



NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA

SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCE

COURSE CODE: MAC214

**COURSE TITLE:
INVESTIGATIVE AND INTERPRETATIVE REPORTING**



MAC214
INVESTIGATIVE AND INTERPRETATIVE REPORTING

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Introduction

MAC214 (Investigative and Interpretative Reporting) is a two-unit course for undergraduate students of Mass Communication. The materials you are about to read have been designed according to the National Open University of Nigeria guidelines. This course is designed to aid your better understanding of the basic concepts involved in the specialised area of investigative and interpretative reporting.

Course Aims

The main aim of this course is to introduce you to the fundamental aspects of investigative and interpretative reporting for the mass media. These aims will be achieved by:

1. assisting you understand the terms involved in investigative and interpretative reporting;
2. providing you with the knowledge needed to gather information for writing an investigative and interpretative report;
3. highlighting steps involved in writing and developing an investigative and interpretative report;
4. aiding you in understanding the foundations of communication law and ethics.

Course Objectives

After going through this course, you should be able to:

1. define the basic terms involved in the study and development of an investigative and interpretative report
2. identify the various sources needed in the development of an investigative and interpretative story
3. gather the necessary information needed for an investigative and interpretative report
4. convert the information obtained from your sources into an acceptable story that communicates and can be understood and accepted by the society for which you are writing
5. discuss the laws that govern the sourcing and reporting of investigative and interpretative stories.

Working through This Course

This course can easily be understood if you as the student can effectively go through all the study units as well as attempt to answer the self-assessment exercises and tutor- marked assignments provided at the end of each unit. Extra efforts should also be made to source for the

recommended texts for better understanding of the various topics discussed.

Course Materials

The basic materials you will need for this course include the following:

1. Course Guide
2. Study Units
3. Assignment File
4. Relevant Textbooks including the ones provided at the end of each unit
5. Reading through newspapers and magazines that have investigative and interpretative reporting

Study Units

This course comprises four modules under which are relevant study units. They are as follows.

Module 1 Investigative and Interpretative Reporting: Understanding the Terms

- | | |
|--------|--|
| Unit 1 | What is Journalism? |
| Unit 2 | What Is Investigative Journalism? |
| Unit 3 | Interpretative Journalism |
| Unit 4 | Relating Investigative with Interpretative Reporting |

Module 2 Gathering Information for In-Depth Reporting

- | | |
|--------|---|
| Unit 1 | Sources of Information |
| Unit 2 | Interviews |
| Unit 3 | Documentation and Interpretation of Information |
| Unit 4 | Going Undercover |
| Unit 5 | Systematic Follow-up |

Module 3 Investigative and Interpretative Reporting: Writing the Story

- | | |
|--------|---|
| Unit 1 | Writing an In-Depth Investigative Story I |
| Unit 2 | Writing an In-Depth Investigative Story II |
| Unit 3 | Writing an In-Depth Investigative Story III |
| Unit 4 | Writing an In-Depth Investigative Story IV |

Module 4 Communication Law and Ethics

Unit 1	Understanding Communication Laws and Ethics
Unit 2	Journalism Law
Unit 3	Ethics in Journalism
Unit 4	Ethical Issues and Making Ethical Decisions

Summary

This course is basically about the process of investigating news-worthy occurrences within the society with the aim of not only informing but also bringing about a change for the better. As a journalist, the need to tell the story is just the beginning. There is also the need to interpret the news to enable the society to understand the implications of the event to their lives and their future. This course outlines these factors as well as the process of developing such reports and the ethical issues to consider in news reporting.

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MODULE 1 INVESTIGATIVE AND INTERPRETATIVE REPORTING: UNDERSTANDING THE TERMS

Unit 1	What is Journalism?
Unit 2	What Is Investigative Journalism?
Unit 3	Interpretative Journalism
Unit 4	Relating Investigative with Interpretative

UNIT 1 WHAT IS JOURNALISM?

CONTENTS

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
3.1	What is Journalism
3.2	Brief History of Journalism in Nigeria
3.3	The Selection of News
3.4	The Journalist and the Society
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0	References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit considers the foundation of the concept of journalism and the function of journalists within the society. It also considers the elements considered by the journalist in choosing the newsworthy items to be presented to the audience for consumption.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- define journalism
- discuss the history of journalism in Nigeria
- explain how journalists select news value events
- explain the relationship between the journalist and the society.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Definition of Terms

A core term that will be used very frequently throughout this course is the word “journalism.” Defining this term is a good place to start in understanding the other major concepts in this course. Journalism has been defined by Harcup (2008: 2) as a form of communication based on asking and answering the questions: “Who,” “What,” “Where,” “When,” “Why” and “How?” This definition was derived from one of the oldest models of communication as formulated by Harold Lasswell in his 1948 transmission model of communication. This definition shows that journalism is an act of communication. This communication is between the journalist who acts as a representative of the source (which in this case is the media house they are attached to) and the audience who serve as the receivers of the message. Harcup goes further to define a journalist as someone who informs society about itself and make public that which would otherwise be private. They also supply information, comment and amplify matters that are already in the public domain. It is based on this that McQuail (2000: 340) defines journalism as ‘paid writing ...for public media with reference to actual and ongoing events of public relevance’.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Define who a journalist is, and why he is termed a “communicator.”

3.2 Brief History of Journalism in Nigeria

The Nigerian press is believed to have started with the activities of Henry Townsend who founded the first newspaper in Nigeria namely, *Iwe Iroyin* in 1859 at Abeokuta. According to Alabi (2003), the newspaper covered a number of issues besides spreading the Christian gospel. It also aimed to inform the people of Abeokuta on what was going on in various places in Yoruba land as well as the Lagos Colony. It featured commercial events, announcements, news of movements (in relation to arrival and departure) of government and commercial representatives from Lagos. Thus, though the writers were converted Christians, the paper was a general interest one with something for everyone. Based on this, it can be said that the crop of writers who sourced for news and developed them were Nigeria’s first reporters who must have been given some training on how to source for news, develop the news and ensure that the article is published on time to meet stated deadlines. The foundation laid by Townsend and his crop of writers was an essential one in the study of Nigerian mass media. This is because the

various owners of preceding papers were trained on the job. The earlier crop of writers wrote to educate and inform the growing literate society that was prevalent in Lagos. This was the case with Robert Campbell through his paper *Anglo-African* (1863-1865), *Lagos Times and Gold Coast Colony Advertiser* founded by Richard Blaize (1880-1883), *Lagos Observer* founded by Blackall Benjamin (1882-1890), the *Eagle and Lagos Critic* founded by Owen Macaulay (1883-1888).

Newspapers soon began to be used as an opposition tool for colonial oppression and a foundation for nationalist movements. These papers featured a number of investigative articles, which were published both as hard news and as editorials. Some of such papers include *Lagos Weekly Record* founded by John Payne Jackson and later succeeded by his son Horatio Jackson (1890-1930), *Lagos Standard* founded by George Alfred Williams and partially succeeded by his son, Alfred Williams and James White (1894-1920), *Nigerian Times* by James Bright Davies (1910-1911), and *African Messenger* founded by Ernest Sesei Ikoli (1921-1925). By the time newspapers like the *Lagos Daily News* founded by Herbert Macaulay in conjunction with Dr. Akilade Caulcrick (though they bought it over from Victor Bababummi in 1926 who was the original owner) and the *West African Pilot* founded by Namdi Azikwe in 1937, the demand for independence was rife and through the efforts of articles written within these papers, Nigeria was able to gain her independence from Colonial rule.

From the analysis above, it can be seen that with the sowing of the seed of nationalism, the structure of news sourcing and reporting changed with the outlook being to probe and challenge the colonial government with the aim of demanding first equal opportunities in government and later, independence from colonial rule. This was the work of investigative journalists who probed into the affairs of the colonial government with the aim of fighting for equal rights for the Nigerian people. With independence, the papers became even more critical of the government of the day with investigative reports aiming more at strengthening one ethnic group over the other while discrediting the Federal Government. Such investigative reporting was limited with the military rule, which shut down and discouraged any form of investigative reportage of government activities. With today's democracy, the concept of investigative reporting has become stronger having more impact on the lives of the Nigerian audience and beyond.

SELF- ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

State the role of the investigative journalists (working under the early Nigerian newspapers) in aiding Nigeria's independence?

3.3 Journalism and the Selection of News Value

Before there can be a proper understanding of the journalist, there must be an understanding of the major concept that makes the journalist different from other sources which provide information and educate the public such as the encyclopedia or journals. The major difference between the write-up produced by the journalist and other sources of information and educative write-ups is that journalists base their writing on news. Burns (2002) categorises news into two namely, **expected and unexpected news**. Expected news is a term used to describe the everyday events that journalists cover. These news items are made known through media releases, invitations and other forms of advance notice. Unexpected news on the other hand is used to describe the news that is collected as a result of regular monitoring of law enforcement institutions (such as police stations, courts, and so on) and government institutions (such as the Presidency, House of Assembly, government offices, and so on). Such news items can also be obtained through personal observations, a “tip-off” from the public or from the journalist’s wide range of contacts. News can also be categorised into hard and soft news. According to Levin (2000:18), hard news which is also called **straight news** is strictly factual reporting of news that is current and important while soft news is less current, entertains and informs while appealing to the reader’s emotions.

In the selection of newsworthy events, some characteristics are often considered by the journalist in weighing the news worthy value of the event. Burns presents these as follows:

1. **Impact:** this refers to the relevance of a story to an audience’s life.
2. **Timeliness:** this refers to the ability of the news item to reach the people on time in order for them to use the information to organize their lives and make informed decisions.
3. **Proximity:** this refers to how close to home the story is to the audience.
4. **Conflict:** the presentation of conflict of views has been a news value many people associate with the media. The stronger the contrast between the points of view, the greater the conflict and the more the interest. This is especially if the presentation of the conflict afflicts the comfortable, making them anxious or guilty.
5. **Currency:** this is a term used to describe news items that focus on events that surround the most current issues.
6. **Novelty:** the presentation of new and unique activities that occur in the society.

7. **Relativity:** this news value is affected by the medium used by the journalist. Stories that have captivating images have a better news value on television than a complex and detailed one which would have a better news value in the print media.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Define news and explain what gives an event news value.

3.4 The Journalist and the Society

The major function of the journalist in the society is to inform, educate and enlighten the people about what is going on in and outside their environment. According to Burns (2002), news provided by a journalist performs four major functions in a society and these are listed below.

1. **Societal bonding:** Through news items, people are bound together in sense of community discussing with one another about the information provided by the journalist.
2. **Judgments:** News provides the essential information and facts needed by people within a society to make judgments about what is happening in the world around them.
3. **Information:** News is used by members of a society to make informed decisions that can aid them to function properly as citizens.
4. **Daily organisation:** News aids members of a society to organize their daily lives by advising them about various issues which may range from weather to traffic

The journalist thus exists for the society who consumes the message they send. They select news worthy issues, which they feel is of public interest and mass produces them either for the print or broadcast media. In relation to the journalist and the society, Harcup (2008) presents two major ways in which this relationship can be analysed. The first concern is the fact that the journalist does not often have the privilege of having direct knowledge of how the audience consumes the news items. Based on this, journalists sometimes underestimate their audience and their needs in selecting the appropriate news items from the myriads of events that happen daily within and outside their society. A number of journalists thus may either assume too much about the needs and expectations of their audience or underestimate it. Many times this assumption can be erroneous. Secondly, is the social environment in which the news is produced and eventually published for social consumption representative of the society from which it operates. A media house that does not have an adequate representative of the various

members of a society under its employment may not be able to source for, write and interpret the news accurately and effectively to the society.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

State the two ways in which the relationship between a journalist and the society can be considered

4.0 CONCLUSION

The journalist is a reporter of events as they happen within a society. Such news is to aid the society in making informed decisions, which will aid their day-to-day lives as well as future undertakings. In the history of the Nigerian mass media, the definition of news value especially during the colonial era was defined by the need to first inform but this changed to becoming more political and this ultimately led to the achievement of Nigeria's independence.

5.0 SUMMARY

This section considered the basic terms that form the foundational knowledge of the concept of investigative reporting. These foundational terms include definitions of news, history of journalism in Nigeria and the role the early investigative reporters played in Nigeria's independence as well as the role of the journalist in the society. These roles include not only informing the society but also representing the society and effectively interpreting the news to the society.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Highlight the characteristics that influence a journalist's concept of news worthiness.
2. Discuss the role of the early journalist and the papers they represented in Nigeria's attainment of independence.
3. Explain the role of the journalist in the development of a society.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 2 WHAT IS INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM?

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- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Defining Investigative Reporting
 - 3.2 Investigative Reporting and Other Forms of Reporting
 - 3.3 Importance of Investigative Journalism
 - 3.4 Misconceptions of Investigative Reporting
 - 3.5 Limitations of Investigative Journalism in the Nigerian Society
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit looks at the concept of investigative reporting as being different from other forms of reportage. Though all journalists can be termed as investigators due to the nature of the job, investigative reporting has elements that make it distinct. This distinction brings to bear the importance as well as the limitations of investigative reporting especially in the Nigerian context.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- define investigative reporting
- explain the basic difference between investigative reporting and other forms of journalistic reporting
- discuss the importance of investigative journalism to a society
- discuss the limitation of investigative journalism in Nigeria.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Defining Investigative Reporting

One of the major duties of a journalist is to be a civic watchdog and achieving this often demands investigation and in-depth work. Thus, in a way, all stories are investigative stories because they require research, digging, interviewing and writing. All reporters are investigators who

are trained to ask questions, uncover information and write the most complete stories possible. Nevertheless, some reporters concentrate solely on investigations of wrongdoings. They deal with reporter-adversary relationships that are usually not found in beat reporting or other in-depth coverage. Their aim is to ferret out well-guarded information from often hostile sources. This gives them chance to be creative, to become part of their reader's emotional lives and sometimes to uncover an injustice and correct it.

The elements investigative reporting are listed below

- **It is about digging deeply into an issue or topic:** As the word 'investigative' implies, simply relaying a simple 'bite' of information – "A cattle fair will be held in X village next month" – cannot count as investigative journalism.
- **The issue or topic has to be of public interest:** "Public interest" means that either a community will be disadvantaged by not knowing this information, or will benefit (either materially or through informed decision-making) by knowing it. Sometimes what benefits one community may disadvantage another. Forest-dwellers can demand better prices if they know the world market value of trees that logging companies want to fell. However, the logging industry may not want this information spread, as logging will then cost it more. Reporters need a clear sense of what their mission is and whom they serve, and this can involve heated newsroom debates. "Public interest" means the interest of the community affected. It does not have to be the whole country, and, indeed 'public interest' may be different from 'national interest'. That term is sometimes used by governments to justify illegal, dangerous or unethical acts on the excuse of "my country, right or wrong," – or, indeed, to discourage journalists from reporting on a real problem.
- **It is a process, not an event:** Investigative journalism never provides an instant story. It goes through recognised stages of planning and reporting, and has to work to accepted standards of accuracy and evidence.
- **It is original and proactive:** Investigative stories have to be based on the work of the journalist and (where resources permit) his or her team. Although an investigative story can start with a tip, simply reporting the tip, or printing the secret document that is anonymously faxed through to you, is not investigative journalism. In fact, doing such a thing may be both lazy and careless. It carries huge risks, since you have not investigated the identity, bona fides or motives of your source or the authenticity of the evidence. You may end up defaming someone, printing lies

or being framed by somebody's agents. Instead, you must develop hypotheses about what the tip means and plan additional research, decide on the relevant questions, and go out to ask them. You must see evidence, and hear and analyze answers for yourself, and go beyond simply verifying the tip.

- **It should produce new information or put together previously available information in a new way to reveal its significance:** If the information or the understanding of its importance is not new, then, what exactly are you investigating?
- **It should be multi-sourced:** A single source can provide fascinating revelations and (depending on who the source is) access to insights and information that would otherwise be hidden. However, until the story from that source is crosschecked against other sources – experiential, documentary and human – and its meaning is explored, no real investigation has happened.
- **Because of its in-depth nature, it calls for greater resources, team working and time than a routine news report:** Most of the case studies presented of investigative reportage are the result of team investigations. However, this poses problems for small local and community publications with small staffs and limited time, money or specialised skills. A journalist may need to seek grants to support an investigation, and learn to tap the skills of others outside the newsroom to help with specialist expertise

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Define the duties of an investigative reporter.

3.2 Investigative Reporting and Other Forms of Media Reporting

A major difference between investigative reporting and hard news reportage is that investigative reporting is presented in an in-depth form rather than a feature or hard news form. This characteristic demands that investigative reportage involves more research and thus more time to write. This is unlike hard news, which is presented in a pyramid form whereby the most important items are presented in the first few sentences. The basic difference between a feature article and an in-depth article is that while in-depth articles involve in-depth interviews feature articles do not. Nevertheless, both forms of journalistic reporting need research. Though presented in an in-depth form, investigative reporting is unlike many other forms of feature and even in-depth reportage found in print and presented through the broadcast media. The major differences being the themes and aims behind the write-ups. For example a feature write up may focus on fashion, music, films, health or

even technology and science, while an in-depth may consider personalities and their individual achievements or as personalities behind institutions. The aim behind these forms of reportage is the writer's search for information in relation to the selected themes in order to further educate and bring to bear the consequences behind these themes to the everyday lives of a selected audience. Investigative write-ups on the other hand seeks to find information about a news event that may not be apparent to the public but may lead to revelations that the organisation or people involved may not wish to be put in the public domain. As such, it gives a further insight into news and it is often linked to campaigns by the newspaper for better protection of the rights of people from individuals, organisations or authorities. It may involve probing investigation by the newspaper through which evidence of neglect may be found and published in support of the victims. This of course is a very sensitive matter, which will demand extensive verification of evidence of all the facts, eyewitness accounts and interviews presented for or against a group of people to ensure accuracy.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Identify the differences between investigative reporting and other news presentation formats.

3.3 Importance of Investigative Reporting in the Society

The importance of investigative reporting is something that cannot be underestimated. The definition of investigative journalism comes out of the traditional view of journalists as “watchdogs”, whose mission is to sniff out wrongs, point fingers at those to blame, and report in a way that brings about change. When reporters are successful in their efforts of ensuring this, the life of the people may genuinely get better and public appreciation of the importance of a free press is strengthened. The importance of investigative journalism to the society includes its ability to:

- inspire changes through its contents, which can lead to policy changes, landmark developments in the political, social, economic or other spheres of the society
- encourage transparency and accountability in the public office thus forcing public office holders to be on their toes
- make the media more credible in the eyes of the society when they expose injustice and the negative effects of government policies and actions on the people
- help the media to play the watchdog role through its painstaking efforts at investigating and exposing corruption in the society

- increase competition among the media as the public tend to get more attracted to news media that are noted for thorough investigative reporting
- bring about an increase in sales because investigative stories tend to increase public patronage as they prefer to listen or read well investigated reports. This interest will also attract advertisers
- widen the scope of journalistic freedom as the reporter has the ability to explore various areas and places in search of facts
- encourage the journalist as well as the media house to improve upon their skills in order to remain relevant in a contemporary society where media houses need to go the extra mile to retain their audience and advertisers
- foster development in a society by ensuring that public funds are not embezzled, public officers are dedicated to their work while bringing to the attention of the government of the day the needs of the public

Added to this is the fact that the limitation of deadlines and routine beats, which characterises the production of hard news, is not present in investigative reporting. This is because the journalist has more time to confirm information obtained and thus mistakes that often occur with daily hard news production is drastically reduced ensuring that the information passed on to the audience is accurate.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Identify two importance of investigative reporting in the society.

3.4 Misconception of Investigative Reporting

Ansell et al (2002) provides us with an example of the image many people have of the concept of investigative journalism and the work it involves. According to them, investigative reporting reveals scandals, shames and corrupt individuals. It uncovers secrets somebody wants to keep hidden. The journalists are also given the image of brave and individualistic reporters, alerted by tip-offs, bringing down a powerful and corrupt figure. This image has shaped many of the definitions of investigative reporting we encounter. Such images also tend to suggest investigative reporters should focus only on the very biggest stories such as presidents taking multimillion bribes from oil companies, or rigging elections. These are misconceptions, which must be corrected. Investigative reporting deals with original research into wrongdoings that go on in the society. The core of investigative journalism is to uncover information that is in the public's interest. These interests are listed as including:

- detecting or exposing crime or a serious misdemeanor
- protecting public health and safety
- preventing the public from being misled by some statement or action of an individual or organisation
- exposure of corruption, conflicts of interest, corporate greed or hypocritical behaviour of those in power

Investigative reporting is not just about investigating secrets that are locked up through laws and concealment. It involves the role of journalists in uncovering social, economic or cultural developments too recent to have been identified by experts, hidden by received wisdom and masked by media sensationalism.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

List some of the misconceptions of investigative reporting.

3.5 Limitations of Investigative Reporting

A number of factors some of which are discussed below limits investigative journalists.

1. Proprietorial interference

The owners of a media house have influence not just direct by direct intervention or by establishing lines that cannot be crossed. They set the tone, they decide which markets to target, they control editorial budgets and they hire and fire their editors who are their representatives in the media world. Thus, the editor's powers can be constrained when the owners insist and impose policies on the media house. This can limit who, what and how a journalist investigates and reports an incident. In Nigeria, proprietors make maximum use of their position to boost their selfish interests. They can use their position to harass and even dismiss vibrant journalists who fail to toe their line. This is do under the guise of reorganisation and rationalisation.

2. Media gatekeepers

In the media world, a number of gatekeepers exist to ensure standards and expectations are met. This process involves the selection and modification of sentences, paragraphs and even stories while others may be paraphrased, shortened or deleted all together. This is the job of editors who serves as a major check for all news stories prepared for public consumption. In doing so, they create limitations for the investigations of certain topics, people and situations.

3. Political interference

The government of the day (especially during military regimes) may feel the need to close down media houses that employ probing investigative journalists. In extreme situations, the license of the media house may be seized by the government of the day thus putting several journalists jobless.

4. Economic constraints

Many media houses do not pay their journalists well and this may encourage their journalists to interpret facts behind the activities of dubious people or organisations within the society who offer handsome monetary rewards in a favorable manner in the media.

5. Technological limitations

Due to the economic downturn the country and indeed most parts of the world is facing, technological gadgets needed to carry out investigative research is not easily accessible. Most media houses cannot boast of the necessary equipments to run the daily events how much more carry out intensive research in journalism. Many African countries – and especially their rural areas – have poor communications infrastructure and this limits the journalist's ability to communicate to various parts of Nigeria and the world at large.

6. Limited skilled manpower

Many news organisations in Nigeria and indeed Africa are not yet large and diversified enough to afford a specialized investigative unit. Many journalists lack access to formal skills and training in the art of investigative journalism.

7. Limited access to information

The Nigerian investigative journalist has limited access to official archives and records. Sometimes official archives are incomplete, poorly maintained and subject to tough official secrets or privacy laws, often left over from the colonial era. The Nigerian investigative journalist as in with many of their counterparts in Africa have to be far more creative and flexible to find alternative routes to the evidence they need

8. Threats to life

In the course of investigating issues of relevance within a society, the journalist is often faced and exposed to various hazards and dangers. The Committee to Protect Journalist in 1991 reported that there were 1262 cases of attacks against journalists out of this number, 267 of the cases were recorded in Africa.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

List the major limitations of investigative journalists in Nigeria.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Investigative journalism like any other form of journalistic reporting demands research. However, the investigative journalist has more work to do in ensuring that an in-depth reporting of an issue is presented to the public. Adequate time and information is needed in the compilation of an investigative report thus meeting the information seeking demands of the public in a different way from the hard news reporting which concentrates on sensationalism as its major attraction. The fact that it is more in-depth also poses a problem for the journalist and this is often presents itself as major limitations faced by the journalist especially in Africa but Nigeria in particular.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit has considered investigative journalism in relation to its definition, importance, misconceptions and limitations. Investigative journalism is different from other forms of journalistic reporting but similar in that all reporting demands some element of research and information compilation for the benefit of the audience and society at large. Because of its complexity, investigative journalism has been given an erroneous image in the society, which seems to limit its importance to the exposure of crime and corruption alone. Though it forms a major aspect, investigative journalism goes beyond this to informing the society and through this information, helping them to make informed decisions, which would further develop the people and the society as a whole. Unfortunately, due to various factors, many media houses cannot boast of a well equipped investigative unit and this has causes a major limitation in the practice of investigative journalism in Nigeria and indeed Africa as a continent.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Compare an investigative report with other forms of mass media news reporting.
2. What is the role of the investigative reporter to societal development?
3. Highlight some of the limitations of an investigative reporter.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 3 INTERPRETATIVE JOURNALISM

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Definition of Interpretative Element of Journalism
 - 3.2 Importance of Interpretative Journalism
 - 3.3 Determinants of Interpretative Nature of a Journalist
 - 3.4 Limitations of Interpretative Journalism
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 Reference/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit considers the concept of interpretative journalism. The unit also considers the definition of the concept of interpretative journalism as well as some of the factors that determine how a journalist interprets or gives meaning to an incident or news or news item. The process of interpretation because its determinants are socially and culturally based means a number of limitations will abound. These issues will be considered in this unit.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- define what interpretative journalism is all about
- discuss factors that often determines how an event or issue is interpreted by the journalist
- discuss importance of interpretative journalism to the society
- discuss the limitations of interpretative journalism.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Definition of Interpretative Element of Journalism

The concept of interpretative reporting considers the role of the journalist to interpret issues and events. It involves the journalist's ability to give meaning to daily events and its effect or impact on the receiver and their future. A leading author in this line of thought is Curtis MacDougall in his book *Interpretative Reporting* (1963) where

he posits that the job of a reporter should not be limited to describing to the audience the what, who, when, where and how of a news event. The story reporter should be able to explain the why aspect of the issue being reported as well as the significance of the event to other events. In finding the significance of an issue to other issues, the reporter attempts to look for connections or patterns. In identifying such patterns, the journalist is to bring to bear the connections but should not make valued judgments about such connections.

Understanding connections and patterns demands investigation with the aim of explaining the 'why' behind a story or event. McNair (1998) believes that journalism is not just the presentation of facts, or telling the public things they did not already know. He argues that the presentation of facts can be obtained in a variety of sources other than from a journalist and these alternative sources include on-line information sources, encyclopedias, brochures just to mention a few. These sources in themselves are essential tools for journalists in developing stories. What makes a journalist different from these information sources is that a journalist through the narrative presentation of the data, contextualise the placement of the facts thus giving the data meaning to the audience. For the journalist to be able to interpret the news he must be able to understand the news also. To understand means more than just the ability to define the jargon used by persons in different walks of life. It involves recognizing the particular event as one of a series with both a cause and effect. The journalist must be aware of the fact that news is not an isolated incident but one inevitably linked to a chain of important events. According to Nwabueze (2009), the interpretative aspect of journalism consists of giving meaning, significance and relevance to issues or developments in the society. It broadens the scope of news presentation, provides insight into the news behind the news.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Discuss the interpretative nature of news reporting.

3.2 Importance of Interpretative Journalism

The mass media serves as both a source of information for the public and as a representative voice for various groups within a society. Through the media, various groups within the society supply information while articulating their political and ideological opinions to other members within the society thus sparking off public debates and shaping public opinions. In this case, the journalist is depicted as a servant of the public interest. The journalist using the platform of the media house provides a communally communicative space in which

information, ideas and opinions can be debated and exchanged as a precondition for rational collective decision-making. The journalist thus takes the middleman position between the members of the society that dictate the pace of decision-making and policy formation on the one hand and the public who consume the information formed through such activities on the other. This middleman position demands that the journalist should understand the position of the two sides well enough to link the sides together to form peaceful coexistence within the society. Within this middleman position, the journalist aids to interpret the ideologies of the voices projected thus aiding communication and promoting the understanding of the messages projected. Within this framework, McNair presents two societies within which this concept can operate. The first is referred to as the **competitive paradigm**. This is most relevant in societies where equal representation is promoted and encouraged. Many theorists have criticised the competitive paradigm stating that most modern capitalist dominated societies are characterised not by equality but by exploitation and injustice thus encouraging inequality. These inequalities in turn generate social tensions and pressures, which encourages categories of domination and subordination bringing about social stratification. This is referred to as the **dominant paradigm**, which is believed to be a model of many modern capitalist societies of today. In dominant paradigm, the journalist acts as an intermediary between unequal groups within the society, helping them to understand themselves and communicating ideologies, which help to guide the society. The theory concludes that without these journalists, these unequal elements of the society would tear themselves apart. Whether competitive or dominant, the journalist remains an intermediary between groups within the society guiding them through their articles to understand themselves better thereby ensuring peaceful co-existence of the various groups within the society.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Explain the middleman role of the journalist as an interpreter of the various voices projected through the media.

3.3 Determinants of the Interpretative Nature of a Journalist

Some factors that determine how effectively a journalist can interpret issues can be categorised as follows:

- **Gender:** This is an aspect of human nature which though many female liberalists may argue is not a major determinant may affect and influence the way a news item is interpreted. Women may see things from a softer lens when compared to their male

counterparts and this in effect may determine their story preference and the angle from which they wish to report the news.

- **Age:** This variable considers mainly the biological age of the reporter. As a social being the reporter would most likely perceive life from the various experiences gained, social associations and expectations. This in turn may affect the way and manner a news item is selected and ultimately interpreted
- **Training:** The level of training and area of specialisation often determines the angle from which a reporter interprets and handles a news item. Reporters trained in health communication for instances will always interpret news from the angle of the consequences of the event to the overall health and well being of members of the society to whom he reports the news to.
- **Socio-economic background:** This variable considers the ability of the mass media house to capture and interpret news from the various socio-economic and cultural backgrounds that make up the society. If such representatives do not exist within the mass media house, news cannot be told to reflect the needs and even fears of all the social groups that make up the society.

It is important for the journalist as well as the editors of mass media houses to be conscious of such determinants as they may ultimately act as determinants for bias and misrepresentation of social classes and people and misinterpretation of news worthy events.

- **Experience level**

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Discuss the factors that affect the interpretative nature of a journalist

3.4 Limitations of Interpretative Journalism

Some limitations in the ability of a journalist to effectively interpret issues can categorise as follows:

- **Political:** Most of the time, the dominant political group determines how an issue will be interpreted by the journalist
- **Ownership:** The owners of a media house (as pointed out in the unit that discussed investigative reporting) have the final say as to what is to be presented to the public. This includes the angle in which a story or event is interpreted.
- **Level of exposure:** Journalists who lack training and exposure to certain contexts will find it difficult to comprehend and thus

effectively interpret the information obtained from his investigative research into an issue. Added to this is the assignment of specific beats to journalists by editors and this may limit or narrow a journalist's ability to interpret issues outside their specialised beats.

- **Missing gaps:** Due to lack of proper documentation and preservation, the journalist working on a story may not be able to get the full picture of an event due to missing details and documents; this will greatly affect and hinder his ability to effectively interpret the information obtained during his research. In researching events outside the country, the journalist often depends on the interpretation of issues as presented by international newsagents and media houses such as CNN and BBC.
- **Economic:** Lack of funds often presents a journalist from going out to confirm information obtained about issues outside the immediate environment. Fortunately, now with the introduction of mobile phones, the need to travel to get information has greatly reduced, nevertheless, there are times the journalist may need to travel to locations where vital information can be obtained to aid the understanding and interpretation of an event.
- **Socio-cultural background of journalist:** A journalist that comes from a background that discourages the challenging of authority or elders may find it difficult to interpret issues outside such a value system

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Discuss some of the factors that limits the ability of a journalist to effectively interpret the news.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The job of a journalist does not end in telling the news to the society but goes on to interpreting the news and the implications of the news to the society. This makes the work of a journalist different from that of other mass media forms that provide information to the society like an encyclopedia or a dictionary. In the process of interpreting news, some factors may determine how a news item is interpreted while other factors even act as limitations to the journalist. This means that the journalist must always be conscious of these factors, which may cloud senses acting as a variable for bias.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit considered the middleman role of the journalist as an interpreter of news. This process goes beyond telling the news but to aiding the society to understand the relationship between the news and the society. This ultimately makes the society within which the journalist lives to be more informed and conscious of their surroundings. It must be noted that a number of variables may act as determinants of a journalist's ability to effectively interpret and if not properly handled may serve as elements of bias and ultimately misinterpretation of news.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Discuss the middleman role of the journalist as an interpreter of news.
2. Discuss the major factors that determine a journalist's ability to interpret a news event.
3. Highlight some of the factors that may limit a journalist in the bid to interpret news to the society.

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UNIT 4 RELATING INVESTIGATIVE WITH INTERPRETATIVE

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Narrativity of News
 - 3.2 Sociology of News Production
 - 3.3 International Media Influence
 - 3.4 Effect of News Presentation on Society
 - 3.5 Interpreting for Public Interest
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 Reference/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit considers the role of the investigative reporter in interpreting the information obtained from research. The research carried out often brings out substantial information, which if not properly interpreted for the interest of the public in mind, the effect of this on the society is often not very positive. These are the major points to be discussed in this unit.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- discuss how the theory of narrativity influences investigation and interpretation of issues
- discuss how the sociology of news production affects and influences investigation and interpretation of issues
- discuss the effect of international media news reporting
- discuss the possible effects of the investigation and interpretation of news items to the public
- define the ideal objectives to consider when investigating and interpreting issues as a journalist.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Narrativity of News

Cottle (2003) examines Jacob's concept of the 'Narrativity of News' which he believes is an extension of the story telling tradition formed by man to tell and retell basic ideologies of his society to the living and the unborn. News therefore becomes a symbolic system in which the informational content of particular stories becomes less important than the rehearsal of mythical truths embodied within the story form itself. It is based on this that many scholars have argued that news stories like myths do not tell it like it is but rather tell it like it means. Journalists in their investigation and ultimate interpretation of issues create news presentations, which developmental catalogues of news themes, (who the key actors will be, what the plot should be like, and so on). Thus, journalists in presenting a news item feel the need to fit into the culturally determined definitions the characters they come across with in their investigation and interpretation of the information obtained. They attempt to fit new situations into old definitions by placing people and events into existing categories of hero, villain, good and bad.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

What is narrativity of news?

3.2 Sociology of News Production

News is a bureaucratic accomplishment organisationally geared up to 'routinise' the unexpected and to 'tame' the news environment. The process of news manufacture means that sufficient amounts of news, comprising of a certain mix of news subjects are produced and packaged on time in professionally understood format. Added to this is the newsroom division of labour, which assigns journalists to news beats. These form the guiding principles in the investigation and interpretation of news items. This sociological organisation of the production of news often favors not the resource poor in the society but rather the dominant groups identified by McNair in the dominant paradigm. This is because it is believed that news develops from within the corridors of the resource rich. Such resource rich members of the society in turn attract commercially beneficial opportunities for not only the media house but also the journalist in question. Thus, the organisation of news seems not to be designed to meet the needs of the socially powerless. It is within this system that many journalists seek for news, investigate them and interpret for public consumption. Such concentration on dominant groups as against the less dominant seems to further empower the

former. This phenomenon seems to play out when one considers how members of dominant groups through conversation and interaction display communicative power over other groups. Through talk interviews, especially on the radio or television, the procedure of turn taking, agenda setting and agenda shifting between the interviewer and the interviewed can be observed as ways in which the dominant groups maintain the status quo.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

What is the sociology of news production?

3.3 International Media Influence

News presentation has been greatly affected by globalisation. The spread of the effect of international stations through satellite cables has enabled stations such as CNN to be viewed in almost every country. Added to this is the Internet effect, which has meant the removal of borders thus, making it difficult to be censored. This has often had a detrimental effect on local news presentation style and format. Many mass media professionals worry about the exposure of citizens of developing countries to the news items designed by international media houses the effect of which most often is a watering down of local values. Such local stations categorise events in order of importance based on an international media house's perception and not on local occurrences that international media houses seem to be the ones that set the pace for news development and themes to be used. Unfortunately because remote and poor countries (most of which are in Africa) do not have an international voice, their stories are investigated and interpreted by international journalists who usually do not understand the context and culture in which the events occur. The result is usually a biased international interpretation of local events. On the other hand is the wrong interpretation of international events by local journalists who try to decipher international news content which sometimes does not make much meaning because of the differences in value, culture and expectation.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

How do media houses affect local news production?

3.4 Effect of News Presentation on Society

A journalist must realise the possible effect and influence media reportage can have on the society that consumes the information disseminated. The need to research into events and issues that happen in the society and to interpret them for the benefit of the society may have the following effects:

- **Moral Panic:** The moral panic theory explores how public anxieties are generated by the media through processes of media amplification involving sensationalisation, exaggerating, distorting and symbolising investigated events and social actors. The journalistic interpretation of such events sometimes leads to processes of societal reaction, which ultimately results in the creation of laws by the government.
- **Comparing the media content with social public's notion of reality:** This considers the relationship between media message and reality. The question of whether the interpretation given by journalists of events through media content does or should reflect the social reality and if it does, which or whose reality does it reflect? Often, the continuous projection by the journalist of one group over another may develop into a proto-culture based on the angle of projection. Unfortunately this projection may not always be progressive
- **The text:** The text in itself could also be a very strong indicator of the content. This is mainly concerned with the language, grammar and syntax used in film and television programs. It can be said that the more violent the words used by a journalist in describing an event or individual, the more violent the public will be in their reactions to a variety of issues that concerns them, their society as well as other groups within and outside their immediate community.
- **Symbolic Interactionism:** This concept explores how labels, symbols and meanings inform human interactions and understanding. The way and method of investigation and the ultimate interpretation given to the issues may result in the journalist giving labels to personalities or groups involved. Based on such labeling, other members of the society react and relate to the labeled groups as dictated by the journalistic report.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

List some possible effects of journalistic reportage on the society.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The way journalist lay down principles and policies affect and influence the way a news item is told and even disseminated. These policies may in some cases give quality to a news item but in other cases removes the essence of a news item. Added to this is the aim behind the method of telling the news. For some media houses, they merely play into the agenda already set by foreign media houses while others may further empower already powerful individuals in the society.

5.0 SUMMARY

As a journalist, working on an investigative story means understanding the implication of the news item to the society and its development. The journalist must understand the reasons why there is a need to investigate and interpret a story and ultimately tell the story. The aim should always be to improve the society within which the news item was developed

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Explain the theory of narrativity of news as it relates to investigative and interpretative reporting.
2. Explain how the sociology of news production which seems to favor the dominant groups in a society can affect the investigation and interpretation of news.
3. Discuss the effect of international media houses on local stations and their development of news.

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MODULE 2 GATHERING INFORMATION FOR IN-DEPTH REPORTAGE

Unit 1	Sources of Information
Unit 2	Interviews
Unit 3	Documentation and Interpretation of Information

UNIT 1 SOURCES OF INFORMATION

CONTENTS

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
3.1	Developing an Objective for Your Story
3.2	Primary Sources of Information
3.3	Secondary Sources of information
3.4	Digital Sources
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0	References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit considers the source for gathering news item. In gathering information for a news item, a number of sources abound for the journalist. These include the primary source which is the first hand information gathered by the journalist and secondary source which is information gathered from archival research. The journalist does not depend on only once source of information in his attempt to interpret and investigate events in his society and beyond. The ability of the journalist to effectively combine these sources determines possibility of getting a good story.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- discuss how to develop an objective for a news story
- explain what a source is
- explain what a primary source is
- explain what a secondary source is
- discuss the advantages and disadvantages of paper, human and digital sources.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Developing an Objective for Your Story

When a journalist sets out to write a story, the aim is to gather the information required to write an accurate and meaningful story. The major reason behind the research is to write a story while the aim should be to uncover information that is in the public's interest to know. According to Harcup (2008:75), the objective behind any journalist's need to carry out any investigation should be based on the interests of the public and these interests should include:

- detecting or exposing crime or a serious misdemeanor
- protecting public health and safety
- preventing the public from being misled by some statement or action of an individual or organisation
- exposing corruption, conflicts of interest, corporate greed or hypocritical behaviour by those in power

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

3.2 Primary Sources of Information

According to Levin (2000), a primary source is an expert or someone recognised as a leading authority on a topic. A primary source may also be a person with first hand information on a topic. A primary source may either be a person or a written document or official report on a topic. Through primary sources of information, a journalist obtains first hand information about an issue.

Primary sources of information can also be described as those providing direct evidence or describing direct experience while secondary sources are those providing context, background, or second-hand information. Primary sources are important in the development of a story as they are the direct source and thus can give detailed information about the event being investigated. Sensitive questions which border on abstract emotions such as anger, joy, disappointment, and so on etc. These are things secondary sources may not be able to adequately express.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

What are primary sources of information?

3.3 Secondary Sources of Information

Secondary sources of information involves archival research and this include library research, searches on the Internet, searches of media house morgues, archives, books, public and private records, as well as the journalist's own private observations and documentation. Also included are reference works such as yearbooks, almanacs, encyclopedia, biographical references. Also within this category are Internet sources, which offer to the journalist speedy access to information, ranging from public to private documents. Secondary sources can be used to add weight and authority. These will be considered below.

Most often as a journalist, one is exposed to a number of information from the beat one is assigned either to or from tips. To get some background information about the area one is reporting on, written materials are very important. Some of these written materials may include:

- past newspaper articles:
- books
- magazines
- journals
- legal documents
- archival documents

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

What are secondary sources of information?

3.4 Digital Sources

To succeed in the newsrooms of this modern age, reporters need to master a range of new technical skills and these skills range from building computer spreadsheets, mining online databases, searching the Internet, and using e-mail and chat rooms for collaboration and interviews. The Internet in itself can be a good source of information entailing information that is scarce to find on the one hand and wrong information on the other hand. The Internet can be used to locate and use both primary and secondary sources. Itule and Douglas (2008) classify the Internet toolbox into the following:

1. **On-line newspaper archives:** With a number of newspapers now on-line journalists can access past and current newspaper stories from the computer without necessarily going to the

newspaper houses. Through on-line newspaper access, a journalist can quickly access the necessary information in the development of a story thus making news gathering faster and less strenuous.

2. **E-mail:** E-mail allows the reporter to send personal messages to individuals thus providing more privacy. It is also an efficient way to communicate with hard to reach individuals. Added to this lengthy information and responses can be sent faster. The responses sent can be cut and pasted as part of a reporter's story thus avoiding misquotes and other accusations primary sources often accuse reporters of.
3. **Listservs:** This is software maintains the list of a community of people linked together not by geography but rather by a common interest. The software keeps a list of all the people who have subscribed to a particular virtual association. Thus, it serves as a one too many communication device. According to Itule and Douglas (2008), tens of thousands of listservs have been created with topics ranging from politics, economy and society. The subscribers are knowledgeable or interested in the topic of the list either because of their profession, interest or life experiences. Posting questions to the list can connect the journalist to experts and others experience.
4. **Newsgroups:** This is also known as **Usenet**. According to Itule and Douglas (2008) the major differences between the Usenet and Listservs is that listservs are received through the e-mail box while Usenet newsgroups use news reader software to go to a newsgroup area and read the messages that are posted as though they were on a bulletin board. Newsgroup messages are posted publically and are available for anyone to read and respond to. Newsgroups can be a good source for story ideas as it can serve as an alert of developing topics of concern to a group. It is also a good source for finding people who are directly affected by some of the topical issues discussed through the newsgroups.
5. **On-line chatting:** This method involves real-time typed 'conversations' with others who are on the internet at the same time. With this method, a journalist can conduct an on-line interviews.
6. **World Wide Web:** This is a hypertext system of marking text and other kinds of files with consistent codes so that users anywhere can access them. This was as the brainchild of a

physicist named Tim Berners-Lee in 1989. Today the Web is the primary way government agencies, news organisations, associations, interest groups and individual's package, display and disseminate information on the internet.

7. **Search engines:** These are also called **web spiders or robots**. They are indexes that are generated by software programs that systematically roam the Web and automatically index the words from any Web pages they find. Such Web pages can be quite comprehensive, tallying literally billions of Web pages. Its major limitation though is that it can only make crude evaluations of the usefulness of any given page. The most prominent of the search engines is Google.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Give two examples of Internet sources.

4.0 CONCLUSION

There are a number of sources, which journalist can use when developing or researching for facts for a story. These sources are categorised and are in understanding all the angles of an event. Proper use of these sources will aid the journalist in producing news items that are well grounded on facts while ensuring that the angle from which the news item is told is adequate.

5.0 SUMMARY

Gathering of information for the development of a news story demands that a journalist researches into facts from various sources. These sources are varied and play different roles in ensuring that a report is grounded on facts and figures. Using such diverse sources aids the journalist in ensuring that the news item eventually told is not biased or badly interpreted.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Explain the importance of primary sources of information in the development of a news item.
2. Identify some internet sources of information available to journalist highlighting their advantages and disadvantages over other sources of information.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 2 INTERVIEWS

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 What is an Interview?
 - 3.2 Advantages and Disadvantages of Interviews
 - 3.3 Types of Interviews
- 4.0 Summary
- 5.0 Conclusion
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit considers the news gathering tactic of interviewing. This is a major news gathering method used by many journalists in their development of news. It is a method that aids the journalist in interrogating and ascertaining the fact worthiness of news sources because the journalist can quote a source thus giving news reporting more credibility.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- discuss what an interview entails
- discuss the advantages and disadvantages of interviews
- identify various types of interviews.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 What is an Interview?

Investigative reporters and interpreters of issues and events often use interviews from the outside in- they start from the least important to the most important players in a story. Itule and Anderson (2007) liken an investigative reporter's newsgathering tactics to a dart game where the center and the smallest circle is usually very small. This circle is surrounded by larger circles, which increase in size as they go further away from the center. This can also be likened to an "onion ring," which consists of a small ring at the center and wider ones forming the outskirts. The investigative reporter information gathering tactic begins with people and documents in the outer rings that will give the reporter

foundational and important information about the central figures or issues being investigated and interpreted. Through this tactic, the reporter can have access to as much information as possible before actually meeting with the person in question. This makes interviews easier as it makes it clear to the interviewee that the questions asked are based on previously sought for information. Such a tactic is given more strength when the reporter starts the interview with questions he knows the answers to. Thus if the interviewee gives a contrary answer, the interviewer can probe with more fact based questions thus forcing out more information.

Interviews are based on two major aims for the journalist and these are trust and information. Journalists need the trust of the people they interview. The interviewee must be comfortable answering the questions asked in order to positively respond by giving honest and sincere information. Interview allows a journalist to quickly obtain answers to specific questions on a topic previously unknown. An example is given of a government's issuance of a large official document for which the journalist wants to write a report on. The journalist cannot possibly be able to read the whole document, digest it and make enough meaning from it to be able to interpret the consequences of the document to the public and their overall welfare. To achieve this, the journalist may need to interview members of the society who are experts in that area as well as those who have some authority in the matter and thus can give meaningful analysis of the document, its history and possible implications for the future. By asking specific questions, the journalist can quickly gather information directly from the primary sources. By linking the responses, the journalist can adequately be the link between the dominant group who initiated the document and the receivers who are affected by the action.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Explain the importance of interviews.

3.2 Advantages and Disadvantages of Interviews **Advantages**

Interviews have many advantages some of which are listed below:

- Interviews are up-to-date when compared to written documents
- More credibility is ascribed to interview quotes than when a journalist quotes a written source
- The journalist can ask direct questions and thus can get direct responses to direct problems the journalist is seeking to resolve

Disadvantages

Some disadvantages of interviews as a primary source of information may be classified based on the limitations of either the interviewee and or the journalist as an interviewer. Some of these disadvantages include:

- The journalist can never be sure that the information collected from the interviewee is accurate. He cannot be certain of what the interviewee thinks about an issue depending mainly on only what is said.
- The interviewee can be a misleading source of information with an agenda totally different from that of the journalist. The agenda of the interviewee may be to stir the journalist away from the major issues and into one that is more acceptable to the interviewee
- As an interviewer, the journalist may ask leading questions that force the interviewee to give answers that support the journalist's agenda.

The interviewee may provide inaccurate information based on their assumptions or preconceived notions. This may be done without any malicious intent. This limitation may also affect the journalist also as the interviewer whereby preconceived notions and assumptions results in the journalist misinterpreting statements given by the interviewee.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

What are the advantages and disadvantages of interviews?

3.3 Types of Interviews

According to Itule and Anderson (2007: 150) interviews follow one of two patterns and this is determined by the subject matter and the type of person being interviewed. Based on this they categorise interviews into the following:

1. **Funnel interview pattern:** This form of interview is the most common interview method mainly because it is relaxing for both the reporter and the source. The interview begins with background questions that border on how, when and where. These background questions are followed by open ended questions and this in turn is followed by closed ended questions. According to Itule and Anderson (2007: 150) funnel interviews are most useful when:

- the source is not accustomed to being interviewed
 - the length of the interview is not important
 - when the journalist is dealing with a touchy topic where closed ended questions need to be asked
2. **Inverted funnel interview pattern:** In this form of interview pattern, the key questions are asked immediately. This style of interview is used with people such as law enforcement officers, or government officials who are experienced in answering closed ended or adversarial questioning from reporters. This method of interviewing is also used in breaking news stories when there is little time to ask questions

Itule and Anderson (2007) also describe another interview method referred to as **Smoking gun interviews**. This form of interview is based on a method whereby the interviewer goes to the interview armed with video tapes or other physical evidence of wrongdoing done by the interviewee. During the interview session, direct questions are asked about specific incidences and when the source denies the allegations, the reporter presents the incriminating evidence for public viewing with the hope that the source will admit being guilty and thus be forced to make amends for the sake of making the lives of the public a better one. This form of investigative reporting is more appropriate with television broadcast media reporters. Some editors and reporters though have criticised this method of investigative interviews for the simple reason that there could be the smallest possibility that the interviewee could be innocent and thus has the right to defend themselves. Such a person should be given a chance to clear himself on air on in print.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Discuss patterns of interviews highlighting their advantages and disadvantages.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Interviews are important in the development of a news item but the journalist must understand that it also has some major advantaged and disadvantages which may work in favour or to the detriment of a news story. Understanding these points will ensure that a journalist is not intimidated by the source while also being conscious of the possibility of a source being intimidated by an overbearing journalist.

5.0 SUMMARY

Interview as a news gathering instrument ensures that the journalist meets sources face to face. This advantage allows the journalist to see the source and to probe when necessary. Nevertheless, it should not be seen as an avenue to lead or put words into the mouth of a source based on previous assumptions made by the journalist before the interview.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Explain the principles behind conducting an interview.
2. Identify the various types of interview methods used by journalists.
3. Highlight the advantages and disadvantages of interviews from the point of view of the interviewer and the interviewee.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

- Itule, B. & Anderson, D. (2007). *News Writing and Reporting for Today's Media*. New York USA: McGraw Hill.
- Itule, B. & Anderson, D. (2008). *News Writing and Reporting for Today's Media*. New York USA: McGraw Hill.
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UNIT 3 DOCUMENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF INFORMATION

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Getting the Facts Right
 - 3.2 Being Objective and Removing Bias
 - 3.3 Going Undercover
 - 3.4 Doing Systematic Follow Up
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit discusses the skills for a journalist must have to document the information gathered during research for the development of a story. This involves the ability to make proper use of the information obtained to ensure that an all round news story is produced.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- discuss the importance of getting the facts right in the development of a news item
- explain the importance of being objective and removing bias
- discuss the importance of going undercover
- discuss importance of systematic follow ups.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Getting the Facts Right

In developing an investigative report item more than one source is essential and ideal to ensure the credibility of the story is high. In developing a story, most reporters avoid unnamed sources if they can. However, there are some important stories that cannot be told if the reporter did not rely on confidential sources. Some investigative reporters hardly ever quote unidentified sources even if they provide

important information for a story. Such sources may however be used to help provide a roadmap to the subject matter and help identify documents and people who can provide firsthand information. Itule and Anderson (2008) believe that the hallmark of investigative reporting is careful documentation. It must be noted that people do not believe unidentified sources but may have more confidence if a document is backed with evidence. For the reporter, it takes a lot of extra work to identify and obtain the documents that will prove a story. Based on this, the authors provide some guidelines to observe when using confidential sources.

1. During an interview, reporters should try to talk a reluctant source into going on the record by telling him or her to how important the information is to the story
2. If the source is still unwilling to talk on the record, the reporter listens anyway because he or she can provide important information
3. The reporter then asks if the source knows of anyone who is willing to provide the same information on the record
4. If it is possible, the reporter finds another source who can be named

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Explain why getting the facts right when gathering data is so important.

3.2 Being Objective and Removing Bias

Reporters who work on investigative reports do not have the same deadline pressure as do those who cover breaking news items. This elongated time is meant for ensuring that the reporter triple checks the information obtained from their sources. Investigative reporters develop a story based on multiple sources unlike breaking news reporters who may develop a story based on a single source. An investigative reporter should base stories on two or more sources and ensure that the information is confirmed. In addition, the investigator must always try to differentiate between facts and opinion and attribute opinions to people who expressed them. The presentation of facts should be balanced ensuring that if allegations are made against a person or organisation, it is only fair to allow them the right to reply.

The aim of any investigative reportage is to produce a fair and accurate, well balanced, impartial and informative write up that is in the public's interest. As a reporter, the advantages and disadvantages of human, paper and digital sources should be noted. Paper and digital sources

alone can produce a comprehensive, accurate story, but one that risks being pedantic and lifeless. While human sources may be affected by conscious or unconscious bias, and are vulnerable to pressure, theirs are the voices that bring life and immediacy to your story. As a reporter, previous assumptions must give way for the facts discovered during the research. Holding on to previous assumptions may encourage bias and misinterpretation of the facts discovered.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

How can bias be controlled?

3.3 Going Undercover

Sometimes when a reporter is working on an in-depth article, they go undercover and do not tell the sources for the story that they are reporters. Many editors have argued that going under-cover is a deceptive practice that is not of the best interest of a news organization's credibility. Based on this they do not encourage this type of investigative journalism. Other critiques have argued the contrary stating that many good stories would be impossible to get if a reporter made his identity known and that all that had been said in his presence will turn up in print or being quoted on air. In many Western countries, undercover journalism is practiced only as last resort. It used only when both the reporter and the editors have concluded that a story is extremely important and information for developing it cannot be obtained in any other way. Itule and Anderson (2007:406) provide some advice as given by Reckten, a former Chicago Tribune reporter for reporters when doing undercover investigations:

1. As an undercover reporter assuming another role, you must do that job right and not jeopardise anyone's life. The duty of the job supersedes your job as a journalist. In other words, you cannot say that because you are an undercover reporter employed as a civil servant on the hope of investigating corruption, the work assigned by your ministry is poorly done thus sacrificing job efficiency on the alter of journalism.
2. When as a reporter one is taking up a false background as an undercover reporter, it is usually advisable to use the reporter's real first name that way there is no hesitation when someone calls the reporter. When filling out forms, it is also advisable to use original birthdays, working experience, state of origin, and so on. The information given should be as close to the truth as possible except for the fact that the person is a journalist.

3. In the process of being an undercover journalist, breaking the law is not acceptable as the undercover journalist cannot be protected or be considered to be above the law.
4. Do not allow your story to be based on unnamed sources. Try to use as many documented evidence as possible.

Even though undercover newsgathering can be dangerous, it nevertheless serves as an important method for collecting information from reluctant sources. When such information is obtained, the journalist must be careful to use the information for the benefit of the society and not necessarily for the development of his mass media or personal development alone. Often, angry sources on discovering that such information has been obtained may turn to the law for justice. To prevent such messy situations, getting secondary sources to back up the details obtained from undercover investigations is important.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Identify some of the rules to be considered when doing undercover investigation.

3.4 Doing Systematic Follow-Up

A reporter needs to do systematic follow-up of the information gathered. If the information is from a written source, identifying the writer and asking questions that will aid the reporter in understanding the aims and objectives behind the write up is essential. This can be done through phone calls, personal visits or virtual connections. The information obtained may also be from other media sources or which the reporter needs to follow up the news item as presented by the media house. In following up a story the reporter must bear in mind some basic tips some of which are as follows:

1. Ensure that you have the correct spelling of the names, places and addresses of the major sources that form the background of the information gathered. During human or document interviews ensure that you double check and confirm the spellings.
2. Ensure you have diary where all the information you have gathered for the story are written. Within this diary, systematically obtained information such as the date, time, address, names, observations etc can be documented. Also within this diary should be important appointments to be kept along with the dates, time and addresses. Try to avoid writing on pieces of papers that can easily get lost or misplaced.

3. Ensure that you get a folder where all the information gathered can be kept. Within this folder, the diary as well as all other pieces of information pertaining to the story being investigated such as photocopies, photographs, reports, phone-numbers etc should be kept. This makes it easier for you when writing the story and interpreting the facts gathered.
4. Always be time conscious when doing follow ups. When given an appointment ensure that you keep to the time. This goes also for tracking other media news items.
5. During interviews, the use of a small midget that records efficiently is always prescribed. Unfortunately some reporters delay in transcribing the information obtained from their interviews this when they need the information they find it difficult to interpret what was said. Transcription of the information obtained from interviews must be done within 24 hours because as a some of the finer details may be forgotten when you eventually want to write out the story or do follow-up discussions with other related sources other than the source that originally was interviewed.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Discuss some of the follow up tips needed by a journalist.

4.0 CONCLUSION

A journalist must be able to transform the information obtained from the field into news worthy reporting; thus, ensuring that the news reported is free of bias and misrepresentation is very important. Such attributes must be developed before going out to source for information.

5.0 SUMMARY

As a journalist, getting the facts right is the core of the job. It is not only to gather the information but what is done to the information is also of essence. The angle from which a new item is reported can affect the receivers in their reactions to the sources identified in the news item. Journalists must always be careful of misinterpretation of information and bias in the investigation of a news item.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Discuss how a journalist can use a source to ensure that a news story is based on facts
2. Discuss the principles that must be considered when doing an undercover investigation
3. Explain how a reporter can ensure that the news item written is free of bias

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Itule, B. & Anderson, D. (2007). *News Writing and Reporting for Today's Media*. New York USA: McGraw Hill.

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MODULE 3 INVESTIGATIVE AND INTERPRETATIVE REPORTING: WRITING THE STORY

Unit 1	Writing An In-Depth Investigative Story (I)
Unit 2	Writing An In-Depth Investigative Story (II)
Unit 3	Writing An In-Depth Investigative Story (III)
Unit 4	Writing An In-Depth Investigative Story (IV)

UNIT 1 WRITING AN IN-DEPTH INVESTIGATIVE STORY (I)

CONTENTS

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objective
3.0	Main Content
3.1	Development of Investigative Journalism
3.2	Researching for an Investigative Report
3.3	The Investigative Report/Story
3.4	Preliminary Preparation
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0	References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Basically, the ills in a society can be partly and indeed, is curbed by building capacity among journalists to carry out effective investigative journalism that exposes corruption, wrongdoing and systemic malfunctioning. This action-learning unit applies the skills of investigative journalism to the development of actual stories to be published or aired.

Investigative reporting in most cases, takes the form of a feature story in writing, bearing in mind that it is basically a presentation of facts on an event, issue, personality or place. A typical in-depth investigative story therefore, contains the news behind the news – the presentation of facts and background information.

However, a well-investigated, well thought out in-depth story could be “destroyed” by poor presentation that is, the way it is written. Writing an in-depth report is crucial to achieving the aims of the story and keeping

the interest of the audience throughout the piece. Readers easily get irritated by poor presentation, poor sentence construction, lengthy or boring paragraphs, wrong spellings, wrong use of words, incoherent sentences and paragraphs, and so on. The basic aim of writing the investigative story is to communicate about wrongdoings, such as corruption in the society, to readers in such a way that they will easily get the message.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- identify the basic forms and format of an investigative report
- write an investigative article and present the report in a manner that the audience will understand
- develop act of writing for public interest
- explain journalism laws and ethics as it affect the practice of investigative journalism.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Development of Investigative Journalism

Investigative reporting is the name usually given to detailed in depth examination, extending over a period into given news situations. Examples might be gang protection rackets, or allegations of corruption in a local council but the work can also involve ‘social’ situations such as drugs.

The essence of this type of writing is the close attention to detail and the systematic interviewing of people involved and combining of documents so that a dossier is built up. It often involves skating near to the law in the search for information where the public interest is of over-riding importance. Frequently, the information sought is being with-held by people who have a vested interest in its concealment or who are willing to utilize the law to stop their activities from being revealed.

Such requires skilled and well-informed investigators who are more or less operating in the role of detectives. The work and writing can be done individually. However, the work and writing for a very big project may be split up among members of a team, which can include staff writers and freelancers, under the direction of a project editor who collates the material and welds it into the final report. This kind of reporting requires close legal checking.

Hodgson (2001:38) in his primer on the press gives us a working perspective on the development of investigative reporting. The history of in depth reporting dates back a long way in such Sunday newspapers as the *News of the World* and *The People*, where investigators examined a criminal's activities or a social problem over a period and finally produced a 'special report'. The technique was given a new meaning by the highly organised "Insight Investigators" which began to appear in the *Sunday Times* in the 1960s.

This was the first newspaper to allocate a team of reporters under a project editor to carry out investigative work on a regular basis. The investigation into the Thalidomide drug, which had caused the birth of deformed babies, was one of the great successes of Insight, and one which resulted in long litigation before the paper was allowed to print the results. Space is the limiting factor of the Insight method. The idea is to present text and pictures over two or more pages with the text running to 6,000 words or more. It is a form of journalism more suited to the leisurely oriented Sunday papers. Insight reports won many awards.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Trace the development of investigative journalism.

3.2 Researching for an Investigative Report/Story

In-depth investigative reports are choice assignments because they allow reporters to explore a topic thoroughly, learn things that most people do not get chance to learn and tell a story without the fear of its being cut for a small hole in the newspaper. (Itule et al 2008: 399). However, for a novice, investigative reports could be frustrating and takes time to do an investigative research for a story. This you must understand as an inspiring investigative journalist.

A thorough research is the first step to a good investigative piece and the main purpose of such a research you carry out is to get your facts and to make sure you have got your facts straight. This is true because you stand the risk of a libel suit if you get the story wrong. Libel suits can be very expensive and people will want to know why you got the story wrong. Is it because you are incompetent? Do not be tempted to cut corners like faking a story where none exists. If you are being pressured, be honest about the holes that you may still have in your research. It is far safer to be clear about what you've found out, and what you still need to verify, than to hope it'll be ok once it's all put together and transmitted or published.

Conventionally, doing an investigative piece is not part of your regular beat where you are expected to work with deadlines. In some cases, the task of doing an investigative piece goes along with your regular beat. However, more time and persistence is given to the task of coming up with an investigative, in-depth piece. Think of the research work as a continual process.

You need to develop persistence as it is not easy trying to get information from people especially when they do not want you to have it. You must expect to be refused access to people and information. This is part of the job. Your ability to get on top of it and uncover the hidden for public good is what makes you an investigative reporter.

In conducting your research for an investigative piece, your starting point may include making initial phone calls. You need to develop a credible and firm telephone manner but remain polite, even when you may feel like losing your temper with someone for being so deliberately obstructive. Be determined at all times but never lose your cool. You may find that you have hit a brick wall and the person you are talking to, or trying to talk to, just will not help you out. Think. How else can you get to the story without having to talk to this particular person? There will be another way round – you just have to find it. If you are in this position before you finally end the call, make sure to ask whether you can come back to them if you find out anything else. This will give you a way back in should you find someone to back up your story.

Good investigative journalism requires good and logical thinking. You will need a good deal of lateral thinking even before you start making your phone calls. Sometimes you will get a few facts that in themselves do not really add up. You need to think around them to spot something there that is not at first obvious. This may mean taking a couple of pieces of information you have from someone else. Never assume that one person has the whole story. You will need to piece the information together, rather like an intricate jigsaw, until you can see what the final version of events might be. Remember, even when you think you have found the final story, you still need someone to verify it. It is no good if the only person who can tell the story is you. You need evidence for your hunches, and people to go on the record.

However, making people go on record is not always easy when conducting an investigative research because of security reasons, amongst others. You will consider other options only if you have tried other conventional methods. Doing an investigative report may require you going under cover in the course of researching the story. However,

before you do this; be sure to ask yourself if the story is important enough and if the result is for the common good or public interest.

An in-depth, investigative report must be worthwhile since you must come to terms with the fact that it is a grueling assignment that requires you to spend days, weeks, months or even years investigating and researching a topic. Your investigation will entail working endlessly in front of a computer and in the field, asking questions over the phone, in person and in writing.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Why are investigative reports choice assignments for the journalist?

3.3 The Investigative Report/Story

Writing an investigative report, follows the same pattern used in writing every other news story. After preliminary preparations, there is an outline, especially for beginners, before the story begins from the caption, through the lead, to the body of the story, to the end. An investigative report could be written in a straight news format or a feature article format. The investigative reporter could decide to be presenting his story in a straight news reports. Once a fresh fact is gathered, a fresh angle to the straight news is presented.

However, most investigative stories are presented in feature format. The feature format provides the latitude to bring in all relevant facts and angles into one full story, make the development flow in a coherent manner and give the audience a better platform to easily read, understand and digest the report. In writing an investigative report, the reporter operates from the preliminary preparation, through the writing of story caption and the lead, to the body of the story.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

State the sequence for writing an investigative story.

3.4 Preliminary Preparation

Preliminary preparation simply connotes that you do not just jump into the story without first getting things set for the story. The documents, transcribed interview and such other materials relevant to the story are gathered and studied at this point. This includes facts jotted down during investigation. Relevant ones are separated from irrelevant ones. This stage is essential because the writer needs to have the materials or

documents (press releases/statements, doctors reports, committee reports, speeches, and so on) handy to know when to use them. This will also ensure that the documents are used as and when due.

The preliminary stage is when you weigh the materials you have and prepare your mind to begin the not-so-easy task of doing a good piece that will captivate your audience. You take a look at all the documents you collected in the course of investigation, transcribe the relevant interviews, and separate the materials you will use from the ones you will not use otherwise you may get confused in writing the story. You may end up including irrelevant materials or irrelevant portions of relevant materials. You need to glance through the selected materials/documents to prepare your mind on how to think out a coherent story.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

What does preliminary preparation for an investigative story involves?

4.0 CONCLUSION

The place of research in the work of an investigative reporter is very important because it helps the reporter to explore things thoroughly to uncover what people do not know. This kind of specialised reporting requires great skills.

5.0 SUMMARY

The essence of an investigative report is to give more facts, details and fresh perspectives to straight news for the interest of the public. To do this, good research work through interviews, documents, observations, and so on is required. Good research work is a major factor for a good report. The investigative journalist systematically goes through preliminary preparations before he is ready to write his piece.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Explain the essence of investigative journalism.
2. Explain the sequence for writing an investigative story.
3. What does it mean to have a good deal of lateral thinking as an investigative journalist?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Hodgson, F. W. (2001). *Modern Newspaper Practice: A Primer on the Press*. Oxford: Focal Press.

Itule, B. D. & Anderson, D. A. (2008). *News Reporting and Writing*. Singapore: McGraw-Hill Companies Inc.

UNIT 2 WRITING AN IN-DEPTH INVESTIGATIVE STORY (II)

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 The Outline
 - 3.2 The Caption/Title
 - 3.3 Find the Theme and Develop the Story
 - 3.4 Writing the Lead
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit discusses the use of outlines as a starting point in mastering the art of writing investigative stories, and brings you to the all-important factor of a lead, which is where the whole story begins in print the electronic media.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- collate materials correctly for a story
- write a story coherently
- discuss what a lead is and its importance in a story.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Outline

Writing a coherent story requires organisation of your thought in such a way that it can be presented in a chronological order in your report or article. An outline is a mention of or description of the key facts or points contained in a story. It serves as a guide while writing the story so that you will not veer off the central theme or start emphasising issues not related to the topic of discussion. It is used to create a skeletal framework for the feature piece before using available information and good sentences and paragraphs to weave the outline into a full blown in-

depth piece. The length of an outline depends on how you want to treat the facts. However, the outline should not be too long in order not to accommodate irrelevant issues in the piece.

An outline should be in sentences with each sentence for one line of thought. Each sentence in the outline could then be treated in one, two or three paragraphs depending on what you want. Using outline is at your discretion but the suggestion here is that outline should be used when necessary to direct the flow of the article, your line of thought, and to help in writing a coherent feature piece. Any lead type can also be chosen – depending on its appropriateness.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

What is an outline for a story?

3.2 The Caption/Title

Using appropriate titles or caption is also key to the writing. The caption or title is an important part of the entire piece because it is the first centre of attraction for the reader. The title often has something to do with the story or something that reflects the central theme of the piece. Avoid as much as possible, misleading captions. Captions may be in question format for instance, “Who killed Mr. Odogu?” It could come in summary statement format such as “Falling standard of Education in Nigeria,” or direct address format such as “The Super Eagles you will never miss.” It is good to know how to caption a good investigative piece in order to give an idea of what the story is about.

Note that the story usually begins with a caption but some journalists choose to write their lead before the caption when writing their piece. This is to enable them develop a caption from the lead. However, writing the caption before other parts of the story is suggested because the caption tailors the mind of the writer towards what the content will be and what information to include in the story. It keeps the reporter on track. As he writes and looks at the caption, he is on track as to the content of the write up. In most cases, the caption gives a faint hint or direct idea of the nature of story content. It could be a single word a summary statement or a short phrase.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Why is the caption of a story important?

3.3 Finding the Theme and Developing the Story

Before you begin, you must determine the purpose of the story. The purpose of in-depth investigative stories is generally to reveal something. Your research and organisation of the story helps you achieve this purpose. Each part of the story – the beginning or introduction, the body and the end or conclusion, should revolve around the theme. Thus, once the theme is determined, all research, interviewing and writing should support it. Though, something may come up in the course of your research that alters the focus of the story, most writers still try to stick to the original theme as much as possible. Itule et al (2008) suggest that you should determine your theme based on the following factors.

1. **Has the story been written before?:** Your task here should be to reveal the unknown for the interest of the public. You can always approach the story from a different angle.
2. **The audience:** The story should be of interest to the audience. People should relate to your piece else, they will not read it, no matter how well written it is.
3. **Holding power:** The audience should not only be interested in the story but the story should hold the interest of the audience. Emotional appeal in the story can be important here.
4. **Worthiness:** Is this story worth anything? Is the theme so narrow or so broad that it has no value? For instance, to write on ‘Cancer’ will be too broad a topic.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

What is another name for the theme of a story?

3.4 Writing the Lead

What is a lead? A lead, as it refers to the writing of a news reports, simply is an introduction to a news story. In other words, it is the introduction part of the story. When reporters cover a breaking news event, their first paragraph to the story often summarise what happened, to whom, where, when, why and how. The most important of these six elements (5Ws and H) go into the first paragraph while the less important elements go into the second and succeeding paragraphs. The first or lead paragraph makes up the summary, which is called the **summary lead**. It is a terse opening paragraph that provides the gist of the story and invites readers to the story.

Summaries and narratives are the most common leads on investigative stories that reveal wrongdoing or break news for the first time. However, there are other special leads that are not summaries. A good lead draws the readers' attention into the body of the story. The lead serves as the neck which joins the head (headline or caption) and the body (entire story). Since there are various leads for in-depth report writing, the most appropriate should be selected to begin a good piece. Among these lead types are: descriptive lead, narrative lead, quotation lead, question lead, direct address lead, staccato lead, summary lead, and so on. These are basic lead types that could be used in beginning a good investigative piece. You should adopt the one that best suit the story or the one you can best apply in beginning a good piece. Importantly, you should study these lead types and understand how to apply each in writing a good piece.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

What is a lead?

4.0 CONCLUSION

With a good outline, the writing is half completed. The writer should flesh out the outline in the main writing starting with an appropriate lead.

5.0 SUMMARY

Writing a good story at this level involves organizing your thoughts and materials coherently in an outline before starting your piece with a lead which is the introductory part of the story.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Write an outline for an investigative report.
2. Write out the lead for the report.
3. How can you determine the theme for a story?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Itule, B.D. & Anderson, D.A. (2008). *News Reporting and Writing*. Singapore: McGraw-Hill Companies Inc.

UNIT 3 WRITING AN IN-DEPTH INVESTIGATIVE STORY (III)

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Types of Lead
 - 3.2 The S-V-O Construction
 - 3.3 Write the Body
 - 3.4 Using Leads in Investigative Reporting
 - 3.5 Writing the Body
 - 3.6 Things to Note as You Write
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit continues with the lead by identifying types of lead an investigative reporter may use in his story, how to find the lead in a story as well as constructing the lead. This unit also introduces you to proper writing of an investigative piece while noting important points as you write.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- identify and write leads for an investigative piece
- write an investigative feature story.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Types of Special Leads

You can use a narrative, contrast, staccato or direct address, and so on, to begin your in-depth investigative story. Use the lead you find most appropriate for the story. A **lead block** of two or more paragraphs can be used for this purpose. This means that rather than put the news elements of the story in the lead, you can use the first two or three paragraphs to set a mood, to arouse readers, and to invite them. The news peg or the significance of the story is provided in the third or

fourth paragraphs (the nut graph). The nut graph – also called the ‘**so what**’ graph is a very important paragraph in the story or report because it explains the reason *d’etre* of the story.

Leads that are not summaries usually fall into one of the following: narrative, contrast, staccato, direct address, question, quote, and so on. Let us look at the narrative lead. You should read up and get used to the other types of leads.

Elements of the narrative lead: A narrative or anecdotal lead is popular with non-breaking news feature stories. The narrative lead uses an anecdote or scene to draw people into the story by putting them in the middle of the action.

- **Lead block:** Though the narrative lead or any other, can be written as a single paragraph, it is usually written as a lead block as mentioned above. That is, two or more paragraphs building up to a paragraph that tells readers the major points of the story.

In addition, since a narrative lead often involves a person, it is acceptable to use that person’s name in the opening paragraph. This is usually not done in summary lead unless the person is well known, but using a name right away in a narrative allows an audience to identify more quickly with a major player in the story.

- **Nut graph:** The next paragraph that follows the lead block is the ‘**so what**’ paragraph, telling readers precisely what the story is about. (Note that narrative is used to entice readers; it should not dominate the story). The common name for the explanatory paragraph that follows the introductory narrative is nut graph. This paragraph explains the significance of the story or gives its news peg, which links the story to previously reported news. The nut graph should be placed fairly high in the story – the third, fourth or fifth paragraph. A nut graph would also be used high in stories that begin with other special leads.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

How can you find the lead for your story?

3.2 Writing the Lead

A helpful approach in writing your lead is to ask yourself the question: “what is my story about?” This is especially beneficial when the material is complex. Then, ask yourself these questions recommended

by Melvin Mencher in his book, *News Reporting and Writing*, 2nd Edition: “What was unique or the most important or unusual thing that happened? “Who was involved – Who did it or said it?” “What is the subject and what verb best will move the reader into the story?”

It is also important to test your lead. As a reporter, you need to develop your own method of testing how adequate the lead is after it has been written. One way to do this is to ask and answer four major questions with key words that spell out the acronym, NEWS.

N – Newsworthiness – Does it say something newsworthy?

E – Emphasis – Does it emphasize the most interesting fact?

W – The Ws and H – Are the essential Ws and H in the opening paragraphs but not jammed into the first paragraph?

S – Source – Does it report the source of this information in this story?

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

What are the key factors to consider when writing a lead?

3.3 The S-V-O Construction

The simplest way to start a straight or hard news lead is with the subject-Verb-Object approach, also known as the S-V-A. However, the investigative story may not necessarily follow this format because in most cases, the story is not breaking news. Usually, the opening paragraph, using the S-V-O construction, begins with the subject, closely followed by a verb and then by the object of the verb to summarise the story, as shown in the following example.

Chidi Imo of Nigeria set a new world record of 10 seconds for the 100 metre race at the All African Games in Cairo.

Chidi Imo, the subject, is followed by ‘set’, the verb, and then by ‘a new world record’, the subject. The other types of leads offer the necessary variety for the many types of stories an investigative reporter will write. But for strength, speed and often clarity, the S-V-O can be the budding investigative journalist’s best friend.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Explain the S-V-O construction formula.

3.4 Using Leads in Investigative Reporting

There are several ways a lead can be used when writing an investigative report. Some of these ways are discussed below.

1. Using summary leads in investigative reporting

A hard news summary lead belongs to an investigative article that reveals wrongdoings or other news first hand while a narrative, contrast, direct-address or other special lead can be used on an in-depth that is not delivering news first hand. An example of an investigative summary lead is given below.

Excessive patient deaths, inept discipline of doctors and dangerously unrestrained growth have plagued heart-surgery programmes for Nigerians for more than a decade, a Guardian investigation has revealed. The findings are based on official documents private doctors fought three years to suppress. The investigation is the first independent review of N500 million-a-year heart surgery cartel run by a coterie of doctors who conduct their affairs in secret.

2. Using bulleted paragraphs to summarize findings

In the example above (of using summary leads for investigative reports), our hypothetical journalist did what many writers do in the first part of an investigative series. He used several bulleted paragraphs that summarise the major findings of the investigation after the lead block above, as shown below.

- Cardiac-surgery death rates are five times higher in some private hospitals than others – differences private doctors cannot justify or explain.
- Death rates jumped to excessive levels 59 times at 37 private hospitals between April and March 2010.
- Cardiac-surgery units in four cities – including Port Harcourt – were closed down after too many patients died.
- Cardiac surgery is safest for Nigerians sent to university teaching hospitals. Private doctors are phasing out these transfers in order to make money.

With the main points highlighted, the reporter can now delve extensively into each of these items and much more.

3. Lead block and nut graph

Since an in-depth investigative report is usually longer than a news account and may not be delivering news first hand, the reporter may want to paint a picture and draw readers into the story before giving them the news peg. To do that, the reporter writes a lead block. A lead block begins with two, three or perhaps four paragraphs of descriptive writing. Narrative is often used, but a contrast or an anecdote can also draw readers into the story. Then, one or more nut graphs are used to give readers the 'so what' of the piece. We shall discuss this further later in this study.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

What is the simplest way to start a lead?

3.5 Writing the Body

Writing in first person article

News stories are seldom written in the first person because reporters are taught to stay out of their writing, to present both sides of a story. In the name of objectivity, reporters are trained to be intermediaries, to witness an event and then recall it in words so that readers, viewers or listeners who were not there can feel as if they were.

Unlike a hard news story written as an inverted pyramid however, an in depth investigative can be written to involve its readers in an emotional story. Such can be effective in the first person especially when the reporter went undercover to get his facts for the story. In these stories, the writer invites an audience into a personal experience. First person article can make a highly intense and personal subject much more real. Examples include, "I was an inmate at the Kirikiri Maximum Prison" and "I worked as a guard at the Kirikiri Maximum Prison". Below is an example of the beginning of a first person in-depth feature written by a journalism student whose husband was dying of cancer. The story worked better in the first person because it allowed the writer to display highly personal and emotional story directly to readers. The article was culled from *News Writing and Reporting* by Itule et al.

I was standing at the kitchen sink washing fresh vegetables for dinner. Dennis worked in from work and said he had just heard a song on the radio that described how he felt.

Better be good to yourself because you're no good for anyone else," he said while he kissed me and reached around for a glass. (Dennis is in a low mood, and I had better just drift with him for a while, I thought.) My husband Dennis is 24 years old. We've been married 2 years, but are never sure how much longer we have together.

Dennis has cancer of the soft tissue. His doctors have told us cancer is a rare form and they can do no more than experiment with various drugs in their search for a cure. The doctors have said that the longer he goes without another growth, the greater his chances of survival.

We think the will to live is the most important factor. Somehow, this will carry us through even the lowest moods.

SELF- ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

Give examples of how you can begin an investigative story using the first person article.

3.6 Things to Note as You Write

It is important for you to provide appropriate background information to the write up. A paragraph or more of background information should appear high in the story to bring the readers up to date.

The body of the story, which follows after the lead and possibly background information, should reflect the reporters journalistic writing skills. When the caption and the lead have done the good job of attracting the interest of the audience to the story, the job of keeping that interest glued throughout the report is achieved by the coherent, meaningful, interesting and free-flowing arrangement of facts in the body of the story. Ensure that you bring in relevant angles to the story. Reflect views of opposing parties as the case may be as part of efforts to balance the report. Do not be one-sided in presentation of facts.

Fairness, brevity, simplicity in language use, accuracy of facts, attribution to sources (except sources that should be protected), are among good writing principles that should be observed in the write-up. As noted earlier a good lead should introduce the readers to an equally good in-depth piece. This means that the body (other parts of the story) should also be interesting otherwise efforts made to produce a good caption and introduction would be in vain.

Remember that the basic aim of writing a story is to communicate with the readers. This calls for use of an appropriate writing style. A simple, easy to understand language is most appropriate. Readers may not have

the time to consult the dictionary after every sentence; the sentences should therefore be coherent. Sentence and paragraph transition should be coherent enough to allow the flow of thought while the piece is being read only relevant citations quotations and instances should be used.

The length of an in-depth piece is determined by the nature of the topic or issue being discussed however, care must be taken in order not to write a lengthy and dry piece. The reader's curiosity and excitement must flow throughout the piece, which means the piece should be interesting all through.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

How can you bring in balance in your investigative report?

4.0 CONCLUSION

Use the right lead. A hard news summary lead belongs to an investigative article that reveals wrongdoings or other news first hand. A narrative, contrast, direct-address or another special lead can be used on an in-depth that is not delivering news first hand. Use bullets early in a lengthy article to summarise it for readers. Do not make them search for the major points of the story. Consider first-person article. Sometimes, the most effective in-depth is written in the first person, especially if the story involves a highly personal topic. Be prepared to tell an editor all the reasons why a first-person article may be the best. The length of your piece depends partly on the nature of your topic. Bring balance, fairness, brevity, accuracy, appropriate language into your writing.

5.0 SUMMARY

There are different types of leads a journalist can use for his report. What is important, it to find and use an appropriate lead for your story. The first person article is more appropriate for writing stories with emotional undertones.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Why would you consider using the first person article in an investigative story?
2. Look up investigative stories or reports in the newspapers or magazines and identify five types of lead used in writing the story. Why do you think they were used?
3. Write out five leads for different stories.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Fogam, P.K. & Aquah, D. (2010). *Law and the Media in Udofia C. Handbook for African Journalists*. Abak: Itiaba Publishers.

Itule, B.D, & Anderson, D.A. (2008). *News Reporting and Writing*. Singapore: McGraw-Hill Companies Inc.

UNIT 4 WRITING AN IN-DEPTH INVESTIGATIVE STORY (IV)

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Using Thread
 - 3.2 Using Transition
 - 3.3 Using Voice (Your Style)
 - 3.4 Writing the Ending
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit discusses on techniques required in writing good investigative stories. The use of a thread, transitions and a voice (your style) are particularly important.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- use thread, transitions and establish your ‘signature’ in a story
- bring your story to effective ending or conclusion.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Using a Thread

When writing the investigative piece, just like a news story, use transitions, paraphrases and quotations to connect paragraphs and move from one area to another. It is also effective to weave a thread throughout the story, which connects the lead to the body and to the conclusion. This thread can be a single person, an event or a thing, and it usually highlights the theme of the story.

For instance, when conducting an investigative report on how people run the drug racket, you could begin with a convicted 18-year-old waiting to be executed on a death sentence in Saudi Arabia and facing the deadline of death. The body of the story will explore drug trafficking, how it

affects people, what is being done to help those affected negatively by its use, among others. Meanwhile, as you write, you would keep coming back to the 18-year-old, the thread. The report should also conclude with the 18-year old, waiting.

As you write, you should keep coming back to the thread that holds the piece together; this is because it gives the story a sense of continuity throughout. Do not forget you used it as a ‘hook’ at the beginning to gain the attention of the reader, so you should refer to it again and again to retain the attention of the reader. The story should have a circular ending that brings you back to the person or scene the story began with.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Discuss the importance of the thread in the development of a story.

3.2 Using a Transition

Transitions hold paragraphs together and allow them to flow into each other. Transition is particularly important because it is the tool writers use to move subtly from one person or area to the next. Transitions keep readers from being jarred by the writing but guide them through the story and keep them comfortable until the end. Like the thread, it helps connect the beginning, the middle and the end of a story. Transition can be a word or a phrase at the beginning or end of a sentence, or it can be a sentence or a paragraph that connects other sentences or paragraphs (Itule et al 2008: 140).

With transitions, you are saying to the reader, “Now the writing is going to move smoothly into another area.” Words commonly used as transitions include *meanwhile*, *therefore*, *sometimes*, *also*, *and*, *but*, *meantime*, *nevertheless*, *however*, and so on. Phrases include “at 8 p.m, in other action,” “despite the promises,” or “in the time that followed.” Sentences include “Police gave the following account” and “*The witness described how the crime occurred.*”

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

3.3 Using Voice (Your Style)

One other key element that holds your story together is voice that is, your signature or personal style. It is true that a byline will tell readers you are the author of the story but the voice inside the story allows you to put your personal stamp on the writing such that the story reveals your personality and people who read your piece can often tell easily

even without your name on the story. It has to do with your unique way of telling a story. Be original and let the audience ‘hear’ you, distinctively from others, when you write. This is achieved by using your language, words, and so on in your writing.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

How can you achieve voice in an investigative feature story?

3.4 Writing the Ending

The ending or conclusion should be able to wrap up the story line. It should not be ‘hanging’ such that the reader will be wandering whether the story continued on a non-existent page. As earlier suggested, you should re-read your work and double and triple check your facts to ensure accuracy. Your work should be thoroughly proofread after typing to ensure that you would not blame typographical error for serious mistakes. Your main aim should be to present the report in a manner that the audience will understand and not play to the gallery with complex writing style and end up not communicating. Your story can trail off at the end like a news story or it can end with a climax. It is good for your ending to complete a circle and come back to the lead. It is important that your ending should leave the reader satisfied.

Things to have in mind when you write investigative reporting (Culled from *News Writing and Reporting*)

- Your mission is to find the truth and deliver it to your audience. This requires more than simply getting the facts straight. You need to provide the context that gives meaning to the facts.
- You owe your first allegiance to your audience – the readers, the viewers, the listeners. This allegiance must be a vital factor in any decision you make.
- You owe your audience the truth as best you can determine it. To minimise harm, you may occasionally have to withhold pieces of information – such as the location of SAS teams in a hostage taking – but this should be temporary and not the intention of misleading your audience. Be sure that everything you do is true and in context.
- Be compassionate. When you report the truth, people may get hurt. In those cases, try to minimise harm. Never use your power as a journalist to inflict gratuitous harm.
- Do not manipulate the people you cover. Do not treat them simply as the means to achieve your own ends. Likewise, as the

surrogate for your audience, do not allow yourself to be manipulated by your sources and diverted from the truth.

- You owe your audience respect. However, practicing journalism is not like running a store; the customer is not always right. What is right is the truth. When your reporting or decisions are challenged, carefully review them in light of the complaint. If the complaint is right, correct your mistake, if you think it is wrong, explain your actions. Do not expect to be loved by the audience you serve. Our goal should not be to avoid criticism, since it is inevitable, but to never deliberately do anything that would justify criticism.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

What major points will you consider as you conclude your story?

4.0 CONCLUSION

The use of threads in your story makes it more interesting just as transitions makes it easy for you to connect paragraphs and makes the story flow for easy comprehension. With your ‘voice’ in the story, your audience cannot mistake the author of the piece.

5.0 SUMMARY

Use a strong thread throughout the story. Many in-depth writers begin their stories with one person or event. Then they refer to the person or event in the body and at the end of the story. Transitions help you connect easily your thoughts or paragraphs in the story. Using ‘voice’ in your story establish your personality in the story. Consider Writing a Series of articles. Instead of writing a single extremely long story, a series can make a subject more palatable to an audience.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What are the things you should have in mind as you write an investigative story?
2. What would you do when your report is challenged or criticised by the public?
3. How can you manipulate people you cover as an investigative journalist?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Hodgson, F. W. (2001). *Modern Newspaper Practice: A Primer on the Press*. Oxford: Focal Press.

Fogam, P.K. & Aquah, D. (2010). "Law and the Media." In *Udofia C. Handbook for African Journalists*. Abak: Itiaba Publishers.

Itule, B.D. & Anderson, D.A. (2008). *News Reporting and Writing*. Singapore: McGraw-Hill Companies Inc.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- define and explain communication law and ethics
- explain the relationship between communication law and ethics.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 What is Communication Law?

Communication law refers to all forms of rules concerning media systems, which control communication activities that everyone, especially media practitioners in a country or society must obey. This definition implies that, for the interpretative or investigative reporter, there are established laws in the society, which he must be conversant with and indeed, obey in the course of his practice.

However, because of the job of an investigative reporter borders on the question of public interest, the reporter often runs counter to some of these laws. Knowing the laws that directly influence investigative reporting goes a long way to keep him alert on account of areas he or the media organization he represents may be sued.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Define communication law as it relates to the journalist.

3.2 Development of Communication Law

The laws that affect the press in most African countries have their origin to a large extent in common law or civil law. These countries inherited the legal systems of their colonial masters like France and Britain.

Thus, after the colonies regained political independence, they maintained and practiced the legal systems of their one – time colonial masters. The result is that many African countries like Nigeria belong to the common law family of the English or the civil law family of the French. -(Fogam and Acquah-Dadzie (2010, pp77-78).

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

What guarantees free press in Nigeria?

3.3 Legal Guarantee of Press Freedom

For the investigative journalist to perform his functions effectively in the society, the press needs to be free. For this reason, freedom of the press has always been recognised as a principle of justice, rooted and fundamental in the tradition of democratic settings.

In line with this, the principle of such freedom is expressed or implied in most social covenants as seen in the constitutions of most African countries. Such constitutions acknowledge the nature and right of freedom of expression and more importantly, freedom of the press.

However, it is important to note that in African countries, the constitution either acknowledge freedom of expression in the preamble or in the substantive provisions. In French – speaking African countries, it is common to find the principle of freedom of expression as a declaration in the preamble of the constitution. Fogam and Aquah – Dadzie (2010;79) noted that these declarations in the preamble do not really guarantee any rights. A frequent conception of a preamble is that it does not form a part of a statute, and as such cannot create any legal rights or obligations. The implication of this is that the activities of an investigative journalist guaranteed in a preamble can have no more than moral force.

The guarantees to a free press are found in the substantive provisions of the constitutions of most African countries with common law background (that is, former British colonies) such as Nigeria. For instance, the Nigerian Constitution of 1979 guarantees freedom of expression including the freedom to hold opinion, receive and impart information without interference. This is essential for the interpretative and investigative reporter because these constitutional provisions are statute and thus create legal rights or obligations. In recognition of the freedom of the press as a fundamental right, these constitutional provide the legal basis upon which the press operates. However, the freedom of the press is not absolute. Thus, the investigative or interpretative journalist in the practice of his profession is often subject to the laws of the land. These laws usually come into play while the investigative reporter is gathering news or during the story's publication.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

What guarantees free press in Nigeria?

3.4 What is Ethics?

Ethics is a system of standards, principles and values defining what are right or wrong in terms of professional conduct. Nearly all professions have ethical standards. Medical doctors and lawyers have ethical standards just as journalists do have. Thus, ethics refers to the understanding among journalists about what is proper behaviour.

According to Professor John Merrill, ethics is that branch of philosophy that helps journalists determine what is right to do in their journalism. It has to do with self-litigation and self-enforcement. Though ethics is related to law, it is of a different nature. Although law quite often stems from the ethical values of a society of a certain time-law is reflective of ethics), law is something that is socially determined and personally enforced – or should be. Ethics should provide the journalist certain basic principles or standards by which he can judge actions right or wrong, good or bad, responsible or irresponsible.

Ethical standards in journalism is necessary because, unlike other professionals whose roles are more clearly defined, journalists have been left on their own to work out roles and determine their ethics. Ethics in journalism is important because good investigative journalism requires skills, critical thinking and ethical decision-making.

Basic ethical principles that you as an investigative or interpretative or journalist must know among others is to seek the truth and report it as fully as possible; act independently and be accountable.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Define ethics.

3.5 Development of Ethics in Journalism

Four theories of the press, which are Authoritarian, Libertarian and Social Responsibility, have influenced the development of journalistic ethics over the years. This is because the prevailing ideology or system of government in a society has always influenced or impacted greatly on the behaviour of media systems in that environment.

However, Stephen Ward proposes an alternate ‘view of press’ theory in his book, *The Invention of Journalism Ethics: The Path to Objectivity and Beyond*. He provides an alternate development of journalism ethics, going beyond Four Theories by identifying six major stages in the development of journalism ethics.

Stage one: The invention of journalism ethics in the periodic news press of the 17th century, especially in London. -The two traditions of factual news reporting and independent opinion making begin here. Editors claim to adhere to such norms as impartiality, truth-telling, unbiased observation, credible informants, etc.

Stage two: The “public” ethic: The development of the 18th century public sphere stimulated the growth of a more free and diverse press, including the first daily newspapers. -The roles of journalist, news reporter and editor emerge. -Journalists take on the persona of reporter, reformer, “polite” commentator and revolutionary. -By the end of the century, the press is a “fourth estate,” a social force to be feared or praised. -All forms of journalism justify their behaviour by appeal to their role as a “tribune” and protector of the public and its liberty.

Stage three: The liberal theory of the press: The liberal theory is, strictly speaking, a 19th century phenomena, although it has long roots in the writings of Milton, Hume and other thinkers of the 17th and 18th centuries. It received its definitive defence in Mill’s *On Liberty*.

The liberal press was a creature of liberalism as a social movement of an ascendant middle class in England and other countries. -Liberalism stressed liberty, a society organized around “merit” and knowledge, and wider political representation. Liberalism stressed a free marketplace in the world of ideas and in the economy. -Social progress would come through education, social reform and a press that supported liberal ideas.

Note: “Liberal press” is a misnomer. -There were at least two types of liberal newspaper across the 19th century: the elite and egalitarian liberal newspapers. -The English liberal press of the mid-1800s, such as the *Times of London*, exemplified the elite liberal newspaper. -Its primary mission was that of serving the liberal elites, providing weighty opinion and educating the masses. -The egalitarian liberal paper began as the cheap “penny” papers that began in the 1830s in major American cities and grew into a mass commercial press. This popular press depended on wide circulation and advertising. -It had a brighter, more accessible style. Its mission was to provide “news for all” and to support a growing, egalitarian democracy.

Stage four: -Objectivity and the mass commercial press: By the end of the 1800s, the development of a professional “news” press gave birth to the doctrine of objectivity – the ideal of the reporter as an independent, objective observer of events. -“This traditional objectivity” became a strict methodology in newsrooms for eliminating opinion in the writing of news. By the 1930s, mainstream newspapers came to be defined in

large part by an objectivity that was summarized by the mantra, “just the facts”.

Stage five: –The return of interpretive journalism; Objectivity was challenged from the beginning by other forms of journalism – the muckrakers of the early 1900s, the interpretive journalism of Time magazine and the new tabloid papers. –Also, from the 1960s onward, objectivity was challenged by the more personal form of broadcast news and by the popularity of investigative and literary journalism. By late century, the objective tradition was weakened further by the “civic journalism” movement and by on-line journalism. Journalism ethics in the 20th century was characterised not only by the dominance of objectivity, but also by its decline, and the return of a more interpretive journalism.

Stage six: Global journalism ethics in the 21st century. The major question of journalism ethics today is what type of ethics should develop in the 21st century. Will interpretive journalism, in the form of blogging or citizen-to-citizen communication, overwhelm the professional ethics of objectivity and verification developed by more traditional forms of journalism?

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

What is the basis or origin of ethics in Journalism?

3.6 The Ethics of Investigative Journalism

Every team of investigative reporters pursues a story under different circumstances, so creating an all-purpose ethical rulebook is problematic, though certain standards have become generally accepted. The legal implications of reporters' actions are, by far, more clear-cut than ethical issues. Ethics, instead, deals with how to distinguish between right and wrong, with philosophical principles used to justify a particular course of action. Any decision can be judged ethical, depending on what ethical framework is used to justify it, and what values are prioritized. What journalists and editors need to determine is who will benefit from the reporting.

If journalism is committed to democratic accountability, then the question that needs to be asked is whether the public benefits from the investigative reports. Whose interest does investigative journalism serve by publishing a given story? Does the press fulfill its social responsibility in revealing wrongdoing? Whose interests are being affected? Whose rights are being invaded? Is the issue at stake a matter

of legitimate public interest? Or is individual privacy being invaded when no crucial public issue is at stake?

Most discussions about ethics in investigative journalism have focused on methodology, namely, is any method valid to reveal wrongdoing? Is deception legitimate when journalists aim to tell the truth? Is any method justifiable no matter the working conditions and the difficulties in getting information? Can television reporters use hidden cameras to get a story? Can journalists use false identities to gain access to information?

On this point, an important factor to consider is that the public seems less willing than journalists to accept any method to reveal wrongdoing. Surveys show that the public is suspicious of invasion of privacy, no matter the public relevance of a story. The public generally seems less inclined to accept that journalists should use any method to get a story. Such an attitude is significantly revealing in times when, in many countries, the credibility of the press is low. The press needs to be trustworthy in the eyes of the public. That is its main capital, but too often its actions further undermine its credibility. Therefore, the fact that citizens generally believe that journalists would get any story at any cost needs to be an important consideration. Exposés that rely on questionable methods to get information can further diminish the legitimacy and public standing of the reporting and the journalists.

Ethical issues are not limited to methods. Corruption is also another important ethical issue in investigative journalism. Corruption includes a variety of practices, ranging from journalists who accept bribes, or quash exposés, or pay sources for information. The harm to private citizens that might result from what is reported also needs to be considered. Issues of privacy usually come to the forefront, as investigative journalism often walks a fine line between the right to privacy and the public's right to know. It is usually assumed that privacy applies differently to public figures than to average citizens.

There are no easy, ready-made answers to ethical issues. Codes of ethics, despite some merits, do not offer clear-cut solutions that can be applied in all cases. Most analysts agree that journalists must remain sensitive to issues such as fairness, balance, and accuracy. Reporters continuously need to ask ethical questions throughout different stages of the investigations, and be ready to justify their decisions to their editors, colleagues, and the public. They need to be sensitive to whose interests are being affected, and operate according to professional standards.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

Explain the principles behind the ethics of journalism.

3.7 Relationship between Communication Law and Ethics

Communication law in this course is understood as it relates to journalism. Thus, in this sub-head, we look at how journalism law is connected with the concept of Ethics in journalism.

The connection lies in the fact that both are necessary for a professional conduct in journalism practice. —This is especially so with the investigative and interpretive journalists in focus. Communication laws are statutes that are enforceable by law enforcement agents in the society once they are violated by any journalist. Thus, such laws must be obeyed. On the other hand, ethics is not enforceable by law. It only appeals to the conscience of the journalist to do right. However, violations of universal ethical standards, also has its consequences like the law. —Sometimes, such “natural” consequences are far more damaging than that under the law.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 7

Explain why ethical issues are not limited to only methods of obtaining information.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Journalism laws have come a long way and there is need for the journalist to be conversant with its pedigree.

5.0 SUMMARY

Communication or journalism law today has its basis in the common and civil law. Most of these laws have ethical foundations as well.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What is the origin of communication law in Nigeria?
2. What is the relationship between journalism law and ethics?
3. What is a liberal press?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 2 Journalism Law

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Defamation
 - 3.2 Elements of a Libel Suit
 - 3.3 Steps for Avoiding Libel Suits
 - 3.4 The Investigative and Interpretive Reporters' Defense for Libel Suits
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit examines some of the basic principles of law that affects the investigative and interpretative journalist. Nigeria has a comparatively developed legal system based on the common law of the British Legal System.

This unit introduces some common areas of communication law that the investigative and interpretative reporter need to know as media professionals. This is essential so that the aspiring investigative or interpretative journalist can be aware of specific rules that regulate, control and influence the activities of such specialised reporters. This knowledge will help the investigative journalist especially, to avoid expensive legal pitfalls, challenge attempts to suppress stories, and so on. Libel, privacy, sedition as well as news gathering laws are of utmost importance because the danger of a law suit is high and the cost of defending or losing one can be great for the Investigative reporter and the media organisation he represents.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- discuss situations where a case for libel or seditious suit is imminent in the course of journalism practice
- explain how to avoid libel or seditious suits
- discuss defenses against communication laws like libel suits.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Defamation

The law relating to defamation is of key importance to the investigative and interpretative journalist. Some suggest it is necessary as an instrument of censorship while others argue that it serves as a spur to accuracy and professionalism. The word ‘defamation’ is often used interchangeably with ‘libel’. It is generally a civil action, which means that the wronged party has a choice whether or not to sue the alleged wrong doer. Defamation is defined as the publication of a statement which reflects on a person’s reputation and which tends to lower him in the estimation of right-thinking members of society generally; or make them shun or avoid him; or exposes him to hatred, ridicule or contempt or disparages him in his business, trade, office or profession.

The interpretive and investigative journalists need to be very careful about their use of language as words can be ambiguous and create a variety of meaning. The interpretive journalist like other journalists, should also consider the juxtaposition, tone and context of their story as the innocuous and unintended may become misleading and potentially defamatory thereby causing a claimant to sue for libel.

What is libel? Libel is defamation by written words or by communication in some other tangible form, whereas ‘Slander’ is defamation by spoken words or gestures. Generally, the law treats libel more harshly because the written word is more permanent and may reach more people than the spoken word – this is debatable today when we take cognizance of the World Wide Web where materials can be retrieved at will and at any time, even for years. Be that as it may, the courts say the greater power of written words to injure reputation justified harsher penalties and legal rules move more favourable to libel plaintiffs than to slander plaintiffs.

Broadcast defamation is also commonly treated as libel by courts because it can reach millions of listeners and be as durable as written defamation. Libel suits place at risk not only the interpretive or investigative journalist’s reputation but also that of the his organisation – a reputation built on accuracy, fairness, thoroughness and responsibility. If an investigative reporter loses a libel suit, his reputation is blemished, sometimes irreparably; he may lose his job. For these reasons and others, journalists must know what constitutes libel and what defenses can protect them in the event of a libel suit.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Define libel.

3.2 The Elements of a Libel Suit

An interpretive or investigative reporter involved in a libel suit of published material in the mass media should know that the plaintiff – the person suing – must prove six things: (1) Defamatory nature of the story (2) Identification (not limited to calling an individual by name) (3) Publication (communication to a third party) (4) Proof of Falsity (5) Injury (actual damage to reputation) (5) Proof of Fault.

Defamatory nature of the story: The essence of a libel suit is vindication of one's reputation. In other words, to prove or establish that one's reputation is not as presented by the press or publication. The plaintiff, therefore, must prove defamation, meaning injury to reputation. A statement in a story or report is defamatory if it injures a person's reputation, lowering that person in the estimation of the community or deterring third parties from associating or doing business with that person.

Judging whether a statement is defamatory will normally involve two steps. The first step requires a judge to determine that the statement is capable of defamatory meaning; in the second step it must be decided or proved whether a substantial segment of the public actually understood the statement as defaming the plaintiff.

The investigative reporter should particularly be certain of his facts – a cardinal rule – as some statements obviously are capable of defaming a person or business. For instance, a report that a bank was founded with drug money and that the chairman of the bank was a drug baron and money launderer implied the bank and its managers engaged in illegal activities. Few people would want to do business with such a bank. However, for a statement to be defamatory, it must have been phrased in such a way that the ordinary reader would understand it as stating facts about the plaintiff with intent of malice.

From the foregoing, the aspiring investigative journalist should be aware of the fact that to prove defamation, the words must refer to the claimant – that is, the claimant must prove that the defamatory words published refer to him directly or indirectly. In addition, the words must have been published to a third party. In legal terms, this implies that the statement must be published in a newspaper, radio or other media to a person other than the claimant.

The claimant can however, decide whom he/they wish to sue. The investigative journalist must appreciate that this does not mean just the originator of a potentially libelous statement as in the journalist. This is an important principle to understand whenever the investigative journalist cannot simply report that Mr. Abubakar says that Mr. Mohammed is a cheat and a liar and assume that he is safe because the allegation came from another person.

Identification (not limited to calling an individual by name): The investigative or interpretive journalist should know that it does not matter if his published statement was not intended to refer to the plaintiff. What matters is that reasonable readers, listeners or viewers would have understood that the statement was about the plaintiff. The publication of a name is not necessarily for identification.

Publication (communication to a third party): This factor has been mentioned in the section above. In addition to what have been said, the investigative journalist should note that a statement does not have to be so widely disseminated as in a national newspaper, radio, television etc. for a person to sue for libel. All the law requires is that the defendant made the defamatory statement to someone other than the person defamed. Example of this can be where the investigative journalist gives the manuscript of his story to be typed by a third party.

Proof of Falsity: Courts' decisions over the years have showed that today, many libel plaintiffs must prove falsity when the allegedly defamatory statements involve matters of public concern. At this point, the interpretive or investigative reporter should note that the statements must involve matters of public concern. In other words, the plaintiff must prove falsity only when the defamatory statement involves a matter of public concern; the requirement will apply in most cases involving the mass media. Courts usually conclude that that if a statement appears in a newspaper or a news broadcast, it involves a matter of public concern.

Injury (actual damage to reputation): The investigative journalist should also be aware that in the past, the presumption by the courts once there is a libel suit is that obviously the defamatory statement had injured the plaintiff. Thus, the plaintiff did not have to produce any evidence showing that he or she had suffered injury to reputation, monetary loss or emotional suffering. However, today, after the US Supreme Court said in 1974 that the presumption of injury was incompatible with the first amendment, the plaintiffs have had to prove 'actual injury' in order to recover damages from publishers who negligently made defamatory statements. Actual injury includes more

than provable monetary loss. Evidence of damage to reputation, humiliation and mental anguish also count. Instructively, the interpretive and investigative journalist should know that in spite of the explanations above, there are instances where the plaintiff does not have to prove injury. If the defendant published the defamatory statement with actual malice, then the courts can presume injury. Publications that do not involve a matter of public concern are another exception.

Proof of Fault: Proof of fault is one of the most crucial issues in modern libel cases, which the interpretive and investigative reporter cannot ignore. Today, plaintiffs must prove some level of fault. The level of fault a plaintiff needs to prove depend on whether the plaintiff is (1) a public official or figure (2) a private individual.

Public officials and public figures must prove that the statement was published with the knowledge that it was false or with reckless disregard for whether it was false. This called ‘actual malice’, a term that causes confusion since many people think it means ill will. But whether the defendant disliked or wanted to harm the plaintiff is not the issue. All that matters is whether the defendant in this case, the investigative or interpretive journalist knew the statement was false or had a degree of awareness of the statement’s probable falsity when it was published. Proving this can be difficult, since the plaintiff must produce evidence about the investigative journalist’s state of mind.

Unlike public officials, you should note that private individuals have less difficulty winning libel suits because in most cases they only need to prove that the reporter or defendant acted with negligence in order to recover actual damages. Negligence essentially means acting unreasonably under the circumstances. In a libel case, an error such as failing to check public records, misspelling or confusing names or accidentally transposing dates or figures might be considered negligence. The difference between actual malice and negligence is sometimes confusing.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

What are the elements of a libel suit?

3.3 Steps for Avoiding Libel Suit

As an aspiring interpretive or investigative reporter, you should take cognizance of the following steps among others, for avoiding libel suits as enumerated by Fedler et al (2005:572).

1. Make sure everything in the story, especially any potentially defamatory statement, is newsworthy. Nothing is gained by risking a lawsuit over a statement that has no news value.
2. Identify everyone in the story as fully as possible.
3. Ask persons who are attacked or criticised in the news story to respond and include the response in the story, even if it is just an absolute denial. If the person refuses to respond, say so in the story. If he presents credible evidence to support his or her denials, check out that evidence.
4. Interview every relevance source and read every relevant document; do not ignore sources or information that may contradict the central point of a story.
5. Find out what basis a source has for making a defamatory charge and what the source's motives might be.
6. Avoid confidential or anonymous sources where possible.
7. Never use confidential or anonymous sources for making attacks on a subject. Use them only for factual information that can be verified by other sources or documents.
8. If a story uses documentary sources make sure the documents are understood and quoted accurately. Double check the information in any document; even official records have errors.
9. Take additional time to make sure the investigation is thorough and the story is accurate.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

What are the major steps for avoiding libel?

3.4 The Investigative and Interpretative Reporters' Defense for Libel Suits

A good investigative journalist can go a long way in avoiding expensive libel claim through the professional and ethical reporting of events. If reporters check the facts, produce an accurate and balanced account of events and avoid embellishing the story, they will reduce the likelihood of possible legal actions and will also be in a position to defend fictitious or vexatious claims.

Indeed the investigative reporter is to be well versed in the defenses that the law provides to defamation actions. This is not a consideration that the interpretive and investigative reporter should turn to *after* they receive a letter of complaint but should be at the forefront of their thinking as they research and construct their story. The aim is to avoid litigation.

Four main defenses against libel suit, which journalists can apply, are listed below: to on the following issues.

1. If the damaging allegation is a statement of fact (can the investigative reporter or interpretive reporter prove that the statement is true?)
2. If the damaging allegation is an expression of opinion (can the interpretive or investigative reporter show it is a fair comment?)
3. If the damaging allegation is contained within a report that is entitled to the protection of privilege (can the reporter show that the coverage is fair and accurate?)
4. If the damaging allegation is a matter of serious public interest (then the journalist may be able to rely on the developing defense of common law qualified privilege).

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

What are the major steps for avoiding libel?

3.4 Ethics of News Gathering

As indicated earlier in this course, investigative journalism involves “getting the news behind the news” and to do this, we established that investigative reporters especially, may encounter several legal problems if they are not careful.

The freedom to publish news and comments would appear to be of little value without the corollary freedom to gather the news. Ideally, therefore, freedom of the press should include the freedom to gather news, write it, publish it and circulate it. Even the constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression cannot be said to carry with them an unrestrained right to gather news. In Nigeria, there are restrictive policies or laws which tend to inhibit the investigative journalist in his attempt to gather news.

The Nigerian Official Secret Act provides an excellent example. This act stipulates that a person who transmits any classified matter to a person not authorised on behalf of the government to receive it; or obtains, reproduces or retains any classified matter which he is not authorised on behalf of the government to obtain, reproduce or retain, as the case may be, shall be guilty of an offence.

Such laws are required to protect confidential acts and records. Very often, however, these laws are so variously interpreted by over-zealous public officers that they make it possible to withdraw virtually all public

records for inspection. Such laws in Nigeria for instance, prevent the investigative journalist to do a good job as he is unable to access information.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

What is the Nigerian Official Secret Act?

3.5 Privacy

The issue for you as an investigative or interpretive journalist is knowing when your constitutional right to ask questions and pursue truth is encroaching on an individual's right to privacy. This is actually a matter of decency and common sense, but in recent years some principles of privacy has been codified into law. Privacy law and court cases also recognize that individuals have some right to control publicity about themselves. Note that in some situations, the public interest in a subject outweighs an individual's right to privacy, but these are matters of judgment, which are decided ultimately in court. So, where can a reporter seek information and photographs without risking privacy suit? Generally, a person in a public place, like on a street or in a park or public building, is fair game, although harassment is not allowed.

Other issues that borders on the law the journalist must be conversant with are Law of Privacy, Law of Sedition, and Laws pertaining to News Gathering, and so on. As you will find out, some of these issues also borders on ethical values.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

What is the relevance of Nigerian Official Secret Act to journalism?

4.0 CONCLUSION

Defamation is one of the most common allegations brought against journalists. It can be very costly for the journalist and his media organisation in terms of reputation and monetary values. Therefore, the investigative journalist should try as much as possible to avoid any situation that can bring about a libel suit by learning and observing all the elements of libel and knowing steps to take in avoiding libel suits as well as defending himself when the need arises.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit has provided selected and brief introduction to legal provisions, which affect the work of an investigative and interpretive journalist, and how the journalist can avoid such legal pitfalls.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Why do you think private individuals are more likely to win libel suit against journalists?
2. What factors must be taken into consideration to prove a defamation suit against a journalist?
3. Explain truth as a defense against defamation

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 3 ETHICS IN JOURNALISM

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Approaches to Ethics in Journalism
 - 3.2 Four Ethical Theories
 - 3.3 Journalists' Loyalties
 - 3.4 Journalists' Values
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit explores ethical issues that directly affect the interpretive and investigative reporter in the practice of his profession and considering the right approach to ethical matters by the journalist. Understanding ethical principle goes a long way in helping the journalist in the discharge of his duties and obligation to the public, which he owes his first loyalty.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- explain principles of Aristotle, Kant and Mill and the Judeo-Christian as they relate to investigative and interpretive journalism
- explain how to apply ethical principles to your work
- explain the core values of journalists.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Approaches to Ethics in Journalism

Through the ages, philosophers have given much thought to what constitute ethical behaviour and the principles that should govern our relations with one another. Journalism practice has developed ethical standards based on shaped values among journalists universally; and have written them down in the form of codes of ethical behaviour. The problem for people engaged in journalism, like the investigative or

interpretive journalist, is how to apply those principles and values to the situations they face day in and day out, in such a way that he portrays an acceptable behaviour in the eyes of colleagues and the public.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

How should an investigative/interpretive journalist approach the concept of ethics?

3.2 Four Ethical Theories

Lorenz and Vivian (2005:572) identified four sets of ethical principles by philosophers which stand out as basis for correct behaviour.

Golden mean: Aristotle who lived in Greece in the fourth century B.C. formulated this theory. -The Golden Mean requires that when there is an extreme position in a situation, one seek a middle ground. The extreme for the investigative journalist could be to publish everything he knows or publish nothing. -The investigative journalist obviously, chooses the Golden Mean and develops stories that are appropriate to the medium, the editor and the audience. In other words, the proper thing to do is to tell what is appropriate in the situation.

Categorical imperative: Immanuel Kant, an 18th – century German philosopher, formulated the categorical imperative theory which states that people should behave only as they wish everyone else to behave. One is duty bound to do what is right in every instance, unconditionally (or, categorically). For instance, one must always tell the truth without exception. To follow the Kantian, ethics is difficult for the investigative journalist even where the overriding motive is for the public good. With such a theory as this, the use of deception to obtain a story is forbidden.

Utilitarianism: Developed by Jeremy Bentham and refined by John Stuart Mill. Utilitarian theory requires you to judge what is right by asking what will give the greatest good to the greatest number of people. To determine what is ethical behaviour in any situation, we must balance right and wrong and act in a way that results in more good than evil.

Golden rule: The Judeo-Christian ethic or golden rule, calls on people to “do unto others as you would have them do unto you”. The flaw in the golden rule for investigative journalist is that, taking it literally, he or she might print nothing about individuals that would be considered negative. This is quite contrary to the thrust of investigative journalism.

You should read the golden rule, however, as requiring that you treat other people fairly.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Explain the theory of golden mean.

3.3 The Investigative or Interpretive Journalist's Loyalties

Ethics deals with what we ought to do in situations involving other people – what we owe to others and how we carry out our responsibilities to them. That loyalty or sense of duty implies faithfulness in the discharge of your obligations as an investigative journalist. The 'others' to whom you owe your loyalty include the public to whom news and information are directed, your sources and the subjects you write about as well as your employers and colleagues. These loyalties include:

1. Loyalties to the Public

Your prime responsibility as an investigative or interpretive journalist is to the public because the aim of your in-depth story is the enlightenment of the public. This means that the public interest is paramount. Members of the public use the information they receive from you as an investigative or interpretive reporter, to form opinions and perceptions, which ultimately is the basis for making decision like who to vote for in an election day. If they are given faulty information, they have no basis for sound decisions. Therefore, the investigative journalists have an overwhelming responsibility to their audiences to provide accurate and unbiased information.

2. Loyalties to Subject and Sources

Anyone reporting on the activities of someone else has a responsibility to represent the subject's position as accurately and completely as possible and that is especially true when the report is negative. To do otherwise is to misrepresent the subject, to show the subject as something that it is not.

The investigative or interpretive journalist is also under obligation to present the views of his sources accurately. This means providing context when context makes a source's meaning clear. Twisting the words of a source or taking a source's words out of context gives an inaccurate portrayal of the words of a source. That misrepresentation can be harmful to the person, even if it is not libelous.

As an investigative journalist, like all journalists, you also owe it to your sources to identify yourself except where there's a conviction that you need to mask your identity, but the rationale for doing this should be clearly and logically worked out.

Loyalties to Employers and Colleagues

Communicators have a responsibility to their employers to do the work they were hired to do as competently and as honestly as humanly possible. Where a journalist behaves in an unethical fashion, he brings his employer's ethics into question as well. This is collective responsibility.

In line with the above, a relationship of trust must exist between the reporters and colleagues in the organisation. Trust is eroded when reporters show little concern for accuracy or thoroughness in performing the normal duties expected of him. Do what is expected of you professionally, colleagues will trust, respect and support you when you run into obstacles.

Note that when an investigative journalist behave in a manner considered unethical, all journalists are subject to the blanket indictment of being untrustworthy. This is why you have a responsibility to other journalists to perform your work in such a way that all journalists are esteemed by the public. Do not forget that people generally have a tendency to stereotype that is, assign the behaviour or characteristics of a few individuals to a whole class especially in a negative way.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

To whom do journalists owe the most loyalty? Why?

3.4 The Investigative or Interpretive Journalist's Values

Journalism, just like every other profession, has certain values that its members prize. These values have been mentioned in passing in the course of this study. The values comprise what members of the profession consider the essential things they should do and the things they should not do. For the investigative and interpretive journalist for instance, like all other journalists, competence is a value – to do the work as best one possibly can.

This course is designed to help you develop those skills that will help you become a competent investigative or interpretive journalist. What may be apparent to you is that competence itself is an ethical value.

That is, to do one's work skillfully, in accord with standard journalistic practice is to do it ethically. Some of the values needed to be mindful of to ensure competence include the following.

- 1. Fairness:** Fairness is another basic value for the investigative or interpretive journalist. This value grows out of the Kantian principle that persons should be treated as ends rather than means. Fairness is equated with being balanced in one's approach to stories, open to facts, impartial, and unbiased in the interpretation of news and in treatment of individuals and institutions. It has ethical implications because it implies sensitivity to the dignity of other human beings. However, being fair as an interpretive or investigative journalist does not mean being an apologist.
- 2. Telling the truth:** Truth is a universal value. The code of ethics of nearly every professional communication organisation addresses it. We rely on truthful communications to make decisions of every level of our lives and our audiences rely on us as investigative journalists to tell them the truth so that they can make reasonable decisions. When you lie as an investigative journalist, you undermine the autonomy of others because they are unable to act as they should on false information. When you lie, you are treating individuals or institutions not as ends, as they ought to be treated, but as means. Investigative reporters can lie in many ways including faking part of a story, embellishing quotes etc.
- 3. Deception:** Investigative journalists lie when they deceive others to get a story. Changing technology has allowed ever more advanced forms of deception in journalism profession. For instance, the miniature camera and microphone of the spy and the private detective have been adopted in journalism. Television's magazine – format news programs, especially, often use hidden cameras in doing investigative stories. For instance, producers for CBS's "60 Minutes" news magazine program, used hidden cameras to document sales of Romanian babies to Americans who want to adopt.

And as indicated earlier in this course, print investigative reporters practice deception by going undercover. Jonathan Franklin, a free – lance reporter wanted to find out if military offices were telling the truth about casualties sustained in the US 1991 war against Iraq. When he was unsuccessful in getting anyone to talk to him, he decided to pass himself off as a mortician to get into a military mortuary. That allowed him to

document the fact that combat deaths were being underreported and that the military was deliberately disguising many fatalities as “training accidents”. Franklin’s reasoning was that the public needed to know what was really happening for them to make informed judgments about a war they financed and supported. That is the way it is supposed to work in a democracy. In making any ethical decision, the investigative journalist who contemplates using deception to get a story needs to ask whether the story can be gotten in any other way. If it cannot, then the question has to focus on whether the good to be derived from using deception outweighs any undesirable result.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

What are the investigative journalist’s core values?

4.0 CONCLUSION

Ethical principles are necessary because they help journalists understand ethical issues better and thereby, make reasonable decisions. In this unit, we looked at four ethical principles, which are the golden mean, categorical imperative, utilitarianism and the golden rule. We also discussed those to whom the journalist owes loyalties as well as values he should work with at all times. The journalist is faced with several ethical decisions in the course of his work. Some these are the issue of deception, telling the truth at all times, fairness and competence.

5.0 SUMMARY

If you do your professional work in a competent way, respecting the values of the profession, you will perform ethically. In addition, having a concern for acting ethically should help you perform competently. To act ethically, you should keep in mind where your loyalties lie. That is, know those to whom you have responsibilities. They include the public, which relies on accurate, unbiased communication in the conduct of its daily activities. To behave ethically is to treat subjects and sources, employers and colleagues, as they deserve to be treated. You need also to hold the shared values of journalists. Among the more important of these codes of ethics are telling the truth, respecting the privacy of others, protecting one’s sources and avoiding conflicts of interest.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What ethical responsibilities do journalists have to their audiences, sources, subjects, employers, colleagues?
2. How does competence relate to ethical performance?
3. What is Kant's Categorical Imperative?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 4 ETHICAL ISSUES AND MAKING ETHICAL DECISIONS

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Protection of Sources/Anonymous Sources
 - 3.2 Misrepresentation
 - 3.3 Conflict of Interest
 - 3.4 Making Ethical Decisions
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit continues with some more ethical issues and especially, with showing you how to arrive at ethical decisions in the course of your practice. How do we make ethical decisions? Largely through a process of reasoning that allows us to apply our values and principles to the dilemmas we face in the world. Communication professionals such as the investigative or interpretive journalist who in good faith follow a carefully thought out process when confronted with an ethical dilemma may arrive at different conclusions, depending on the relative importance given to different values and principles. However, the important thing is for you to follow a process.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- explain more ethical issues that relates directly to the investigative journalist
- discuss systematic methods that exist for arriving at ethical decisions.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Protection of Sources/Anonymous Sources

Every journalist knows that sources are the lifeblood of a good investigative story. On many occasions, sources are quite willing to be named. It may also be crucial to produce such an individual to defend a legal action. There are instances, however, when sources will only come forward and provide information on the understanding that their identity will not be disclosed. The investigative journalist, like other journalists, need to cultivate sources and confidential relationships to ensure that informants are willing to come forward with information of public concern and for journalists to perform their perceived role as public watch dog.

The investigative journalist, however, should learn to respect his source's wish for anonymity if he so desires. If you give your word not to reveal their identity, ethically, you should not break your promise. Several investigative journalists have had to serve sentences and pay fine in order to protect their sources' identity. Such actions increase your sources' confidence in you and they will be willing to talk to you next time. For journalists therefore, the issue is ethical rather than legal.

Ethical issue also includes the issue of anonymous sources. The overuse of unnamed sources is probably the single biggest complaint about the media – bigger even than bias, sensationalism and inaccuracy. Anonymous sources are people you may never have seen or met before that provides you with information through phone or a third party. When you name sources in your investigative reports, you make the story more credible and acceptable to the public. This implies that it is better to have your sources on record and later persuade them to allow their names published, than otherwise. However, as with the case of investigative reporting and as pointed out above, some of your sources may not want you to reveal their identities for security or other reasons. In this context, your sources are not anonymous to you but to your audience if you decide to use the material. An investigative reporter in his report should not use anonymous sources. At best, words from anonymous sources should be used as a lead to investigate further the facts of the phenomenon under investigation.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

At what point can a source be said to be anonymous?

3.2 Misrepresentation

Misrepresentation occurs when a journalist does not identify himself/herself as a reporter in obtaining information from a source. The question is “should investigative reporters misrepresent themselves when working on stories?” This is one of the ethical issues facing journalists. Most students of journalism and even budding journalists, have come to equate investigative journalism with misrepresentation which is not necessarily so. Such equation has informed why some journalists reject undercover journalism because it involves a conflict in values, requiring the journalist to deceive someone in an effort to obtain the truth.

However, the fact remains that going undercover is still being practiced. But journalism ethicists agree that for an investigative journalist to go under-cove, a three-part test should be applied to such under-cover operation. First, is the information of vital importance to the community or public? (‘Vital’ should be considered in terms of public health or safety, not Naira and Kobo). Second, “Has the journalist exhausted all efforts to obtain the information through traditional reporting techniques?”, “Will the media organisation tell its audience just how it engaged in deception to obtain the information?” This third test is significant because it makes the organisation to contemplate whether the public will agree with its decision to deceive – and any doubt about that should lead to a sober reassessment of whether the first two tests have been met.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

What does misrepresentation mean to the journalist?

3.3 Conflicts of Interest

The roles of the journalist in the society place him in a position to portray individuals or organisations positively or negatively. However, because they are responsible to the public and the public has repose their trust in them, journalists must avoid conflicts between their journalistic responsibilities and their private interests. Conflicts can arise for instance, where a journalist is involved in partisan politics or personal relationships or vested interests. Let us consider one of these scenarios – politics.

Involvement in Politics

When journalists act as unofficial advisers to political candidates and lend their talents in writing speeches for political candidates, they run the risk of conflicts of interest. In such instances, it is difficult to do a thorough investigative work without being biased. Thus, such reporters who act on behalf of candidates fail in their responsibilities to those to whom they owe prime allegiance – their employees and their audience. They also fail in their ethical responsibilities to their colleagues whose effectiveness as journalists might be diminished if audience saw them also as biased toward one candidate or party.

The truth is that reporters, editors and publishers establish friendship with many of the people involved with things news organisations are expected to report about. Thus, it may be difficult for an investigative journalist to maintain the impression of being impartial in a news report about a legislature who is a close friend and belong to the same social club. It is difficult for an investigative journalist to function easily in a report about a political leader knowing that the publisher (his employer) of the paper has been ‘drafted’ as campaign manager for an election by the leader.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

How can journalists get trapped ethically in politics?

3.4 Making Ethical Decisions

As an investigative journalist, you most often will find yourself in ethical dilemmas where you must decide if whatever course or decision you have to make is for the common good. When you find yourself in such situations, Lorenz and Vivian identified a six-step process which, if answered carefully and conscientiously, should lead you to a reasonable, ethical decision in almost any ethical dilemma. However, the more practice one becomes at following the process, the easier it becomes.

1. What happened? What are the facts of the situation? Spell out as clearly and as specifically as you can.
2. What communication values apply? Look to the codes of conduct that is adopted by the journalism profession.
3. To whom are responsibilities owed? As a professional communicator, you owe responsibility to the public, your sources, employer, colleagues etc. In this instance who is involved and who will be affected by the decision you make?

4. What ethical theories apply? What will be your decision if you followed the categorical imperative? utilitarianism? The golden mean or the golden rule? With which outcome are you most comfortable?
5. What are the alternatives? What would be the consequences of carrying out, or not carrying out, each alternative? Which is the best alternative in the situation?

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

What are the six step ethical decisions making process?

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, we looked at more ethical issues protection of sources, anonymous sources, misrepresentation and conflicts of interest. A journalist can get out of the problem of making ethical decisions by following processes that will help him to make reasonable decisions.

5.0 SUMMARY

In the face of several ethical issues, the professional journalist should learn to avoid conflicts and get used to making ethical decisions following established processes in order to make reasonable decisions especially when he finds himself in a dilemma.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Why should a journalist be careful not to have conflicts of interest?
2. How should a journalist make ethical decisions?
3. Is it okay for a journalist to do an investigative story on his friend that is contesting for president? Why?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Fogam, P.K. & Aquah, D. (2010) *Law and the Media* in Udofia C. Handbook for African Journalists, Abak: Itiaba Publishers.

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