
INVESTIGATING THE INFLUENCE OF PROFESSIONAL CODE OF CONDUCT ON

JOURNALIST PERFORMANCE AMONG WOMEN IN UGANDA

A CASE STUDY OF UGANDA BROADCASTING COOPERATION(UBC)

UGANDA

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed at investigating the influence of professional code of conduct on performance of female journalists working at UBC. It explored the knowledge and adherence of female journalists to the professional code of conduct while performing their work and secondly, the challenges they face in trying to adhere to professional code of while performing their journalism. The questionnaire that was self- administered and content analysis were the two main tools employed in this study, which combined qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The findings corroborate what is in the documented reports by HRW, Amnesty International, UHRC, IFEX, CPJ, and HRNJ about media censorship in Uganda and show that the majority of respondents lack understanding of professional rules of conduct and find it challenging to adhere to them as they carry out their work. The report suggests, among other things, that Ugandan media outlets train their staff members the appropriate professional behaviour and encourage adherence to it while they are working. Secondly, that the media houses should look for alternative measures to the challenges their workers face in trying to ensure performance while adhering to the professional codes of conduct.

Key words: professional code, conduct, journalists and performance

Background to the study

Uganda currently has over 200 FM radio stations, up from 14 in December 1996, according to the Uganda Communication Commission (UCC), while the number of private television stations increased from four to 45, including cable networks, in the same time period (IREX, 2008:388). This appears to be highly beneficial for the industry in terms of speech freedom. Nevertheless, starting in 2002, the National Resistance Movement (NRM)-led government started to control the media by putting

obstacles in the way of media operations (Kazaara & Kazaara, 2023). This was accomplished by introducing harsh and restrictive internal regulations against the media and by permitting very little freedom of communication and wide range of opinion. The difficulties the media is currently experiencing, meanwhile, are numerous and go beyond the scope of a single journalist. The degree of investment by media owners in the sector has been significantly impacted by a growing commercialization of media outlets, particularly radio. Many media managers and owners have chosen to use freelancers who are paid on an as-needed basis (Kazaara & Kazaara, 2023). The compensation per tale ranges from less than a dollar to a few bucks. For up-country radio stations in particular, these reimbursements are not only insufficient but also erratic. The output's quality has been impacted as a result. Particularly at radio and television stations headquartered in the upcountry, there seems to be a constant shortage of qualified media workers. Journalists are frequently underequipped, lacking essential instruments of the trade including laptops, voice recorders, and cameras (Davids et al., 2023).

Statement of the problem

The distribution and broadcasting of inaccurate stories, unbalanced disclosure, subjective rather than objective and fair coverage of the news, failing to respect the confidentiality of individuals when collecting data for news stories, accepting bribes, revealing information sources, and encouraging hate speech are all factors that can make journalists more vulnerable to attacks and threats, according to studies by HRNJ-Uganda 21. In the opinion of HRNJ-Uganda, there may be a connection between journalists' effectiveness and their lack of competence (Mercy et al., 2023). This would make it crucial to target current active professionals across the nation, using UBC as a case study, and provide them with the necessary training and information as a preventative strategy to boost the quality of their work (Kazaara et al., 2023). It is hoped that this study would strengthen continuing efforts by the media industry to sustain ethical practices and support independent journalism, and that this will immediately improve the efficiency of journalists in general and women journalists in particular. As a result, research is now necessary

to determine whether professional codes of conduct affect female journalists at work.

Specific objectives

- 1. To examine the state of journalists' knowledge and adherence to the professional code of conduct while at work.*
- 2. To find out the challenges female journalists practically face in the process of performing their work and practicing their professions in Uganda.*
- 3. To examine the limitations of professional code of conduct among female journalists in Uganda.*

Methodology

Research design

This study used a survey method for its research design. This was the case because surveys enable the analysis of a representative sample of individuals in order to ascertain the prevalence, distribution, and relationships between sociological and psychological factors at the time the survey was conducted. According to Nwabueze (2009), a survey is a not meant to be experimental descriptive research approach that gathers precise information about a present condition by selecting a sample of the community. According to Ohaja (2003), a survey is a study of a sample's characteristics conducted through asking that enables the investigator to draw conclusions about his population of attention. This definition is validated by Ohaja's investigation.

Sampling design or technique

The opinions of academics were carefully considered when choosing the right sample for this study. Random sampling was the method of sampling employed in this study. The investigator used these strategies to increase the likelihood that any sample component would be chosen. fifty participants were thus randomly chosen from the population by the investigator to make up the sample size.

Population sample

The population for this study was the female journalists working at UBC in any department. However, for the purpose of manageability of sample and avoidance

of guess work, the populations for this study were female journalists from Editorial department, presenters, reporters, managers, investigative journalists and sports analysts. This population is esteemed with a number of fifty individuals.

Sample size determination

The research was based on a targeting population of 50 individuals. In this context, the research interviewed a sample size of 40 respondents to represent the whole population of the entire study. The researcher chose this size due to the need for the researcher to be cost effective so as to reduce on the time and cost that the study would have taken when the sample is so large. This sample size was determined using Slovene's formula.

Instruments for Data collection

The interview guide, pencils, notebooks, and document review were some of the instruments that the investigator used to gather data for this study. The interview guide assisted the investigator in recording the pre-interview preparation steps and also shows the flow of the questions that should be asked of those who participated. The participant's varied points were recorded in notebooks and with pens, together with their job titles, proper names, contact information, and the dates on which they were met. The investigator utilized a document review to find pertinent literature related to the study's issue.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was carried out using a variety of techniques. The consultant and statistician checked all answers to the surveys for consistency and data quality before entering the information into a pre-programmed data entry screen in CSpro, cleaning it, and then exporting it for SPSS analysis (Nelson et al., 2022). Frequency/percentage distribution tables, distribution graphs, and cross-tabulations are the primary forms of presentation and analysis for the study because it is mostly descriptive in nature.

While taking careful notes and underlining the new problems, data from KI was recorded. These were subsequently manually evaluated and categorized into themes, after which narratives were built for interpretations. The voices and topics

voiced by those who participated are highlighted and illustrated using quotes from the KIs.

RESULTS

The table 1 below summarizes the respondents' employment status

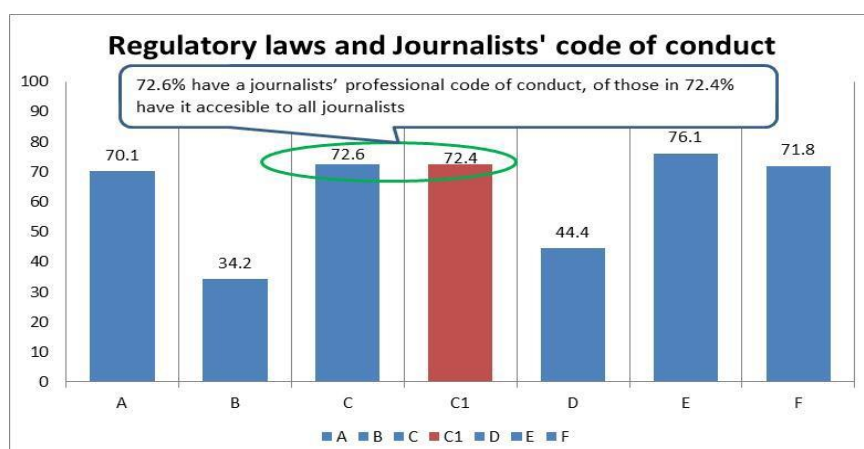
<i>Employment status of respondents</i>		
<i>Employment</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentages</i>
<i>Freelance</i>	51	44
<i>Full time staff</i>	66	56
<i>Total</i>	117	100

Respondents' position in the media outlet

Within the media organization they worked for, the majority (84%) of the participants held a role as a reporter or contributor; just one participant held a producer position. There was no statistically significant difference ($P\text{-value} > 0.05$) found when the study contrasted the different positions by type of media outlet, including print, radio, TV, and online. However, as we had already noticed, the radio media type of media outlet employed the majority of the people who participated (reporters/correspondents).

Figure 2

The figure below shows respondents' knowledge of the media laws, knowledge of conventions that guarantee freedom of expression, UBC with code of conduct and the journalist's access to the codes.



- A Know any media regulatory laws
 - B Know any conventions that guarantee freedom of expression and media
 - C Media house has a copy of journalists' code of conduct
 - C1 Accessible to all journalists in media house
 - D Have a personal copy
 - E talk about the need for journalists to adhere to the professional code of ethics
 - F media house have an in-house editorial policy or guidelines for journalists
- Journalists' engagement with and adherence to the professional code of ethics and principles**

Like any other profession worth its name, the journalism professional code of ethics is ideally

the constitution of the journalism profession, intended to guide the practice of sourcing, processing and dissemination of news and information. But from the table below, about 58 per cent of the journalists indicated that they make reference to the journalism professional code of ethics as and when the need arises with about 8 per cent referencing it at least once a month. Findings show that another 8 per cent makes consult their professional code on a daily basis.

Table 2

The table below shows the distribution of the frequency the respondents make reference to their professional code of ethics

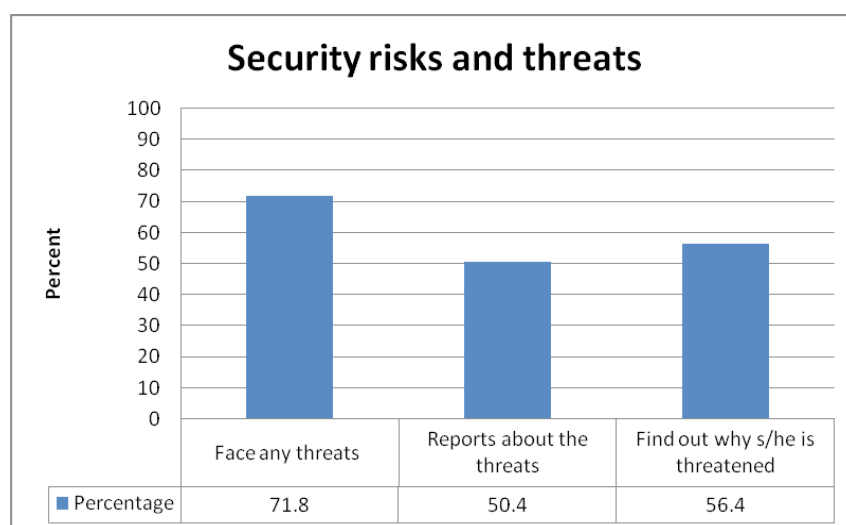
How often respondents engage with/make reference to their professional code of			
How often and under what		Frequency	Valid Percent
	Daily	4	7.7
	Once a week	6	11.5
	Several times a	8	15.4
	At least once a	4	7.7
	Whenever I feel	30	57.7
	Total	52	100.0

Another male KI from Kampala opines that adherence to the code is low due to the fact that many of those who join journalism do not do it out of passion for the profession, but rather as a source of income. Another KI from Mpigi suggested that some journalists get compromised on their ethics due to their needy financial situations.

How to enhance professionalism and ethical reporting among journalists

Figure 3

The figure below shows percentages of respondents who reported facing threats and risks, those who reported about the threats and those who found out why they were threatened.



When asked if they had made efforts to inform anyone (even police) of the threats they were facing, only half of the respondents indicated that they had informed anyone about the risks and threats they were facing.

Majority of those who said they had reported to someone (70 per cent) said they had reported to HRNJ-Uganda alongside their supervisors (editor/manager). Other offices/individuals mentioned included the police (15 per cent), fellow reporters/journalists, local authorities, and the Uganda Human Rights Commission.

Table 3

The table 3 below shows the distribution of the frequency respondents said the threat affect their ability to fully report stories

How threats affect respondents' ability to fully report			
How threats do to		Frequency	Percent
	Seriously	33	28.2
	Somehow	64	54.7
	Not at all	10	8.5
	Not sure	10	8.5
	Total	117	100.0

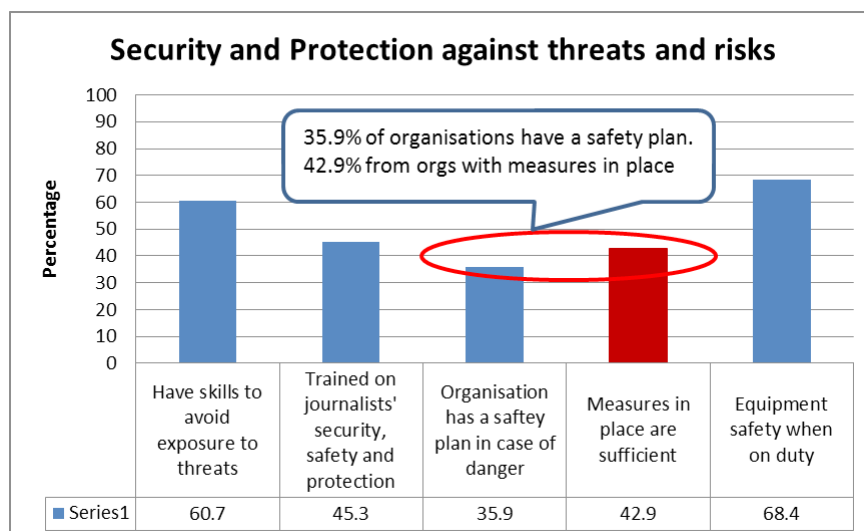
Journalists need to strengthen their defense and protection mechanisms.

The study examined the existing defense and protection mechanism that are available to

Journalists. Only 45.3% of journalists claimed to have had formal safety and protection training, despite the fact that 60.7% said they had the knowledge and abilities to avoid and handle dangers and threats in the course of their employment. The following organizations were listed by participants as having provided training: ARTICLE 19, HRNJ-Uganda, Panos, UMDf, and the Red Cross. The survey also asked about the existence of a safety strategy or policy at the participants' news company. The majority of the participants (64%) claimed that their media outlets lack a safety protocol. Few media outlets (36%) claimed to have a safety protocol, but the majority (57%) believed that it was insufficient to address the growing threats and attacks. This is because among the elements listed as part of the safety protocols for some media houses included; having a company lawyer, having security guards, suspending sensitive stories, provision of organization IDs, branded T-shirts among others.

Figure 4

The figure 4 below shows the percentage of respondents who said that they have the skills to deal with risks; those who have been trained on safety and protection, media houses with a safety protocol, and those who think that the measures in place are sufficient.



Proportion who has heard any of the key safety statements

Journalists who comprehend and respect their working environment and are capable of making decisions on their personal safety can help to ensure their safety and security. In order to enable participants to demand safety nets at their places of employment, the study questioned participants if they had heard of some of the essential statements.

The assertion that "Journalists ought not to take risks in investigating a story because they think they could potentially be killed or injured" was known to slightly more than half (55.6%) of the sample. The statement that "A journalist can refuse a dangerous assignment" was, however, unknown to less than half (49.6%) of respondents.

While it is generally assumed among media practitioners that; "No story is worth a journalist's life", only 73.5% of respondents said that they had ever heard the statement. It is however important to note that respondents acknowledged having heard and indeed agreed with the statement that; "It is important for journalists to have safety training"

Table 4

The table 4 below shows the distribution of the frequency respondents said they had heard of the following media safety statements.

Respondents have heard of media safety statements			
		Frequency	Percentage
Which one of the following statements have you ever heard about? (Tick	Journalists should not take risks in pursuing a story if they think they might be killed or injured		
	No	52	44.4
	Yes	65	55.6
	A journalist can refuse a dangerous		
	No	59	50.4
	Yes	58	49.6
	Media houses should provide journalists with safety equipment while going for dangerous assignments		
	No	28	23.9
	Yes	89	76.1
	It is important for journalists to have safety		
	No	27	23.1
	Yes	90	76.9
	Media house should provide journalists with		
	No	42	35.9
	Yes	75	64.1
	No story is worth a journalists' life		
	No	31	26.5
	Yes	86	73.5

How security risks and threats impact the way journalists relate and get stories from sources

Majority of the respondent (81 per cent) indicated that the constant security risks and

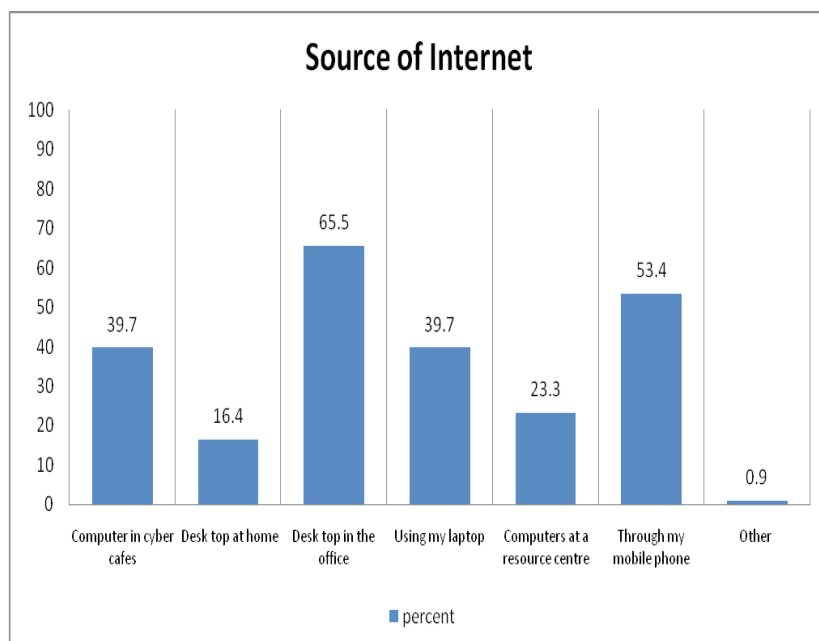
threats that they face have an impact on their behavior as journalists especially on how they related with their sources of information. Close to 30% of the respondents indicated that the impact was very serious. Below are selected responses from some respondents on the impact of the threats on how they related and got stories from sources.

Journalists must embrace digital security and online safety

The poll asked participants how they access internet services because of the significant role that the internet and online communication play as well as the hazards and threats that go along with them. While 65.5% said they used the desktop computers in their offices to access the internet, 53.4% said they used their mobile phones.

Nearly 40% of people used public computers and cybercafés to access the internet. Given the dangers of using shared machines, this requires knowledge and tools to remain anonymous online. Unfortunately, when pressed further, the bulk of participants didn't appear to have either the software or the know-how to surf the web secretly while utilizing a shared computer.

The figure below summarizes the distribution of the frequency respondents' source of internet



Conclusions

As custodians of news and information, numerous professionals are not familiar with the aforementioned structures and are unaware of their rights and obligations. The level of respect for and commitment to professional journalism rules and other internal editing standards is still poor, and the number of infractions is fairly significant. This can be linked to a number of things, including a lack of the necessary knowledge and abilities, a lack of enthusiasm for the job, low compensation, and sheer impunity among the media community.

Recommendations

Journalists need ongoing education and training in the fundamentals of reporting and producing news, such as impartiality, accuracy, fairness, weighing, and multiple sources. This can be accomplished through prearranged internal training, formally planned training workshops on particular themes, mentoring, and coaching. Support media outlets in building an ethical code of conduct by helping them create internal editorial rules that upper management must enforce.

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