

# CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN PROFESSIONAL ETHICS



**EDITED BY**

**ADUKE ADEBAYO**

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# CHAPTER TWELVE

## COMMUNICATION AND ETHICS

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### INTRODUCTION

#### **The concept of communication**

Communication comes from the Latin word *communicare*, which means “to make common” or “to share”. Communication is vital to human existence. It shapes people’s social and political lives.

Conceptualizations of communication have been abundant and have changed substantially over the years (Miller, 2002). In short, communication is a multipurpose word which means many things to many people. A process-oriented conceptualization of communication suggests that communication is a process through which we manage meanings. Hence, communication is defined “as the process by which meaning is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs or behaviour” (Pearson, Nelson, Titsworth and Harter, 2003:10). Lewis (1975:5) also defines communication as the sharing of messages, ideas or attitudes resulting in a degree of understanding between a sender and receiver.

These definitions suggest that communication is a two-way affair. It involves expression and interaction. It is the sharing of ideas, information, meaning, understanding, etc. If communication is to be effective, meaning must be transferred from one mind to the other. In other words, we can say that communication is successful when the sender of a message and receiver of that message achieve a high degree of similarity in their comprehension of what was actually transmitted (Lewis, 1975).

Despite the ubiquitous nature of communication, it is important to mention that communication is not always effective or ethical. But the extent to which a communication goal is achieved depends largely on how ethical the communication messages are. The National Communication Association (NCA) cited in Pearson, et al (2003:28) underscores the importance of ethical communication thus:

...Ethical communication is fundamental to responsible thinking, decision making, and the development of relationships and communities within and across contexts, cultures, channels and media. Moreover, ethical communication enhances human worth and dignity, by fostering truthfulness, fairness, responsibility, personal integrity, and respect for self and others. We believe that unethical communication threatens the quality of all communication and consequently the well-being of individuals and the society in which we live.

In essence, ethical communication questions the competence and credibility of communicators. It affects the image and reputation of communicators.

Although communication occurs in various contexts or situations: Intrapersonal, Interpersonal, group, public and mass communication settings (each of these contexts poses different challenges to communicators), this paper will focus on the public and mass communication contexts. This is because these settings are quite complex. They present restructured messages which do not only regulate interactions but also affect the well being of the society. They address issues which border on public interest.

### **The nature of ethics**

The word 'ethics' comes from the Greek word 'ethos' which means character. As contained in *The World Book Encyclopedia* (2006:365):

Ethics is a branch of philosophy that attempts to help us understand which ways of life are worth following and which actions are right or wrong. Ethics addresses questions of right and wrong using reason rather than faith or tradition.

Ethics thus has to do with human values or conduct. Conduct includes inward activities such as motives, intentions and desires and outward activities such as speech, movement, writing, selling and buying (Dzurgba, 2003). It is believed that a person's conduct will affect other members of the society. Hence, the need to pay attention to ethical behaviour particularly in the communication industry. Certainly, when ethical decisions are faulty, public reaction would be swift and critical.

Ethics is voluntary in nature – It is self-legislation. It is divided into two fields: normative ethics and meta ethics.

- (i) Normative ethics also referred to as moral philosophy, is concerned with presenting and justifying a guide to right conduct. It employs terms such as "good", "bad", "right" and "wrong" to express preferences, decisions and choices or to criticise, persuade, and praise.



- (ii) Meta ethics also called analytical or critical ethics, systematically studies the meanings of ethical terms and of judgments used in normative ethics, their functions and the means of supporting normative judgments (The Encyclopedia Americana, 2003:610).

Irrespective of the field, ethics tries to introduce order into the way people think about life and behave. It helps to answer such questions as “What should I do? What should I say? How should I behave? How should I live? What is morally justifiable action and what is not?”

In essence, ethics helps people to make rational choices between what is good and bad.

### **THEORIES OF ETHICS**

Ethical theories are explanatory and prescriptive in nature. They justify the moral actions of human beings. According to Rossouw cited in Okunna (1995:8):

Ethical theories propose the appropriate reasons on which our moral decisions should be based... (and have) been developed to identify how we should determine what is actually good not only for ourselves but also for others.

There are many theories of ethics. However, modern ethical theories can be categorized into two schools of thought: deontology and teleology.

#### **Deontological theory**

Deontology holds that what really matters ethically, is what ought to be done, that is, what your obligations are. Equally important is the intention or motive of the person taking an action. For the deontologist, the rightness or wrongness of an action should depend on the intrinsic quality of the action itself rather than on its consequences. “The deontologist in journalism recognizes that certain actions, like sycophancy and acceptance of ‘brown envelopes’ are intrinsically wrong, whether the consequences of such actions are beneficial or not” (Okunna, 1995:15).

The greatest advocate of the deontological theory of ethics is Immanuel Kant. Kant’s categorical imperative moves the notion of what is ethical from the actor to the act itself. For Kant, an action was morally justified only if it was performed from duty. He identified two types of duties – the strict duties which were generally negative (that is, not to harm) and the meritorious duties which were more positive (that is, to aid others) (Patterson and Wilkins, 1998).

#### **Teleological theory**

Teleological theory is also referred to as consequential ethics. Teleology defines ‘right’ in terms of the good produced as the consequence or outcome of an action. The most influential teleologists are the utilitarians,

who include Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. Under the utilitarian view, “it may be considered ethical to harm one person for the benefit of the larger group”. This approach, for instance, is the ethical justification for investigative journalism, which may harm individuals but the results of which are printed or broadcast in the hope of providing a greater societal good (Patterson and Wilkins, 1998). Utilitarianism (also known as social ethics) has thus been condensed to the ethical philosophy of the greatest good for the greatest number.

### **SOME ETHICAL PROBLEMS IN THE COMMUNICATION INDUSTRY**

Some of the ethical challenges communication practitioners have to grapple with include:

#### **Deceptive practices**

Deception is one of the unethical conducts prevalent in the communication industry. For instance, critics of advertising perceive advertising as bad, manipulative and corrupting; consumers frown at misleading claims in advertising.

Arens, Weigold and Arens (2008:65) identify the following forms of unfair and deceptive practices in advertising:

- False Promises – Making an advertising promise that cannot be kept.
- Incomplete Description – Stating some but not all of a product’s contents.
- False and Misleading comparisons – Making false comparisons, either explicitly or by implication.
- Bait-and-Switch Offers – Advertising an item at an unusually low price to bring people into the store and then “switching” them to a higher priced model by claiming that the advertised product is out of stock or poorly made.
- Visual Distortions and False Demonstrations – Using trick photography or computer manipulation to enhance a product’s appearance.
- False testimonials – Implying that a product has the endorsement of a celebrity or an authority who is not a bona fide user, or implying that endorsers have a certain expertise that in fact they don’t.
- Partial Disclosure – Stating certain facts about the advertised product but omitting other material information.



- Small-Print Qualifications – Making a statement in large print, only to qualify or retract it in obscure, small, or unreadable type elsewhere in the ad.

The practice of public relations also raises many truth-telling issues. The term 'PR' sometimes seems to be used in a way that is almost synonymous with half-truths, insincerity and manipulation. (Fill, 2005:94) There is always the temptation to place undue emphasis on positive aspects of an organization or individual's actions while pretending that the negative aspects do not exist.

However, it must be stated that Public relations is not propaganda, it is not bribery and corruption, and it is based on truth and ethical communication.

Some political talks are also quite deceitful.

### **Sycophancy**

Excessive and insincere praise is a common ethical problem in mass communication. The sycophant journalists flatter political leaders, wealthy citizens and owners of the media houses, that is, their employers (Okunna, 1995). The government-owned media are most guilty of the apologist role of praise-singing of government activities and policies.

Sycophancy is a betrayal of trust. It denies the public the correct information which is the duty of the journalist to give them. The sycophant journalist can twist facts, falsify information, or indulge in sensationalism to promote the interest of the person being flattered (Okunna, 1995).

### **Indecent media messages**

There are public complaints about matters of taste and decency in marketing communications, particularly, in advertising. For example, *APCON Advertising news* (2006) published complaints of two consumers about two billboards which featured indecently dressed female models and sexually suggestive messages. These are Hollandia Milk billboard and Energee Drink billboard both erected in Lagos metropolis. The Legend Stout billboards ("Express Yourself" campaign) are also examples of indecent adverts. They portrayed the female models as sex objects.

It is surprising that one of such adverts that is considered creative but indecent by some consumers actually won awards. The Mercedes Benz CLK Coupe, "Topless or Covered" campaign won two awards at the maiden edition of the Brand faces Marketing Awards (BMA 2003).

Now, if Delta soap Television advert can be regarded as indecent and had to be revised for it to be fit for broadcast, then one wonders what



qualifies the “Topless or Covered” advert for an award. Ethics should not be sacrificed on the altar of creativity.

### **Bribery**

The commonest type of bribe in journalism is the so-called ‘brown envelope’ which is a *monetary bribe* handed out to a journalist to pressurize him or her into doing what the bribe giver wants. Acceptance of money and other monetary gifts such as ‘freebies’ (free services – free lunch, free trips) may compromise the integrity of communication practitioners. Okunna (1995) notes that objectivity is usually the first casualty in reporting when journalists succumb to the evils of materialism. Outright lies could end up becoming the stock in trade of unethical journalists as they attempt to please people whose bribes they have accepted.

### **Other problems**

Other ethical problems which confront communication practitioners include invasion of privacy, indecent use of language by comedians, stereotyping (e.g. Mama na boy MTN advert), cluttering of billboards, bad taste in photojournalism, irregularities in sales promotion activities and internet use.

### **THE NEED FOR REGULATION**

It is important to mention that public communication and marketing communications affect lives. They have the potential to offend, mislead or cause distress. Hence, to lessen this potential harm, apart from government legislation, there is a need for voluntary control of activities in the communication industry. The various sectors of the communication industry have therefore put in place measures to check excesses in the industry. In fact, there is self-regulation or self censorship in the communication industry.

Generally, codes of professional ethics in mass communication have the following objectives:

- To protect the consumer – readers, listeners, viewers, or the public in general;
- To protect and inspire the working journalist, broadcaster or others directly concerned with gathering, writing, processing and presenting news and opinions.
- To guide editors and others who take full responsibility for what is published and broadcast;
- To define the responsibilities of proprietors, shareholders and governments who are in a position of absolute control over any form of mass media communication activity;

- To deal with issues of advertisers and others who buy into the services of the media.

(McBride, et al.1981 cited in Okunna, 1995:65)

It has been observed that most of the codes of conduct used by Nigerian Communication Practitioners are derived from the West. They have borrowed from international/universal codes. Nevertheless, these codes of ethics have been put in place as mechanisms for maintaining standards in the communication industry.

We shall now examine some of these codes.

### **Journalistic ethics**

The essence of journalistic ethics is to stipulate rules, norms and principles that would guide the journalist in making moral decisions. Ethics helps the journalist determine what is right or wrong, good or bad, responsible or irresponsible.

The basis for journalistic ethics is supported by the social responsibility theory of the press. In response to the widespread criticism of the American press, especially because of its sensationalism, a private commission of inquiry was set up in 1942 and reported in 1947. It was conducted under the Chairmanship of Robert Hutchins, Chancellor of Chicago University (Blanchard cited in McQuail, 2005). The report coined the notion of social responsibility and highlighted the following key journalistic standards that the press should seek to maintain:

A responsible press should:

- provide a full, truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day's events in a context which gives them meaning;
- serve as a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism and be a 'common carrier of the public expression';
- give a 'representative picture of constituent groups in society'; and
- Present and clarify the 'goals and values of society' (McQuail, 2005: 170-171).

The main principles of the social responsibility theory as summarized by McQuail (2005:172) are:

- The media have obligations to society, and media ownership is a public trust.
- News media should be truthful, accurate, fair, objective and relevant.
- The media should be free, but self-regulated.

- The media should follow agreed codes of ethics and professional conduct.
- Under some circumstances, government may need to intervene to safeguard the public interest.

This theory emphasises the need for regulation in the communication industry.

McQuail (2005) reports that under the auspices of UNESCO, a set of International principles of professional ethics in journalism was drawn up. These principles address idea of a 'right to information, the need to respect universal values and the diversity of cultures.' They also emphasise the need for journalism to promote human rights, peace, national liberation, social progress and democracy (Nordenstreng cited in McQuail, 2005).

Laitila (1995) carried out a comparative study of journalistic codes in 31 European countries. Findings reveal six general principles found in nearly all the 31 codes examined. The most frequently found principles in journalistic codes are:

- Truthfulness of information.
- Clarity of information.
- Defence of the public's right.
- Responsibilities in forming public opinion.
- Standards of gathering and presenting information.
- Respecting the integrity of the sources.

### **CODE OF ETHICS FOR NIGERIAN JOURNALISTS**

Code of ethics is considered to be a vital pillar of journalism. The following code of ethics was drawn up by professionals – The Nigerian Press Council in collaboration with the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) and the Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE) in 1996. The code was ratified by the Nigerian Press Organisation (made up of NUJ, NGE and Newspaper Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN) in 1998. It is the duty of every journalist practising in Nigeria to observe the following provisions:

1. **Editorial independence**  
Decisions concerning the content of news should be the responsibility of a professional journalist.
2. **Accuracy and fairness**
  - i. The public has a right to know. Factual, accurate balance and fair reporting is the ultimate objective of good journalism and the basis of earning public trust and confidence.



ii. A journalist should refrain from publishing inaccurate and misleading information. Where such information has been inadvertently published, prompt correction should be made. A journalist must hold the right of reply as a cardinal rule of practice.

iii. In the course of duties a journalist should strive to separate facts from conjecture and comment.

3. **Privacy**

As a general rule, a journalist should respect the privacy of individuals and their families unless it affects public interest.

a. Information on the private life of an individual or his family should only be published if it impinges on public interest.

b. Publishing of such information about an individual as mentioned above should be deemed justifiable only if it is directed at:

- i. Exposing crime or serious misdemeanour;
- ii. Exposing anti-social conduct;
- iii. Protecting public health, morality and safety;
- iv. Preventing the public from being misled by some statement or action of the individual concerned.

4. **Privilege/Non-disclosure**

i. A journalist should observe the universally accepted principle of confidentiality and should not disclose the source of information obtained in confidence.

ii. A journalist should not breach an agreement with a source of information obtained as "off-the-record" or as "background information."

5. **Decency**

i. A journalist should dress and comport himself in a manner that conforms to public taste.

ii. A journalist should refrain from using offensive, abusive or vulgar language.

iii. A journalist should not present lurid details, either in words or picture of violence, sexual acts, abhorrent or horrid scenes.

iv. In cases involving personal grief or shock, enquiries should be carried out and approaches made with sympathy and discretion.

v. Unless it is in the furtherance of the public's right to know, a journalist should generally avoid identifying relatives or friends of persons convicted or accused of crime.

6. **Discrimination**

A journalist should refrain from making pejorative reference to a person's ethnic group, religion, sex or to any physical or mental illness or handicap.

7. **Reward and gratification**

- i. A journalist should neither solicit nor accept bribe, gratification or patronage to suppress or publish information.
- ii. To demand payment for the publication of news is inimical to the notion of news as a fair, accurate, unbiased and factual report of an event.

8. **Violence**

A journalist should not present or report acts of violence, armed robberies, terrorist activities or vulgar display of wealth in a manner that glorifies such acts in the eyes of the public.

9. **Children and minors**

A journalist should not identify, either by name or picture, or interview children under the age of 16 who are involved in cases concerning sexual offences, crimes and rituals or witchcraft either as victims, witnesses or defendants.

10. **Access to information**

A journalist should strive to employ open and honest means in the gathering of information. Exceptional methods may be employed only when the public interest is at stake.

11. **Public interest**

A journalist should strive to enhance national unity and public good.

12. **Social responsibility**

A journalist should promote universal principles of human rights, democracy, justice, equity, peace and international understanding.

13. **Plagiarism**

A journalist should not copy, wholesale or in part, other people's work without attribution and/or consent.

14. **Copyright**

- i. Where a journalist reproduces a work, be it in print, broadcast, art work or design, proper acknowledgement should be accorded the author.
- ii. A journalist should abide by all rules of copyright, established by national and international laws and conventions.

15. **Press freedom and responsibility**

A journalist should strive at all times to enhance press freedom and responsibility.

## **BROADCAST ETHICS**

The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) regulates and controls the Broadcasting Industry in Nigeria. The NBC was established by Section 1 of the NBC Act No. 38 of 1992 (as amended).

### **Nigeria Broadcasting Code**

The Nigeria Broadcasting Code is aimed at assisting “broadcasters to make sound decisions and build credibility in their vital role of providing the public with the power to make important decisions thus serving society in an ethically responsible and constructive manner”. (Nigeria Broadcasting Code 2006:5)

As contained in the NBC Code (2006) document, a broadcast licensee shall:

- (a) Adhere to the general principles of legality, decency, truth, integrity and respect for human dignity as well as the cultural, moral and social values of the people within the provisions of the constitution;
- (b) Pay special attention to the protection and development of children and other persons requiring special care and consideration;
- (c) Be mindful of the degree of harm and offence likely to be caused by the inclusion of any material in programming in general or in specific terms;
- (d) Maintain professional independence and editorial control over content and scheduling.

**Some of the provisions of the code are:**

#### **Programmed presentation**

- A presenter or anchor shall be decently and appropriately attired to reflect the culture of the community.
- A presenter/continuity announcer shall have a good command of the language of presentation, in diction and grammar.
- A presenter/anchor shall not express an opinion in the programme.
- A presenter/anchor on a phone-in programme shall handle it with maturity and sound judgment to ensure that the programme does not lose focus or lead to unfair treatment of any person or institution.
- Every scheduled broadcast item, including spot announcements, shall be scripted.



**Programming standard**

- All programmes shall adhere to the general principles of legality, decency and truthfulness, in addition to the specific guidelines for their genres.
- Any movie classified as *Not Suitable for Broadcast* (NSFB) shall not be BROADCAST.
- Any musical content classified as *Not to Be Broadcast* (NTBB) shall not be BROADCAST.
- All sides to an issue shall be equitably presented, preferably in the same broadcast.
- A *Right of Reply* shall be guaranteed to any person(s) or body with a genuine claim to misrepresentation.
- The physically and mentally challenged shall not be exploited or presented in a manner embarrassing to the disabled or members of their families.
- The use of lewd or profane expressions shall be avoided.
- Womanhood shall be presented with respect and dignity.

**Programmes**

- Panelists in a discussion programme shall reflect the various view points.
- Take due care in dealing with themes which children could imitate, like the use of dangerous items as play items or copying of violent sports;
- ...religious broadcast shall not exceed 10% of the total weekly airtime of any station.
- Privacy in the process of acquiring programmes or in obtaining material for programmes shall not be infringed upon.
- Materials recorded in public places may be broadcast without the consent of the individuals concerned, however, where the individuals object, such objection shall be respected.
- News and Current Affairs programmes shall be guided by the ethical standards of journalism.
- Broadcast stations shall avoid the adulation or tendency to glamorize persons or personalities or resort to praise singing or denial of access to those of contrary views or political leanings.

- An advertisement shall be accepted for broadcast only if it is accompanied with a certificate of approval from the Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON).
- Every effort shall be made to keep the advertisement message in harmony with the content and general tone of the programme in which, or adjacent to which, it appears.
- A newscaster personifies the sacredness of news. Therefore, a person who regularly presents news or news-related programmes shall not feature, visually or vocally, in an advertisement.

(Source: Nigeria Broadcasting Code, 2006)

### **ADVERTISING AND SALES PROMOTION ETHICS**

The Nigerian Code of Advertising Practice and Sales promotion, enacted vide the powers conferred on the Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON) by the relevant provisions of Act 55 of 1988 as amended by Act 93 of 1992.

The Statutory Committees charged with the duty of enforcing this code are:

- (i) The Advertising Standards Panel (ASP) and its relevant sub-committees,
- (ii) The Advertising Practitioners Investigating Panel (APIP), and
- (iii) The Advertising Practitioners Disciplinary Committee (APDC).

### **Advertising**

As stated in the code, all advertisements in Nigeria shall:

- be legal, decent, honest, truthful and respectful and mindful of Nigeria's culture;
- be prepared with a high sense of social responsibility and avoid misinformation or disinformation;
- always be in the interest of the consumer and the wider Nigerian Society;
- Conform to the principles of fair competition generally accepted in business, and of fair comment expected in free human communication;
- Enhance public confidence in advertising.

### **Provisions of the code include:**

- All advertisements must be legal. This implies that they must conform to all existing laws of Nigeria in addition to international laws and conventions, as well as the provisions of the Oath of Advertising Practice.

- Advertisements must not use visual illustrations or words or sounds that offend public taste and decency. In particular, no obscene or offensive production or exposure is allowed in any advertisement.
- All advertisements for regulated products and services must be presented for vetting and approval by the Advertising Standards Panel before exposure....
- No sex shall be depicted as subservient by causing one group as inferior or superior to the other.
- No advertisement shall glorify or make insinuations of sensual behaviour or wordage.
- Testimonials and endorsements must be genuine, and the models used must be alive and suitable for the products, services and ideas they endorse in the advertisements.
- Advertisers and advertising agencies shall be prepared to produce evidence in support of any testimonial or endorsement and any claims therein.  
Any model used in a testimonial for any product or service must in reality be a regular user of such product or service.
- No advertisement for any alcoholic beverage shall be exposed in children's, religious and sports programmes.
- Children, sports men and women, or pregnant women shall not be used as models in alcohol advertisements.
- Television commercials for all alcoholic beverages shall not be aired before 10.00 p.m.
- No commercials for alcoholic products shall be aired on radio before 8.00 p.m.
- Advertising of tobacco products in any manner is prohibited.
- Political advertisements shall be issue-oriented and devoid of abusive statements or references. They shall not employ fake, distorted or unsubstantiated claims, or contain misrepresentations.
- Media houses shall not accept for publication or broadcast any advertisement for foods, drinks, cosmetics, medicines and medical devices, etc, unless there is evidence that such products have been registered by the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) and the advertising material approved by APCON as required by law.



- Children shall not be induced to copy behaviour or practices which may be unsafe or in any way hazardous for them.
- Advertisements using children as models shall not expose them or the child audience to values that are not approved by the society in general.

#### **Sales promotion**

- All sales promotions must be legal, decent, honest and truthful.
- The terms and conduct of all sales promotion shall be equitable to all participants. The fulfillment of any obligation arising therefore shall be prompt and efficient.
- Written permission shall be obtained from prize winners if their names and addresses are to be used in publicity otherwise than in the general notification of results as contained in the initial promotional material...
- Promoters should ensure that promotional products meet satisfactory standards of safety, durability and performance in use.
- Sales promotions shall be designed and conducted with proper regard to normal safety precautions, so that intermediaries, beneficiaries, or any other persons are not unduly exposed to any harm.

#### **Public Relations ethics**

The NIPR Code of Professional Conduct (Bye - Laws No of 1992) includes the following provisions:

#### **Excerpts of the NIPR code**

A member shall:

- Have a positive duty to observe the highest standards in the practice of Public Relations and to deal fairly and honestly with employers and clients (past and present), fellow members and professionals, the public relations profession, other professions, suppliers, intermediaries, the media of communications, employees and above all, the public.
- Conduct his or her professional activities with proper regard to the public interest.
- Have a positive duty at all times to respect the truth and shall not disseminate false or misleading information knowingly or recklessly, and take proper care to check all information prior to its dissemination.

- Honour confidences received or given in the course of professional activity.
- Neither offer nor give, or cause an employer or clients to give any inducement to holders of Public office or members of any statutory body or organisation who are not directors, executives or retained consultants, with intent to further the interests of the employer or client if such action is inconsistent with the public interest.

**A member shall not:**

- Misuse information regarding his or her employer's or client's business for financial or other gain.
- Serve an employer or client under terms or conditions which might impair his or her independence, objectivity or integrity.
- Guarantee the achievement of results which are beyond the member's direct capacity to achieve or prevent.
- Injure the professional reputation or practice of another member.

(Source: Osho, 2001)

**ETHICS AND PUBLIC SPEAKING**

“Speechmaking is a form of power and therefore carries with it heavy ethical responsibilities” (Lucas, 2001:34). When the power of speech is abused it often has disastrous consequences. Adolf Hitler remains to this day, the ultimate example of why the power of the spoken word needs to be guided by a strong sense of ethical integrity. Hitler was a persuasive speaker but his aims were horrifying and his tactics despicable (Lucas 2001:35).

In contemporary times, public speakers particularly politicians, public office holders, and government officials are often faced with the age-old ethical dilemma of whether the end justifies the means. For example, should a Vice Chancellor lie in order to pacify students on rampage? Should a politician make false promises in order to get the electorate to cast their votes for him/her? Should a Bank CEO declare false profits at an AGM to impress shareholders? Should a politician who has lost at the polls incite his/her supporters to take up arms to claim their votes?

A speaker's ethical decisions would be guided by his/her values, conscience and sense of right and wrong.

Guidelines for ethical conduct in public speaking:

- Have worthy motives.
- Be fully prepared for a speech.
- Use sound arguments.

- Be honest.
- Avoid name-calling and other forms of abusive language.
- Behave ethically all the time.
- Avoid plagiarism.
- Have genuine concern for the well-being of the audience.
- Do not quote out of context.
- Use acceptable means of persuasion.

An ethical speaker is perceived to be more credible than an unethical speaker.

### ENSURING ETHICAL STANDARDS IN THE COMMUNICATION INDUSTRY

There is no doubt a global concern for ethics in contemporary society. This is probably because the world is gradually becoming a *global village*. We are in an information age driven by Information Communication Technology (ICT). Not only this, the global economic meltdown has affected stakeholders in the communication industry. One of the cons of these phenomena of our times is the prevalence of unethical behaviour in the industry. There is therefore an urgent need to ensure that ethical standards are maintained in the communication industry through the following measures:

#### **Self-regulation**

The most obvious way of maintaining standards in the industry is by ensuring that practitioners observe the provisions of the code of conduct of their various professions. The following regulatory bodies have a great role to play in this:

- The Nigerian Press Council (NPC)
- The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC)
- The Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR)
- The Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON) and its various sectoral arms such as:
  - \* The Association of Advertising Agencies of Nigeria (AAAN)
  - \* The Outdoor Advertising Association of Nigeria (OAAN)
  - \* The Media Independent Practitioners Association of Nigeria (MIPAN)
  - \* Advertisers Association of Nigeria (ADVAN)
- National Agency for Food and Drugs Administration and Control (NAFDAC)
- The Consumers Protection Council (CPC)
- The Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC)



There is a need for sensitization and effective monitoring of practices in the industry; erring practitioners should also be disciplined. The regulatory bodies should not be toothless bulldogs. Since ethics is voluntary in nature, efforts should be made to ensure ethical behaviour in the industry. Although, much is still expected, mention must be made of the efforts of APCON in this direction. For instance, the Advertising Standards Panel (ASP), a statutory committee of APCON, insists on seeing prizes before approval is given to any advertisement on sales promotion. The ASP also bans advertisements that do not conform to the regulations.

It has been observed that some hitherto unethical television adverts have been revised to meet ethical standards. Examples are the current Delta Soap and Dettol Disinfectant adverts. For the Delta Soap TV advert, the sensual dance movements of the models have been edited while the visuals which expose children to harmful practices have been edited in the Dettol TV advert.

Now, what do we say about Omo's "Dirt is good" campaign. It is indeed a pleasure that it is now a thing of the past as it is no longer on!

The National Broadcasting Commission has also tried to pull its weight. In 2006, the Commission resolved complaints brought against the Lagos State Television by the Ogun State government. It also resolved complaints over the adverts by MTN and Virgin Nigeria (Media Review; 2006). Moreover, some erring stations have been shut down. For instance, recently, an FM Radio Station was shut down in Ado-Ekiti for not complying with the regulations of political broadcasting during the bye-elections in Ado-Ekiti.

Now, the big questions are: What is the Nigerian Press Council (NPC) doing? Can we have a feel of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR)?

#### **Integrate communication ethics into the curriculum**

Integrating ethics into the curriculum of Communication, Business Administration and Management courses in tertiary institutions will no doubt expose students to the ethics which will regulate their practice when they eventually become graduates.

Students need to be aware that they will influence ethics in their companies. Students therefore need to examine past and current ethical standards of society and then envision whether these standards will change (Brown and Mausehund, 1997). As Fritzsche (1990:46) notes, "The CEO sets the ethical tenor of the organization". Hence, the responsibility for establishing ethical standards resides with management. He adds that since colleges and universities prepare future managers, educators must assume some responsibility of increasing students' awareness of ethical issues.

## AUDIENCE ETHICS

Communication as stated earlier is a two-way affair: The major players in any communication activity are therefore the source and the receiver (audience).

It is pertinent to mention that the audience as a major stakeholder in the communication industry has a vital role to play in ensuring that practitioners maintain ethical standards. There is an urgent need to let audience members know that they have a responsibility.

According to Aucoin (1996:72) “audience ethics focus on the responsibilities of audience members as they are exposed to experience, ideas, and facts presented by the mass media. It is incumbent upon the audience to actively engage in the conversation of public discourse coming to them via the mass media if the course concerns matter of public policy”.

Ethical behaviour as a member of a democratic society demands more than cancelling subscriptions or changing channels or adopting strategies to resist dissonant messages.

Aucoin (1996:74) summarized media audience ethics by the following rules:

1. Agree to converse. Agree to engage in the public dialogue. Talk back to your TV sets, your newspapers, and your magazines.
2. Demand sufficient evidence before you accept a report or story as representing a truthful account.
3. Retain a healthy degree of skepticism even when you are willing to accept a report as truthful. No report can be the final word. What will the next report say? What will the next source tell you? Truth-seeking about public and social issues must by nature be a continual process. It can never be an arrival.
4. Identify and challenge ideologies of message senders. What unspoken beliefs about the world have moulded and shaded the message.
5. Recognize and challenge private motives of public communicators. What hidden agendas have affected the messages?
6. Bring to a mediated dialogue your own understanding derived from past experiences and fact gatherings and contrast and compare them in a critical way with the mediated message...insist that the message makes sense before you believe it.

The foregoing suggests that audience members for example, television viewers, radio listeners, newspaper/magazine readers, consumers/customers who are targets of marketing communication messages, listeners of public



speakers/rhetors need to be more sensitive to the messages they receive. The audience members need to be more dynamic, critical and less gullible.

There are provisions in the various codes examined in this paper to ensure effective feedback from the audience. Audience reaction can be conveyed through letters to the editor, letters to producers/presenters, telephone calls to editors, producers and presenters. Any breach of the ethical codes of conduct can also be reported formally to regulatory bodies. In particular, the APCON, NBC, NAFDAC and the CPC welcome complaints from the public.

### CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed the role of ethics in communication behaviour. It must be reiterated that ethical communication is necessary for the achievement of goals. An individual or corporate body can build a good image and reputation through ethical communication- Ethical communication enhances credibility. It is no doubt the road path to effective rebranding of any product!

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