9) |
| Objectivity and honesty of the Researcher | 6(11.3) | 28(52.8) | 17(32.1) | 1(1.9) | 1(1.9) |
| Researchers' maintenance of confidentiality | 2(3.8) | 15(28.3) | 27(50.9) | 8(15.1) | 1(1.9) |
| Researchers' capacity to credit sources | 6(11.3) | 27(50.9) | 15(28.3) | 4(7.5) | 1(1.9) |
| Students' compliance to referencing style APA, MLA etc | 3(5.7) | 22(41.5) | 23(43.4) | 1(1.9) | 2(3.8) |

Lecturers' Perception of Students' Compliance with Ethical and Legal Provisions in Communication Research

| | | | | | |
|--|---------|----------|----------|--------|--------|
| Researchers' full disclosure of research outcome | 3(5.7) | 24(45.3) | 22(41.5) | 3(5.7) | 1(1.9) |
| Copy Right Act (Cap 68 of LFN, 1990) | 9(17.0) | 35(66.0) | 8(15.1) | 0(0) | 1(1.9) |
| Defamation/Malicious Falsehood (Sec373 of Criminal Code) | 3(5.7) | 30(56.6) | 18(34.0) | 2(3.8) | 0(0) |
| Researchers' use of Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2011 | 8(15.1) | 35(66.0) | 8(15.1) | 1(1.9) | 1(1.9) |
| Official Secret Act 1962 | 5(9.4) | 25(47.2) | 20(37.7) | 2(3.8) | 1(1.9) |
| 1999 Nigerian Constitution (Sec. (37 protection from invasion of privacy) and (Sec. 39 on Freedom of Expression) | 3(5.7) | 22(41.5) | 2139.6) | 2(3.8) | 5(9.4) |

In Table 1 above, the study indicates that students' compliance to the ethics and laws affecting the conduct of communication research work in the two departments sampled was very poor as most of the respondents showed. For instance, majority of respondents rated students' compliance low especially in plagiarism and authorship as well as in objectivity and honesty where 28 out of 53 respondents in each item rated students' compliance low representing 52.8 percent. Compliance to Copy Rights Act (Cap 68 LFN) received the highest low score as indicated by 35 respondents representing 66 percent. This shows consistency in item rating by respondents as plagiarism and copy right law share similar values but while plagiarism is an ethical issue, copy right is a coded law actionable in court. Respondents also agreed and rated students' compliance to the respect of the privacy of persons understudy and maintenance of their confidentiality as very high as indicated by 27 respondents representing 50.9 percent. This has the obvious implication that studies carried out in these departments were not reliable and cannot be depended upon.

Research Question Two: Which of the ethical and legal provisions do the students violate most in mass communication research?

The five Likert scale measurement used in measuring lecturers' perception of the most violated ethical and legal provisions in mass communication research by students were ranked as follows:

Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Undecided (UD), Disagreed (D), and Strongly Disagreed (SD) with their values ranked 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 in that descending order. This gives a mean of 3. This by implication shows that any variable below 3 has low ranking by the respondents while anyone above 3 has high ranking.

Table 2: Lecturers' ranking of the most violated ethical/legal principles of research

| Ethical Principles & Laws | No Resp | SD | D | U | A | SA |
|---|---------|---------|----------|---------|-----------|----------|
| Compliance with Plagiarism/Authorship | 1(1.9) | 1 (1.9) | 3(5.7) | 4(7.5) | 26 (49.1) | 18(34.0) |
| | 5(9.4) | 7(13.2) | 3(5.7) | 8(15.1) | 23(43.4) | 7(13.2) |
| Respect for respondents' privacy | 2(3.8) | 4(7.5) | 6(11.3) | 9(17.0) | 23(43.4) | 9(17.0) |
| Objectivity and honesty of the Researcher | 2(3.8) | 5(9.4) | 7(13.2) | 7(13.2) | 27(50.9) | 5(9.4) |
| Researchers' maintenance of confidentiality | 2(3.8) | 2(3.8) | 13(24.5) | 5(9.4) | 28(52.8) | 3(5.7) |
| Copy Right Act (Cap 68 of LFN, 1990) | 2(3.8) | 4(7.5) | 6(11.3) | 9(17.5) | 28(52.8) | 4(7.5) |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---------|---------|---------|----------|----------|---------|
| Defamation/Malicious Falsehood (Sec.373 of Criminal Code) | 2(3.8) | 6(11.3) | 8(15.1) | 10(18.9) | 22(41.5) | 5(9.4) |
| Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2011 | 3(5.7) | 3(5.7) | 9(17.0) | 9(17.0) | 23(43.4) | 6(11.3) |
| Official Secret Act 1962 | 2.(3.8) | 6(11.3) | 9(17.0) | 5(9.4) | 29(54.7) | 2(3.8) |
| 1999 Nigerian Constitution (Sec. 37 protection from invasion of privacy) and (Sec. 39 on Freedom of Expression) | 2(3.8) | 5(9.4) | 9(17.0) | 9(17.0) | 25(47.2) | 3(5.7) |

In Table two above, 29 respondents representing 54.7 percent ranked the Official Secret Act as the most violated ethical and legal provisions in communication research in the two communication departments in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Other ethical and legal issues that attracted similar rankings were researchers' maintenance of confidentiality and violation of the Copy Right Act where 28 respondents or 52.8 percent in each case agreed. This also agreed with the findings in Table 1 where respondents also rated students' compliance as low. The ranking of plagiarism was equally remarkable as 26 or 49.1 percent and 18 or 34.0 percent agreed and strongly agreed respectively it is the most violated ethical issue. The two positions also indicate the extent to which lecturers perceive students violation of plagiarism and authorship in the communication research. The implication of this is that students only copy other people's works in gross violation of this ethical and legal principle. This is closely followed by respect for respondents' consent which scored 3.50. The later goes contrary to the finding in Table 1 which indicated that research students complied with the requirements in respect of respondents' consent. Based on the mean scores of all the variables in table two, the respondents were unanimous in showing that students violate all of them. This is not good enough for research that holds a lot of benefits in contributing to national development.

Research Question Three: What measures do you suggest to ensure students' compliance to ethical and legal provisions in communication research?

Table 3: Lecturers' suggestions on how to ensure students' compliance ethical/legal expectations

| S/NO | Recommendations | No of Respondents | | |
|------|---|-------------------|-------------|------------|
| | | Yes (%) | No (%) | Total |
| 1. | Close and strict supervision | 33 or 62.3% | 20 or 37.7% | 53 or 100% |
| 2. | Provision of Resources | 5 or 9.4% | 48 or 90.6% | 53 or 100% |
| 3. | Institutional emphasis on teaching research ethics and laws | 34 of 64.2% | 19 or 35.8% | 53 or 100% |
| 4. | Punishment of offenders | 15 or 28.3% | 38 or 71.7% | 53 or 100% |
| 5. | Lecturers modelling student researchers | 5 or 9.4% | 48 or 90.6% | 53 or 100% |
| 6. | Timeous commencement of research work | 3 or 5.7% | 50 or 94.3% | 53 or 100% |
| 7. | Subjection of all research works to plagiarism software | 14 or 26.4% | 39 or 73.6% | 53 or 100% |
| 8. | Others | 9 or 17% | 44 or 83% | 53 or 100% |

The respondents were given spaces to provide suggestions on how to ensure students' compliance with the ethics and legal provisions in communication research. The highest was the recommendation whereby 34 out of 53 representing 64.2 percent of respondents strongly suggested that institutions should emphasise adequate teaching of research, ethics and laws of communication. This was closely followed by the recommendation of 33 out of 53 respondents representing 62.3 percent who said that student researchers should be closely and strictly supervised to ensure maximum compliance. This is the emphasis of social learning theory that insists that students should be motivated through punishment and reward to ensure strict compliance with various provisions. More so, the theory further espouses that lecturers should model students to attain enviable heights in research. Other recommendations are duly reflected in the general recommendations.

Discussion of Findings

The place of ethically balanced research work is a sine qua non to national development. The findings in Table 1 shows 28 respondents scored students' compliance to plagiarism and authorship as well as in objectivity and honesty low. The issue of compliance to the Copy Right Act was also rated low by 35 respondents. This confirms the position of Gbenga (2015) who identified falsification of data; falsification of sample selection; deliberate selection of wrong respondents; drawing of biased inferences and asking leading questions as some of the malpractices students indulge in research work. In Table two, 29 respondents were also unanimous in ranking Official Secrets Act as the most agreed violated act. Equally remarkable is the finding that plagiarism and authorship were frequently violated. These two strong positions on the ranking of plagiarism as the most violated research ethic could explain the degenerate state of communication education in the two departments and by extension the Nigerian educational system.

The implication of this on the reliability and authenticity of research output in the two departments becomes doubtful. This confirms Okoro (2015, p.160) fears when he asserted that research plays role in development communication as opposed to the role of research in either communication in general and development in particular. This calls for the application of social learning principles to bring about the necessary behavioural change to fast track utilitarian research for national development. The theory suggests the application of modelling efficacy and para-social interaction to bring about social and behavioural change communication (SBCC) among research students. The modelling efficacy employs the attention, retention, reproduction and motivation strategies to bring about positive social change in individual behaviour pattern.

Health Communication Capacity Collaboration (2013) insists that, "Social learning theory can help program designers identify the types of characters that most attract the audience, the benefits of a behaviour that people value." This forms part of

para-social interaction whereby a person identifies with a fictional character with a view to emulating the values such a character stand for. The use of motivation strategy of social learning theory will reward complying students and punish the erring ones. Lecturers could use the various modelling techniques of the theory in line with recommendations below to bring positive change in students' attitude towards research in mass communication.

Conclusion

This study has confirmed that most lecturers in the Department of Mass Communication and Department of Film and Theatre Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka perceive students' compliance with the ethics and legal provisions in communication research as low. Lessons were drawn from other fields including biomedical disciplines where social sciences and humanities may have taken cues from. The study observes that institutional framework for checking unethical practices in Nigeria is generally weak and in some cases do not exist at all. While various arms of mass communication have institutional checks in terms of professional practice, there should be specific guidelines on research as most of them namely radio, television, press, film production, public relations, advertising etc. have legal framework and professional code of ethics and are engaged in one form of research or the other. Such researches are mainly in the study of message or content, media or channel and the audience in terms of characteristics, access, perception etc. However, research as a definite arm of any discipline deserves a clearly defined research regulatory pattern to ensure that the purpose and use of research in the development agenda of any society achieves its purpose.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

First, individuals involved in research activities should acquaint themselves with both legal and ethical demands in carrying out any research endeavour. Since ignorance of the law cannot be an excuse, it follows that anyone who violates such legal and ethical code of conduct should be sanctioned.

Second, Departments of Mass Communication should ensure that research ethics and legal imperatives form part of the content of any course on research especially fundamentals of communication research and data analysis in communication research. These are two flagship research-based courses in mass communication.

Third, research supervisors should also be trained on both legal and ethical requirements in research and be proficient in the use of software for easy detection of unethical practices such as plagiarism.

Fourth, considering the implications of unethical research conduct to the development of the society, institutional capacities should be built and strengthened

to check legal and ethical compliance by research students.

Fifth, Departmental Academic Boards should also be empowered to screen all research works to ensure compliance with the necessary software and ensure appropriate punishment for offenders.

Sixth, a content analytical study of student research work should be conducted to objectively assess students' compliance with ethical and legal expectations of research in mass communication. The current study focussed on the supervisors (lecturers) perception, which is not foolproof. A content analytical study will be the most appropriate method to use to determine the true state of compliance by the students.

References

- Ayozie, D. O.; Ayozie, K. N.; and Ayozie, V. U. (2011). Ethical Issues Involved in Integrated Marketing Communication in Nigeria. *Society for Business Management Dynamics*, 1(4), 67-75.
- Bandura, A. (1971). *Social learning theory*, New York, General Learning Press, file:///C:/Users/USER/Documents/Bandura_SocialLearningTheory.pdf Received on 20 April, 2018.
- Capuro, R. and Pingel, C. (2002). Ethical Issues in Online Communication Research. *Ethics and Information Technology*, 4(3), 189-194.
- Gbenga, A. (2015). Ethical Issues in Research file:///C:/Users/USER/Documents/Ethical%20Issues%20in%20Research%20by%20Gbenga%20Adesanya%20(1).pdf Received 22 March, 2017
- Halloran, J. D. (2011). The Context of Mass Communication Research, Document Prepared for the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problem in application of Resolution 100 and Guidance Notes of the Medium Term Plan adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO at its Nineteenth session.
- Health Communication Capacity Collaborative (2013) *Social Learning Theory - HC3 Research Primer*, file:///C:/Users/USER/Documents/Niger%20Delta%20Crises/SocialLearningTheory.pdf Received on 20 April, 2018.
- Ikeagwu, E. K. (1998). *Groundwork of Research Methods and Procedures*, Enugu: Institute Development Studies, University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus.
- Kamat, P. V. (2006). Research Ethics, being paper presented at the Symposium on Scientific Publishing,
- M'Bayo, R. J. (2006). *The Handbook for Journalism Studies*. New York: Edwin Mellen.
- Mckee, A. H. (2008). Ethical and Legal Issues for Writing Researchers in an age of Media Convergence. Retrieved from www.sciencedirect.com on March 6th, 2017.

- McQuail, D. (2012). *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Muktar, M. and Gujbawu, M. (2016). Unethical Practices in the Mass Media: A Study of some Selected Media Houses in Kano Metropolis, Nigeria. *Journal of New Media and Mass Communication*, 49(1), 123-134.
- Okoro, N. and Nwafor, K. A. (2015). The Role of Research in Development Communication: The Grassroots Orientation. In Ike and Chuka (Ed). *Nigeria: Development Communication and Interrogating the Field*. Enugu, Nigeria, RhyceKerex Publishers Ltd.
- Page, S. A. and Nyeboer, J. (2017). Improving the Process of Research Ethics Review, *Research Integrity and Peer Review*, <https://researchintegrityjournal.biomedcentral.com/track/pdf/10.1186/s41073-017-0038-7?site=researchintegrityjournal.biomedcentral.com> on October 24, 2017.
- Nwabueze, R. N. (2003). Ethical Review of Research involving Human Subjects in Nigeria: Legal and Policy Issues. *Industrial International Law Review*, 14(1), 156-161.
- Nwodu, L. C. (2006), *Research in Communication and other Behavioural Sciences: Principles, Methods and Issues*. Enugu: Rhyce Kerex Publishers.
- Nwosu, I. E. and Nkamnebe, A. D. (2006). *Triple-P Advertising, Principles, Processes and Practices*. Aba: Afri-Tower Ltd.
- Ogungbure, A. A. (2011). The Tuskegee Syphilis Study: Ethical Reflection, Thought and Practice. *Journal of the Philosophical Association of Kenya (PAK). New Series*, 3(2), 77-92.
- Okoro, N. (2013). *The Business of Advertising*. Enugu, Nigeria: Acena Publishers.
- Okoro, N. and Okolie, A. (2004). *Law, Politics and Mass Media in Nigeria*, Nsukka, Nigeria: Prize Publishers Limited.
- Okpoko, P. U. and Eze, P.I. (2011). *Methods in Qualitative Research*, Nsukka: Great APPublishers limited .
- Pope, A. (2012) Ethical and Legal Regarding Consent in Research with Adult Stroke Patients: A Case Study in Ethics of Mental Health Research, *Journal of Nervous and Mental Health Disease*, 200(3), 250-254.
- Roig, M. (2005). Avoid Plagiarism, Self-plagiarism and Other Questionable Writing Practices: A Guide to Ethical Writing.
- Schram, W. and Roberts, D. (1981). *The Process and Effects of Mass Communication*. Chicago: University of Chicago Illinois Press.
- Smith, D. (2011). Pfizer pays out to Nigerian families of Meningitis Drug Victims. *The Guardian Newspaper*, August 12, 2011.
- Wogu, J. (2008). *Introduction to Mass Communication Theory*. Nsukka: University of Nigeria Press Ltd.

Legal Documents/ Reports

1. 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria with amendment 2011, Section 37.
2. Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (2002)
3. Freedom of Information Act 2011
4. Psychological Report, American Association of University Professors, AAUP, (September/October, 1989). "Statement on Plagiarism." *Academe*, 75, 5, 47-48.