



Unhealthy competition among Radio Stations and the fight to keep-up with broadcast ethical standard: An assessment of Imo State Radio broadcast journalists

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ABSTRACT

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This study assessed the influence of unhealthy competition among radio stations in Imo State and how it affects their adherence to broadcast ethical standards. This study was anchored on the Social Responsibility Theory. This study employed a mixed-methods research design that made use of a survey and an in-depth interview. The population of the study comprised 180 Nigeria Union of Journalists members in Imo State. The instruments for data collection were the questionnaire and an in-depth interview guide. Findings showed that station owners and their journalists understand the ethical codes of their profession. At an average mean of 2.8 radio stations in Owerri, they can uphold the ethical standard of their profession by creating a sustainable image before their listeners, sticking strictly to the Nigerian Broadcast Commission's and Nigeria Union of Journalists ethical codes and the punishment of defaulting journalists in their station, taking personal decisions, and sticking by them to be the best change they want to see in the world even as they do their day-to-day work. It was concluded that the establishment of more radio stations in Imo State makes existing radio stations struggle in their fight to keep up with NBC ethical standards, even as they are confronted with competing radio stations here and there. The researchers recommend that station owners and their staff should be up in their game to be unique, irrespective of other radio stations coming to join them for the same or similar clients and profits. This will go a long way toward making their staff formidable to face the worst of situations.

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1. Introduction

The society and even the constitution have entrusted radio as a broadcast medium with the rights and privileges to seek and present fairly, truthful, and competent information on behalf of the public (Journalism, 2023). Radio is one of the cheapest and most effective means of reaching a wide and heterogeneous audience because of its ability to be received almost everywhere and its ease of access. Radio is unique because of its durability and ability to be enjoyed almost everywhere,



ranging from its user's free time to busy times (Deselaers et al., 2019),(Rad, 2020),(Al-Hassan, 2011),(Britannica, 2023b). Due to the uniqueness of radio, radio stations in different localities now provide a unique means of entertainment for their listeners pleasure, ranging from talk shows, comedy, music, etc (Stephens, 2021). Many individuals now include radio in their daily lives. Some individuals find it impossible to function without listening to the radio each day. Radio stations started compiling lists of the best musicals as radio grew to be the preferred medium for many young music fans (Mass media NG, 2020).

Several studies have shown that radio has been very helpful to its listeners, making them feel less isolated and more connected to their community and the world even when electricity or connectivity are not reliable (Report, 2017),(UNESCO, 2022). The lucrativeness of radio has made each state in Nigeria have several radio stations operating within it. As the days go by, new radio stations keep being established. Every radio station has a mapped-out program schedule that they stick to per day. These programs include domestic, foreign, and universal program types with particular target audiences (Britannica, 2023b),(Perona, 2011),(English, 2020). Radio stations usually balance their program scopes since most of their listeners are within a particular state or region. Radio stations employ a diversity of programs to make their stations unique from other stations (Britannica, 2023a).

Having several radio stations in a city helps to cut down on radio monopolies, as it gives wider room to explore more measures of radio programs, including different music genres and advertisements, and encourages program diversity (Sterling, 2011),(English, 2020). However, this still increases competition among radio stations, which, if care is not taken, takes a toll on numerous radio stations adherence to journalism ethical standards. The establishment of more radio stations gives rise to higher tendencies to breed a high level of healthy and unhealthy competition, all thanks to the NBC code for regulating these many radio station programs (Abdullahi et al, 2021). Even with NBC code, the audiences are being competitively sought after; most times, the myriads of programs at the audience disposal leave them more confused than ever; however, over time, the audience grows out of this confusion, then makes a choice to stick with some choice of program timing by several stations at their disposal (Journalism, 2023),(Rahmi et al., 2022).

Nigerian broadcast media stations are faced with a myriad of challenges. According to Etika, D& Ejue (2018), Corruption is the biggest challenge faced by Nigerians, even in their journalism and broadcast practices. With the rise in licensed radio stations, corruption, on the other hand, seems to be on the increase (Egwu, 2023). The significant degree of corruption in the Nigerian system has even pushed underpaid journalists to engage in brown envelope journalism, which is unethical for those in their field (Baeder et al., 2018),(Myers & Harford, 2020). Public and commercial radio stations in every nation are impacted by radio stations' competitive pressures. An increasing

number of radio stations are either losing money or making very little money compared to when they first began broadcasting (Sterling C.H, 2011),(Network, 2023). Radio was usually a low-margin business outside of the major markets. Pressure from struggling station owners led the NBC to de-regulate both commercial and public radio (Papanikos, 2023). The few NBC guidelines that remain regarding station programs and operations tend to be swept aside with reckless abandon as radio licenses are routinely awarded to new radio stations in the state. This is because station owners now have more control over how their stations operate because they must outperform the competition in the radio industry in order to generate the expected profit that will keep them operational (Britannica, 2023b).

With the establishment of several licensed radio stations, station owners are burdened with creating unique programs with strategic air-timing, putting more pressure on their staffs to think outside the box to come up with pleasurable, persuasive, and compelling programs to get them more audience as well as retain their loyal audience. This makes most radio staffs find a loophole in the NBC code and capitalize on it just to get their audience satisfied. This, with time, waters down the ethical quality that NBC laid down for the journalism industry. Most radio stations now focus on competing against each other, whereas the real threat is increasingly coming from outside the industry (Xiao et al., 2021),(Myers & Harford, 2020),(Sama, 2019).

In Nigeria, radio stations and other media outlets are faced with power challenges, thereby leaving media stations and houses to spend much of their money on the high cost of generators and on diesel or fuels just to stay on air. This issue of power shortage has worsened radio station competitions to get more clients to buy their air slots for their programs, advertisements, and sensitizations (Deselaers et al., 2019),(Agbeleoba et al., 2022). Nearly all proximity radios struggle with issues like low worker retention, a high rate of advertising and sponsorship, difficulty securing funding for fuel or diesel to keep the radios on the air, and problems paying their workforce. Radio journalists nearly universally receive poor remuneration compared to other occupations (Deselaers et al., 2019).

Currently, there are more than 24 functional radio stations in Imo State; however, the most known among them are Orient FM, Hot FM, Groove FM, Ozisa FM, Boss FM, Zanders FM, Darling FM, Bizzibody FM, My Radio FM, Megaband FM, Reach FM, etc (Radio, 2023). Imo state radio broadcast stations are saddled with the responsibility of balancing their day-to-day on-air broadcasts in line with the NBC codes and their listeners choice programmes. Among the programs that radio stations air are personal programs, government programs and announcements, news, talk shows, phone-in discursive programs, individual, group, or organization-sponsored programs, advertisements, announcements, etc. Radio stations in Nigeria usually make profit through client patronage of their airtime for advertisements, religious programs, announcements, etc.; this is clearly their major

source of revenue, thereby making it hard for most stations to keep up with journalism ethical standards since they have to appease the people and their professional ethical standard (Bello et al., 2020). The study is particularly peculiar to radio broadcast stations in Imo State. According to statistics, Imo State currently has more than 24 operational radio stations; these stations will be studied by journalists who are registered NUJ members.

The Imo state radio broadcast station sector is without doubt getting more competitive as the days go by. Lately, there are more than 24 radio stations in Imo State, and more are yet to come up anytime soon. The truth still remains that the more established and licensed radio stations in the state, the more there tends to be a drop in the state's radio broadcast ethical standards. Most Imo radio broadcast stations, in their quest to gain and retain more audiences, tend to go against the Nigerian Broadcast Commission's (NBC) ethical code or water down its standards to some degree. According to the NBC ethical code, the use of abusive, vulgar, or unacceptable slang or languages by audiences during phone-in programs is not allowed, but these days there tend to be these same languages aired, especially during phone-in programs. Since most people are already used to these words and languages, the radio anchors can only warn them or end their call when these people call in. There seems to be a reduction in advertising airtime prices among Imo state radio broadcast stations, especially when new radio stations keep springing up every now and then. This heightens the competition level among these radio stations, and sometimes they will have to make one, two, or more compromises to retain their clients, even at the detriment of the ethical standards of their profession. All these are the factors that prompted the need for this study. The purpose of this research is to assess the influence of unhealthy competition among radio stations in Imo State and how it affects their adherence to broadcast ethical standards. To guide the study, the researchers raised the following questions: They are: 1. What are the basic ethical standards any radio stations are to uphold? 2. How has the establishment of more radio stations increased unhealthy competition among radio stations in Imo State? 3. How can broadcast ethical standards still be enforced even as there are more licensed radio stations?.

2. Theoretical Framework

The social responsibility theory according was propounded from the Hutchins Commission on the Freedom of the Press, set up in the USA in 1947. This theory was established to re-examine the press freedom in the Libertarian era, and how its birth was influenced by the finding of the Royal Commission of the Press setup in Britain in the year 1949 (Theaker, 2020).

The social responsibility theory permits unrestricted press, but at the same time, press content should be discussed in public forums and media outlets should be willing to comply with any demands from the public, professional self-regulations, or both. Because it grants complete media independence on the one hand while imposing external constraints on the other, the idea straddles

the authoritarian and libertarian camps. The press is privately owned in this instance. The concept of social responsibility goes beyond straightforward "objective" reporting (fact-based reporting) to "interpretative" reporting (investigative reporting). The majority of the news is accurate and full of facts, however the commission on press freedom declared that "no longer giving facts truthfully rather than giving a necessary analysed or interpretative report on facts with clear explanations" (Tabassum & Singh, 2020).

The concept aided in the growth of media professionalism by creating a high bar for accuracy, truth, and information. On the basis of media social responsibility, the press council commission also includes the following tasks: the development of a press code of ethics; the raising of standards in the journalism field; the defense of journalistic and media interests; penalise people who disobey the code of conduct and criticise them.

According to this notion, journalists should exercise social responsibility while carrying out their legal obligations. The tenets of the social responsibility theory should serve as a guide for the ethical conduct of Nigerian journalists. This is supposed to act as a check and balance on the media's unbridled influence.

Steps to Opening a Radio Station in Nigeria

Naija (2021) gives a brief outline of what it takes to open a radio station in Nigeria. Basically, radio stations are opened either online or offline. The online radios make use of streaming services, whereas the offline radios make use of transmitters. These two-radio strategies for establishment choice and option come at a very unique cost. Online radio happens to be much easier and cheaper to start up, unlike offline radio. However, most radio owners prefer having both online and offline radio structures so as to complement each other. For establishing the radio, some equipment, structures, and licenses are required. Equipment's needed include: Busolo & Manalo (2022) and Deitz (2021) gave us a list of possible equipment's required in a radio station. For offline radios, we need: **Antenna:** Antennas are used along with radio receivers. **Audio playback devices:** These could be cassettes, CDs, DVDs, or, as in modern times, the use of computers in conjunction with mass storage devices. **Audio processors:** Audio processors are devices used for the purpose of electronic manipulation of audio signals. **Cable:** This is needed for various things, but basically for linking the components of a broadcast studio to each other. **Microphone:** this comes in handy for easier and smoother sound projection. **Mixer/Audio Consoles:** With a mixer, you can adjust features like level and equalisation.

Receiver: Receivers in radio communications are electrical devices that typically pick up radio waves and transform whatever data they carry into usable forms. **Soundproof/acoustics:** This is another very useful piece of equipment and structure that every radio setup must have for its sound clarity and good feedback. **Speakers:** This helps us to hear sound outputs, monitor them, and get

feedback on the quality of our broadcast. **Headphones:** this is used hand in hand with the speakers for monitoring sound feedback. **Transmission lines:** By these, we mean specialised cables or other constructions created for the purpose of carrying radio frequency alternating current from the FM transmitter to the FM antenna, as an illustration. **Transmitters:** These are used to produce and transmit electromagnetic waves conveying messages or signals generated at a radio station. They are sold in sets. **Laptop:** This helps make the broadcasting work easier and uncomplicated. **Audio processor:** This is used to electronically manipulate audio signals as well as boost the signal quality. Due to the technological upgrade in our environment, computer software is now used to carry out this task.

For online radios, we as well need: A headset having both an earpiece and a mouthpiece. Audio software: examples are Winamp, Adobe, Icecast, etc. Audio streaming servers: there are some free and paid audio streaming options.

Stages to undergo in order to Start-up a Radio Station in Nigeria

Naija (2021) and Stephens (2021) gave us a head start on the basic things needed to start up a Nigerian radio station. These were outlined in stages with specific explanations. These stages include: **Stage 1:** Carry out a market survey. **Stage 2:** Decide on whether to start a low-power or full-power radio station. **Stage 3:** Design and acquire your structure and equipment. **Stage 4:** Get professionals to install your broadcast equipment. **Step 5:** Employ all necessary personnel and Staff. **Step 6: Get a CAC and NBC license:** As required by the National Broadcasting Commission Act, Cap. N11, Laws of the Federation 2004, obtain a CAC and NBC license. One would have to form a limited liability company under the Companies and Allied Matter Act, 1990, with a minimum share capital of one million naira and a provision pertaining to broadcasting in its objects clause, before applying for the license.

In summary, CAC charges ₦50,000 for radio registration forms, whereas NBC charges ₦20,000 and ₦15,000,000 for category A and category B locations, respectively, to register. Renewals for categories A and B are set at \$5,000,000 and \$4,000,000, respectively. The three cities of Port-Harcourt, Lagos, and Abuja are categorized as Category A, whereas the rest of Nigeria's states and regions are categorized as Category B. These two types of licenses have a 5-year maximum validity period and must be renewed no later than six months before the preceding license expires. **Stage 7:** Begin transmission **Stage 8:** Publicise and reach out **Stage 9:** Broadcast responsibly. Radio stations' broadcast licenses may be revoked by NBC for the following reasons: failure to pay required fees by the deadline; failure to use a license within a year after its issue; not applying for and getting licenses in a proper manner; and participating in activities that are against national interest.

Radio stations in Imo state

The National Broadcast Commission (NBC) has granted licences to a large number of radio stations over the years, including both government-owned and privately-owned stations as well as college radio stations. In Imo State, there are numerous radio stations, and more are still coming up as the day's dawn (Radio, 2023). Among the radio stations in Imo State are the following:

1. Orient FM/TV Owerri, 94.5 FM, or IBC-Orient FM 94.5: is the official radio station of the Imo Broadcasting Corporation, based in Owerri, the capital city of Imo State. Orient FM and TV are the pride of the Eastern Heartland. Slogan: The Clearest Voice East of the Niger. Established in 1976.
2. Heartland FM Owerri 100.5: Owned by the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN). Slogan: Voice of the Eastern Heartland. Established in 2003.
3. Hot FM Owerri, 99.5: Owned by Spectrum Broadcasting Limited. Slogan: Blazing the Trail. Since January 2018, it has changed to 'more than just radio.'" Established in 2010, Located at Plot 12, Public Building Layout, Onitsha Road, Owerri, Imo State.
4. Zanders FM Owerri (105.7): Zanders FM 105.7 is a redefined and reputable radio station situated within Owerri for news, sports, and entertainment programmes. Your #1 hit music radio station in Owerri, Nigeria. It's Zanders FM 105.7, baby!
5. My Radio FM Owerri-101.1: This radio is situated at Akabo. The company that owns it is Ideal Media Independent Broadcasting Network Limited. Slogan: What radio should be? Established in 2016. They are your favorite family radio station. With programmes for all the family, young and old, in English, Igbo, Pidgin, and even more.
6. Darling FM Owerri 107.3: Owned by Darl Capital System Limited. Your #1 radio station for healthy lifestyles and education in Nigeria. We are widely known as Darling 107.3 FM, the first education, healthy Christian lifestyle, and talk music station in Nigeria. We deliver a format that is both urban and contemporary, with a programming style laced with news, current affairs, lifestyle, and sports, in a humorous but intelligent conversational approach.
7. Mega-band FM Owerri 97.3: This station is located on Okigwe Road, before the Orji flyover. Owned by Protech Global Technology Limited. Slogan: Revolving around you with a difference and excellence. Established in 2015.
8. 1 Community Radio FM Oguta 90.9: This is a radio established for the Oguta community members.
9. Groove FM Owerri, 98.1: Groove FM is a private radio station in Nigeria that broadcasts on the 98.1 FM frequency. Groove 98.1 FM started broadcasting on the 1st of April 2020 for test transmission and commenced full broadcast on the 5th of August 2020. Federal Polynek FM; 103.2 MHz; Nekede. Owned by the Federal Polytechnic, Nekede.

10. IMSU Star FM Owerri: This is a campus radio of Imo State University, Owerri, which is located in Imo State capital.
11. A new radio station is springing up around the Mbaise-Obowo axis.
12. The Reach FM Owerri (104.9): The Best in South East Nigeria When It Comes to News, Sports, Talk Shows, and Music.
13. Gold FM – 89.3 Owerri, Owned by Ideal Media Independent Broadcasting network limited.
14. Ojemba FM Owerri – 96.9
15. Ojemba FM Orlu – 106.1
16. OZISA FM Owerri – 96.1
17. Boss FM New Owerri
18. Heritage FM – 88.7
19. Toast FM New Owerri
20. Onw Radio 92.7 FM
21. Rock FM 93.9
22. Ojemba FM 94.1
23. Bizzibodi FM 100.1
24. Radio East (Online Radio).

Five Ethical rules that Radio journalist need to know

According to the Citizen (2016), these five ethical rules that radio journalists need to acquaint themselves with include: (1) **Interviews:** When setting up an interview, it's crucial to be as open as you can. The interviewee will have to provide written permission before being quoted in the press. The reporter is required to identify themselves, especially once the subject is on the record. (2) **Fact-checking:** In accordance with recognised journalistic norms, it is the duty of all journalists to verify the information in their stories. The individual being quoted in an article should be called to confirm the quote is accurate whenever possible and when there is no other record of the interview outside the journalist's memories or notes. (3) **Anonymous sources:** In some cases, it's necessary to keep a source's identity a secret, especially if there are grave safety concerns. Unnamed sources should never be used to offer personal or political criticism; they should only be utilised for material that is crucial to a narrative. (4) **Right of reply:** You must provide the individuals or organisations you bring accusations against the chance to respond. They must be provided with a time frame that is appropriate to do so. (5) **Data protection:** The journalist is responsible for making sure that all information and data (both digital and physical) related to the story are stored safely. This is to safeguard you when the story is published.

Specialised Code of Ethics for Radio Journalists

Accountable Haryanto (2011) and Ballesteros et al., (2022) highlighted a few professional journalism ethical rules intended for radio journalists. They were listed as follows:

1. Journalists shall respect people's physical and moral rights to privacy when gathering information by any method, with the exception of rare circumstances in which they are authorised by law to withhold information or refuse to be filmed or recorded.
2. Radio journalists should broadcast and comment on information that's attributed to a reliable source and with unoffensive language that can hurt their listeners physically or mentally.
3. Journalists must be objective, neutral, and make a clear distinction between facts and opinions.
4. Journalists are restricted from covering details of people's personal lives without their permission.
5. Journalists are to respect the rights of people in their choice of religion and must not discriminate against people on the basis of their religious beliefs, denomination, or group, except when such religious issues trigger conflict in the entire society.
6. Journalists are to uphold solidarity to defend colleagues from persecution for disapproval.
7. The journalists must at all times provide accurate, balanced, and objective information.
8. Journalists must at all times serve the interest of the public in being informed; therefore, their acceptance of gifts or favors to influence objectivity in their stories is highly prohibited.
9. The religious stand of journalists is not to influence the objectivity of their stories and on-air presentations of issues.
10. Journalists are to always observe copyright, as plagiarism is prohibited in the journalism profession.

Perona (2011) found that the best way for broadcasters to meet a quota is to devote more music to the more popular segments and eliminate the less popular types of content when (i) domestic and foreign programmes are not perfect substitutes for consumers and (ii) broadcasters want to maximise audience (due to an exogenous objective or due to regulatory constraints that limit advertisement). Intuitively, a quota decreases the broadcaster's ability to use the best combination of domestic and international content, necessitating the broadcasting of more of each type of content to reach a given level of utility among its audience.

According to a study on local stations in Africa by Myers & Harford (2020), millions of people in sub-Saharan Africa still rely on radio as the most readily available independent news source, despite the global proliferation of digital news providers. However, weak media markets, scant advertising revenue, and fierce competition are posing unprecedented dangers to the viability of radio stations across the continent. These outlets can continue to operate and preserve their independence with a more realistic view of viability and more adaptable donor methods.

Journalists in Imo State are aware of the Freedom of Information Act, according to research by Obayi et al., (2020) on the subject. It also showed that journalists in the state of Imo have favourable opinions on the laws governing information withholding, societal barriers, and legal supremacy.

Cohen & McIntyre (2019) conducted a similar investigation of the ethics of broadcast journalism. Only 28% of practitioners were aware of the Code of Conduct and Practise of Journalism in Kenya, which is enforced by the Media Council of Kenya, according to the poll, which revealed that the majority of practitioners (85%) are aware that broadcasting is governed by professional codes of ethics. The necessity to implement rules that are recognised by the nation's statutes in order to institutionalise professionalism in the broadcast media is the biggest problem facing FM stations.

In a research on journalism ethics in Nigerian news media conducted by Nasidi (2016), it was discovered that while Nigerian journalists generally uphold the ethics of their trade, they occasionally act unethically. Because Christians rule the South while Muslims rule the North, Southern publications occasionally exaggerate and adopt a negative tone when reporting on Northern issues, and vice versa if the subject is relevant to Southerners. Ugo et al., conducted an ethical study in (2023) to compare media practises to ethical norms. According to their research, Nigerian journalism has thrived on a culture of bribery and corruption, particularly in relation to the "brown envelope syndrome," which is allegedly a result of low pay and employer debt. The public's trust in the media has decreased as a result of this tendency.

According to Oyebuyi (2018) study it was concluded that both public and private radio stations in Oyo State do quite well in the performance of their public service obligations through public-oriented programming. The results of this study show that radio stations in Oyo State's programme schedules, to a certain extent, uphold the social obligations expected of the mass media because they feature more non-sponsored than sponsored programming. A high level of NBC Code of Ethics compliance was found, and Ekeh and Adekunle's study from 2022 found that awareness of the code had a substantial impact on that compliance ($F(2,193) = 70.081$, $Adj.R^2 = 0.210$, $P < 0.05$).

According to a study by Abdullah et al., (2021), Broadcast stations in Nasarawa State actually follow the policy of news commercialization. The study's findings have led to the conclusion that radio stations in Nasarawa State solely broadcast the opinions of the wealthy and powerful. According to this study, news reporting on radio stations in Nasarawa State loses impartiality and balance as a result of news commercialization. The final finding demonstrated that one issue affecting news trustworthiness is the underpayment of media workers in Nasarawa State. Additionally, affluent people and public officials sway media outlets to publish positive stories about programmes and policies they want the public to support. Journalists also frequently violate their own standards of ethical and professional conduct. According to a study by Bello et al., (2020), Broadcast media stations in Nigeria face numerous challenges, including lack of funding, the high

cost of producing locally produced content, regulation, poor management, poor programme quality, the transition from analogue to digital broadcasting, cultural imperialism, insufficient training for broadcast professionals, and politicisation of the broadcast media.

3. Method

The researchers employed a mixed-methods research design for this study. A survey research approach and an in-depth interview were employed for this study. The study's area was the journalists within Imo State. The population used in this study is that of Imo State, as specified in the NUJ 2019 fact sheet (Obayi, et al., 2020).

It was stated that there are 180 registered journalists in Imo State. Due to the size of the population, a census principle was adopted. Durosinmi-Etti et al., (2021) observes that when a population is small and well defined, the entire population is often studied. The population was used as the sample size for the survey of this study; however, 8 people were selected among radio station owners within Imo State and interviewed (Ibe et al., 2020). The purposive sampling technique was employed to determine those used for this study among journalists in Imo State.

4. Result and Discussion

After The researchers distributed 180 copies of questionnaire to the NUJ journalists who work with radio stations in Imo State. About 173 copies of the same questionnaire were recovered from respondents, as the researchers recorded a return rate of 96.1 percent. These 173 copies were used for this study's analysis. **Research Question One:** What are the basic ethical standards any radio stations are to uphold?.

Table 1. THE BASIC ETHICAL STANDARDS TO BE UPHELD BY RADIO STATIONS IN IMO STATE

Radio Basic Standards	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
We are to report objective and well verified information to their viewers	92	65	10	6	3.4046	Accepted
Each station presenter and anchor are to discourage of use of foul languages and inappropriate slang on air	71	85	5	12	3.2427	Accepted
Journalists are to discourage sedition of all form in their stations and on-air	103	61	5	4	3.5202	Accepted
Journalists are to shun slander or derogatory comment against a fellow on air	32	97	23	21	2.8092	Rejected
Radio stations journalists are to be neutral in reporting political, religious and ethical issues	75	93	3	2	3.3930	Accepted
Average Mean Score					3.2	Accepted

SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY, 2023

Findings as shown in the above table showed an average mean score of 3.2, which became the benchmark for the data analysis interpretation. The basic radio ethical standards include: objectivity of reports with well-verified information sources; discouragement of the use of foul language or inappropriate slang on air; discouragement of all forms of sedition by journalists or program presenters/anchors; shun of slander or derogatory comments against a fellow on air; and

the at all points neutral viewpoint of journalists when reporting political, religious, and ethical issues. This implies that Imo State radio station journalists are aware of the basic ethical standards their respective radio stations are to adhere to in their day-to-day program broadcast.

Research Question Two: How has establishment of more radio stations increased unhealthy competition among radio stations in Imo State?.

Table 2. JOURNALISTS RESPONSE TO RESEARCH QUESTION TWO

Establishing radios increasing unhealthy competitions among radio stations	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
We now compete to gain clients to the point of dragging other stations clients	22	30	62	59	2.0867	Rejected
It has reduced the economic earning of almost every radio station.	21	92	16	44	2.5202	Accepted
It sometimes makes the listeners to get confused on which dial to either listen to or leave	73	34	54	12	2.9710	Accepted
It influences the station retained fan not to stay loyal for long	38	67	37	31	2.6473	Accepted
Average Mean Score					2.4	Accepted

SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY, 2023

The data from the above table showed an average mean of 2.4, which became the benchmark for the data analysis and interpretation. The establishment of more radio stations in the state has reduced existing radio station economic earnings, caused most listeners to get confused on which station to either listen to or leave, and even influenced the existing radio station fans not to stay loyal for a long time to their favorite stations.

Research Question Three: How can broadcast ethical standards still be enforced even as there are more licensed radio stations?.

Table 3. JOURNALISTS RESPONSE TO RESEARCH QUESTION THREE

How broadcast ethical standards can be upheld by radio stations in Imo State	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
Each radio station laying down selected rules that must be follow with regards to their programmes and client.	50	56	43	24	2.7630	Rejected
By creating a good and lasting image before their respective listeners to make each station stand out among other stations	43	79	25	26	2.8034	Accepted
By Sticking strictly to NBC and NUJ ethical codes in their day-to-day station on-air programmes and adverts and punishing individual journalist offenders.	87	46	11	29	2.9306	Accepted
Journalist taking personal decision and sticking by it to be better and not going to any mile to gain more listeners even at the detriment of their professional standard.	38	91	34	10	2.9075	Accepted
Average Mean					2.8	Accepted

SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY, 2023

Based on the established mean of 2.8, which served as the reference point for data analysis and interpretation, the findings indicate that radio stations in Owerri have the capacity to maintain ethical standards within their profession. This can be achieved by cultivating a sustainable image among their listeners, adhering strictly to the ethical codes set forth by the National Broadcasting

Commission (NBC) and the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), and implementing appropriate disciplinary measures for journalists who violate these codes. Additionally, it is crucial for individuals within these stations to make personal commitments and remain steadfast in their pursuit of positive change, both in their daily work and in the broader world.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The researchers interviewed eight private radio station owners in Imo State. The proceeds of the interview were summarised below in line with the respective questions and their answers.

Question 1: What are the basic ethical standards any radio stations are to uphold?

Responses from those interviewed showed that they perfectly understood the terms outlined for them before they were licensed to go on air. NBC gave them an outline of their ethical codes that must be adhered to at all times. The codes stipulated the punitive measures to be taken by the station should they fail. The station owners clearly added that they, having understood this, made sure to train their staff in line with these rules so that even staff working in radio stations understood what they should and should not do while on air. Journalists working under their stations know what to do since they are trained professionals in the journalism profession.

Question 2: How has establishment of more radio stations increased unhealthy competition among radio stations in Imo State?

The responses of these radio owners with regards to this question were summarized as follows: the station owners showed forth their indirect grievance with the establishment and coming on air of most radio stations within and outside their geographical location. Some expressed that these new stations just tend to scatter the works they have built for a while; in fact, to them, it does more harm to them; they have to start afresh, re-strategize some of their programmes, reduce the cost of their airtime, and add up other programmes with unique qualities just to retain their loyal listeners. Even some of these loyal listeners still change their loyalty by reducing their listenership, preferring to check out most of the new stations. They even added that the new stations come with many challenges to existing radio stations. One of those interviewed added that the new stations mount pressure on existing radio station owners, who then transfer the same pressure on their staffs to make better input to stay afloat in the unpronounced radio competition every now and then. In summary, these radio stations being opened in the state pose a big challenge to most existing radio stations; they now have to lose both cash, loyal clients and listeners, and even their usual effort and confidence.

Question 3: How can broadcast ethical standards still be enforced even as there are more licensed radio stations?

The responses of those interviewed showed that even with the constant establishment and going on air of new radio stations occasionally, radio owners state that the ways to still enforce the ethical standard of the journalism profession are just as the Nigerian Broadcast Commission (NBC) has given them. The rules stipulated for them to be on air must be adhered to, since NBC goes ahead to make sure that no radio station flouts the rule they laid down. Stations that consciously, directly, or indirectly fell prey to these rules had to dance to the tune of NBC's prescribed punishment. Every radio station owner has a laid-out rule for their staff that must not contradict the NBC rule. These rules are followed meticulously to make sure nobody within the station indicts others to serve a punishment they were not supposed to serve. Radio station owners are careful to retain the standard of their station and NBC rules; however, we cannot say that the standard is still entirely obeyed; there are some complex situations that come up once in a while that still make us find safe ground to sail through them. Another thing that can help radio owners and journalists uphold the NBC standard is their outright personal decision to always do the best and right thing while on air and at all times. This decision goes a long way toward helping not just the individual adhere to NBC rules but every other person around them, especially if they are already aware of such a person's resolute decision.

The quantitative finding showed, at an average mean score of 3.2, that Imo State radio station journalists are aware of the basic ethical standards their respective radio stations are to adhere to in their day-to-day programme broadcast. The qualitative finding agrees with the quantitative finding. Durosinmi et al., (2021), in line with the above finding, concurs that there are ethics guiding the broadcast journalism profession. Akinola & Ojebuyi (2022) revealed a high level of compliance with the NBC Code of Ethics and that awareness significantly influenced compliance with the NBC Code of Ethics among broadcast media journalists in the states. Haider et al., (2022) finds, however, that Nigerian journalism has thrived on a culture of bribery and corruption and their usual collection of the "brown envelope syndrome." Abdullahi et al., (2021) Study revealed that news commercialisation affects objectivity and balance in news reporting on most radio stations. The social responsibility theory supports the above findings from this study. Imo state radio stations at some extent adhere to the ethical standard of their profession; however, at some points they will not entirely continue with that due to complex life situations before them.

Quantitative findings showed at an average mean of 2.4 that the establishment of more radio stations in the state has reduced existing radio station economic earnings, caused most listeners to get confused on which station to either listen to or leave, and even influenced the existing radio station fans not to stay loyal for a long time to their favorite stations. Qualitative findings showed that radio station owners tend to lose funds, profits, clients, and their loyal audiences whenever a new radio station springs up. This poses a challenge to them. According to Myers & Harford (2020),

the most accessible independent news source for millions of people in sub-Saharan Africa remains radio, despite the global growth of digital news providers. They add that poor media markets, low advertising revenues, and fierce competition are posing unprecedented dangers to the viability of radio stations across the continent. According to Akinola & Ojebuyi (2022), the main problem facing FM stations is the requirement to institutionalise professionalism in the broadcast media by passing laws that are acknowledged by the nation's statutes. According to Chioma Choima (2014), there are many challenges that broadcast media stations in Nigeria must overcome, including lack of funding, the high cost of producing locally produced content, regulations, poor management, poor programme quality, inadequate training for broadcast professionals, and politicisation of the broadcast media. The creation of more radio stations is undoubtedly intended to lower the ethical bar for the journalistic industry.

A quantitative finding showed at an average mean of 2.8 that radio stations in Owerri can uphold the ethical standard of their profession by creating a sustainable image before their listeners, sticking strictly to the NBC and NUJ ethical codes and the punishment of defaulting journalists in their station, taking personal decisions, and sticking by them to be the best change they want to see in the world even as they do their day-to-day work. Qualitative findings believe that the NBC code for airing radio stations already has punitive measures that are upheld, making it almost impossible to bend these rules while on air. The individual's personal resolution tends to go a long way in making them do the right thing at all times with the NBC Code punitive measures stipulations. Obayi et al., (2020) concur that it was revealed that journalists in Imo State have a positive perception of the Act on protection, supremacy of the law, social barriers, and withholding of information. Nyong (2018) adds that radio station journalists go against their profession's ethical standard, apparently due to poor remunerations and indebtedness by their employers. Nasidi (2016) finding contradicts that of this study. He found that Nigerian journalists do not totally obey the ethics of their profession; they to some extent discriminate against the code of ethics. Irrespective of the prevalent economic situation in Nigerian society, journalists can still uphold the ethics of their profession if they really, strictly want to. Journalists in Imo State can do better than they are already doing.

5. Conclusion

No doubt, the establishment of more radio stations in Imo State has indirectly influenced radio station owners to engage in this unpronouncedly unhealthy competition among themselves. The findings of this study agreed that the establishment of more radio stations mounts pressure on station owners since they tend to lose their loyal listeners, clients, and, in other cases, their programme structure. It is safe to conclude that the establishment of more radio stations in Imo State makes existing radio stations struggle in their fight to keep up with NBC ethical standards, even as they are confronted with competing radio stations here and there. Radio stations still

uphold the ethical standards NBC stipulated to them even as they lose money, clients, and their fans in the unhealthy competition kicked off by other springing radio stations and their various programmes. The researchers made the following recommendations in light of the findings: 1) Imo state journalists and station owners should keep up with knowing and doing the right thing, just as NBC laid down to them; this will go a long way toward retaining the ethical standard of the journalism profession. 2). We recommend that station owners and their respective staff be up in their game to be unique irrespective of other radio stations coming to join them content for the same or similar clients and profits; this will go a long way toward making their staff formidable to face the worst of situations. 3). Radio station owners in Imo State should make sure their own stipulated station rules do not contradict those of NBC, as that will make their staff struggle to keep up with the NBC on-air laid-down standard.

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