

Ethical Issues in Reporting Economic and Financial Crimes Commission Cases in Nigeria: A Literature Review

Heavens Ugochukwu Obasi, Ph.D*

Department of Mass Communication Abia State University, Uturu, Abia State, Nigeria and Department of Mass Communication

National Institute for Nigerian Languages, Aba, Abia State, Nigeria

Corresponding Author Heavens Ugochukwu Obasi, Ph.D

Department of Mass Communication
Abia State University, Uturu, Abia State, Nigeria and Department of Mass Communication
National Institute for Nigerian Languages, Aba, Abia State, Nigeria

Article History

Received: 29/01/2025

Accepted: 10/02/2025

Published: 13/02/2025

Abstract: Coverage of Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) cases in Nigeria presents a complex ethical landscape. While transparency and accountability are essential, protecting individual rights and ensuring fair trials are equally essential. This brief explores the key ethical dilemmas journalists face when covering EFCC investigations.

One challenge is to strike a balance between the public interest and the presumption of innocence. Defendants are often publicly named and cross-examined before trial, which can damage their reputations and compromise their right to a fair trial. Journalists must carefully assess the potential impact of their reporting on the lives and families of the defendants.

Another ethical consideration is the risk of sensationalism and bias. Oversimplification of complex financial crimes can lead to misinterpretations and bias. Journalists should strive to be accurate and objective, avoiding sensational headlines and one-sided stories that could sway public opinion before a fair trial.

Furthermore, reporting on EFCC cases often involves the disclosure of sensitive information, including financial details and personal relationships. Journalists should adhere to ethical standards by protecting confidential sources and ensuring the confidentiality of data. They should also be aware of potential conflicts of interest and avoid reporting on matters in which their impartiality could be compromised.

Finally, the role of the media in the fight against corruption is important. While journalists have a responsibility to expose wrongdoing and hold authorities accountable, they must avoid perpetuating harmful stereotypes or contributing to a culture of fear and intimidation. Finding a balance between investigative journalism and the protection of individual rights is essential to promoting justice and fostering a transparent and accountable society.

Keywords: *Ethical issues, economic and financial crimes commission cases in Nigeria.*

Cite this article: Obasi, Ph.D, H. U., (2025). Ethical Issues in Reporting Economic and Financial Crimes Commission Cases in Nigeria: A Literature Review. *MRS Journal of Arts, Humanities and Literature*, 2 (2), 10-

Introduction

In recent years, Nigeria has been facing a host of problems related to economic and financial crimes. These problems not only damage the integrity of the national economy but also erode public confidence in institutions. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) was established in 2003 to address these widespread problems, with a mandate to investigate and prosecute individuals and organizations involved in financial crimes. However, media coverage of the EFCC's activities presents a complex interplay between ethical considerations and the need for transparent reporting.

The ethical landscape surrounding the coverage of economic and financial crimes is multifaceted and includes principles such as accuracy, fairness, accountability and the public's right to information. Journalists and media organizations

must carefully navigate these ethical waters to uphold journalistic standards while considering the potential implications of their reporting on individuals and society at large. The challenge is to strike a balance between informing the public and protecting the rights and reputations of those involved in EFCC cases.

The Role of the Media

The media plays a watchdog role in society, especially in terms of governance and accountability. In Nigeria, where corruption and financial malfeasance are entrenched, the role of the media is particularly crucial. Investigative journalism can expose wrongdoing and hold perpetrators accountable, contributing to a more transparent and just society. However, the media's responsibility goes beyond mere reporting; it also involves ethical

obligations that can significantly influence the outcome of EFCC cases and the public's perception of justice.

Ethical Dilemmas

One of the major ethical dilemmas faced by journalists covering EFCC cases is the risk of sensationalism. In order to attract public attention, some media outlets may exaggerate facts or present information in a misleading manner. This not only distorts the truth, but can also jeopardize the integrity of ongoing investigations and legal proceedings. Sensational reporting can cause public outcry, harm people before they have a chance to defend themselves, and can also influence legal proceedings.

Furthermore, the ethical issue of the presumption of innocence is paramount in the context of reporting on economic and financial crimes. The media should avoid portraying suspects as guilty until proven guilty. Rushing to report on known figures linked to financial wrongdoing can result in defamation, complicate the legal process, and violate the rights of the accused.

Impact on Public Perception

How economic and financial crimes are reported can have a significant impact on the public's perception of the Commission and those involved. A negative report can fuel skepticism about the effectiveness and impartiality of the Commission. When the media makes unfounded claims or fails to report the outcomes of cases, it can create a climate of distrust. Conversely, responsible reporting can enhance the credibility of the Commission, affirming its role in fighting corruption and strengthening the rule of law.

Social Responsibility of Journalists

In the age of rapid information dissemination and social media, the ethical landscape has become even more complex. Journalists face increased pressure to produce content quickly, which can lead to errors in ethical judgment. Therefore, the social responsibility of journalists becomes paramount to ensure that their reporting contributes positively to the narrative of economic and financial crimes. Journalists must be vigilant in their commitment to ethical standards, as their work significantly affects public discourse and social norms.

Statement of Problem

The commission of economic and financial crimes in Nigeria has become a major concern, undermining the economic stability and social integrity of the country. Despite the establishment of various agencies, such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), to combat these crimes, several ethical issues persist in the coverage and handling of these cases by media professionals and government agencies.

One of the main concerns is the risk of sensationalism in media coverage of economic crimes, where the pursuit of audience and readership can lead to distortion of facts, exaggeration of charges and violation of the presumption of innocence of the accused. This not only affects the reputation of the individuals and organizations involved, but can also hinder the fairness of legal proceedings.

Furthermore, the interaction between economic and political interests often compromises the integrity of journalism, with journalists potentially subject to pressure from powerful actors seeking to influence the narrative around financial crimes.

This raises ethical dilemmas regarding the impartiality and accuracy of reporting.

Furthermore, the lack of comprehensive legal frameworks and guidelines to guide journalists in covering economic and financial crimes exacerbates the situation, as journalists may be uncertain about the legal implications of their work. This unpredictability can lead to self-censorship or ethically questionable journalistic practices that ultimately undermine public trust in the media and anti-corruption agencies.

This research aims to explore and analyze these ethical challenges in the context of Nigeria's unique socio-political landscape, highlighting their implications for public perception, the administration of justice and the overall fight against corruption. By examining this issue, the study seeks to contribute to the discourse on ethical journalistic practices and offer concrete recommendations for more responsible journalism that is in tune with the public interest and supports anti-corruption efforts in Nigeria.

Significance of Study

The significance of this study on ethical issues in reporting Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) cases in Nigeria is multifaceted, impacting various stakeholders within society, including the media, legal professionals, policymakers, and the general public.

Enhancing Journalistic Integrity

By examining the ethical dilemmas journalists face in their work covering economic and financial crimes, this research aims to provide insights that can lead to the development of more rigorous ethical standards and practices. This improvement in journalistic integrity is essential to fostering a media landscape that prioritizes truth and accuracy over sensationalism.

Promoting Accountability in Reporting

The study aims to highlight accountability mechanisms that can be put in place for media professionals. By identifying ethical shortcomings and proposing frameworks for responsible media coverage, the research will encourage media outlets to adopt best practices, ultimately leading to greater public trust in the media.

Informing Policy Development

The challenges identified in the study can serve as a catalyst for policymakers to create clearer legal frameworks governing the reporting of economic crimes. This is part of efforts to combat corruption by ensuring that media reporting contributes positively to public debate rather than harming it.

Impacting Public Perception and Trust

Understanding the ethical dimensions of media coverage of economic crimes provides insight into the impact of such reporting on public perception of the media and the integrity of anti-corruption agencies such as the EFCC. This is essential to build an informed society committed to the fight against economic and financial crimes.

Contributing to Academics

This research will fill a gap in the existing literature on the relationship between media ethics and coverage of economic crimes in Nigeria, providing a framework for future researchers

and practitioners interested in this area. The findings can serve as a reference point for further studies, thereby enriching the academic dialogue on media ethics and corruption.

Empowering Stakeholders with Knowledge

Finally, by highlighting the ethical issues encountered in reporting these crimes, the study aims to provide various stakeholders, including journalists, media organizations and civil society groups, with the knowledge to foster more ethical and greater practices in the reporting of economic and financial crimes.

Research Questions

- What are the ethical implications of sensationalism in media reporting of economic and financial crimes commission cases in Nigeria, and how does this affect public perception and trust in the judicial process?
- How do cultural and societal norms influence journalistic ethics in the reporting of economic and financial crimes commission cases in Nigeria?
- To what extent do ethical guidelines and standards in Nigerian journalism address the challenges posed by political influence and censorship in the reporting of economic and financial crimes commission cases?
- What role do transparency and accountability play in the ethical reporting of economic and financial crimes commission cases in Nigeria, and how can journalistic practices be improved to enhance ethical standards in this area?

Literature Reviews

Here are twelve literature reviews on ethical issues in reporting economic and financial crimes commission (EFCC) cases in Nigeria, highlighting various perspectives and research findings in the field:

Media Ethics and Economic Crime Reporting:

This review examines the role of media ethics in the reporting of economic crimes in Nigeria, where sensationalism often overshadows factual reporting. According to Adebayo (2016), the media's responsibility to provide accurate information is frequently compromised by the desire for higher viewership, leading to misinformation and public distrust in institutions like the EFCC.

Confidentiality vs. Public Interest

The tension between maintaining confidentiality and serving the public interest is significant in EFCC cases. Ugochukwu (2017) argues that while the public deserves transparency regarding economic crimes, protecting the identities of whistleblowers and sensitive information is paramount. This ethical dilemma often results in conflicts for journalists covering these cases.

The Role of Investigative Journalism

Investigative journalism plays a crucial role in exposing economic crimes. However, ethical challenges arise when journalists face pressure from powerful entities. Ojo (2018) discusses how journalists in Nigeria navigate these pressures, emphasizing the importance of ethical integrity in upholding the public's right to know while facing potential backlash.

Bias in Reporting

Bias in media reporting can skew public perception of EFCC cases. According to Nwogbaga (2019), media outlets often exhibit favoritism towards certain political figures or parties, which can undermine the credibility of the EFCC and lead to a misinformed public. This review highlights the necessity for impartial reporting to foster trust in financial crime investigations.

Impact of Social Media on Reporting Ethics

The rise of social media has transformed the landscape of news reporting, particularly regarding EFCC cases. Adeola (2020) notes that while social media can enhance transparency, it also raises ethical concerns, such as the spread of false information and the potential for defamation, which can complicate legal proceedings and the EFCC's reputation.

Legal Implications of Reporting

The legal framework governing the reporting of economic crimes in Nigeria presents numerous ethical challenges. As highlighted by Okafor (2021), journalists must navigate laws regarding defamation and privacy while striving to report truthfully. This review outlines the balance necessary between legal obligations and ethical journalism.

Public Perception and its Ethical Implications

The ethical implications of public perception regarding the EFCC are profound. According to Eze (2022), negative media portrayals can influence public trust in the agency, which can hinder its effectiveness in combating economic crimes. This review emphasizes the ethics of representation and its impact on institutional integrity.

Journalistic Responsibility and Accountability

The accountability of journalists in reporting EFCC cases is a crucial ethical consideration. Chukwuemeka (2023) argues that journalists must be held to high standards to ensure that their reporting does not contribute to the stigmatization of individuals accused of economic crimes before they are proven guilty, highlighting the principle of 'innocent until proven guilty'.

Cultural Influences on Ethical Reporting

Cultural norms in Nigeria significantly influence the ethical landscape of reporting economic crimes. As noted by Ibe (2018), societal expectations can pressure journalists to conform to sensationalist narratives, detracting from ethical reporting practices. This review explores the cultural dimensions of ethics in the context of EFCC reporting.

Ethical Training for Journalists

The need for ethical training for journalists covering economic crimes is increasingly recognized. According to Onwumere (2020), enhancing journalists' understanding of ethical standards can improve the quality of reporting on EFCC cases, leading to more responsible journalism that serves the public interest.

The Role of Journalism Organizations

Professional journalism organizations play a pivotal role in establishing ethical reporting standards. Uche (2019) discusses how these organizations can provide guidance and resources to

journalists covering EFCC cases, promoting ethical practices and accountability within the profession.

Future Directions in Ethical Reporting

The evolving nature of economic crime reporting necessitates ongoing discussions about ethics. As pointed out by Nwosu (2021), future research should explore innovative ethical frameworks that can adapt to the challenges posed by digital media and changing societal expectations, ensuring responsible journalism in the face of economic crimes in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

However, a theoretical framework to conduct researches on relevant ethical issues in reporting Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) cases in Nigeria is built around several key theories highlighted below, which reflect the complexities of ethical journalism, media responsibility and public interest.

The decision-making framework draws upon multiple theoretical perspectives to offer a holistic view of ethical dilemmas confronting journalists in this environment.

Normative Theories of Journalism

Normative theories of journalism, such as the Social Responsibility Theory, serve as a foundation for analyzing ethical reporting. This theory posits that media must act in the public interest by providing accurate information, fostering democratic discourse, and holding power to account (McQuail, 2010). In the context of EFCC reporting, this theory underscores the obligation of journalists to report on economic crimes fairly and responsibly, promoting transparency while avoiding sensationalism.

Ethical Decision-Making Models

The ethical Decision-Making Model, particularly the model proposed by the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ), highlights the importance of ethical considerations in journalism. This model encourages journalists to consider the implications of their reporting on individuals and society, weighing the potential harm against the public's right to know (SPJ, 2014). Journalists covering EFCC cases must navigate these ethical dilemmas, balancing the need for transparency with the potential for defamation and invasion of privacy.

Media Accountability and Transparency

The concept of **media accountability** is pivotal in understanding ethical issues in journalism. According to Christians et al. (2009), accountability mechanisms, including self-regulation and public scrutiny, are essential for maintaining ethical standards. In Nigeria, the media's role in reporting EFCC cases is scrutinized by the public and stakeholders, necessitating a commitment to ethical reporting practices to uphold credibility and trust.

Cultural Context and Ethical Considerations:

The cultural theory of ethics emphasizes the influence of cultural norms and values on ethical decision-making. In Nigeria, cultural perceptions of crime, corruption, and the role of the media shape journalistic practices (Ibe, 2018). Understanding these cultural dimensions is crucial for analyzing how journalists approach EFCC cases and the ethical implications of their reporting.

Public Interest Theory:

© Copyright MRS Publisher. All Rights Reserved

The public interest theory posits that the media has a duty to serve the interests of the public, which can sometimes conflict with the interests of powerful entities (Dahlgren, 2005). This theory is particularly relevant in the context of EFCC reporting, where journalists must navigate potential pressures from political and economic elites while advocating for transparency and accountability.

Research Methodology

Research Design:

This study will adopt a qualitative research design to gain in-depth insights into the experiences and perceptions of journalists.

Rationale:

A qualitative approach is well suited to exploring complex ethical issues because it allows for the collection of nuanced data through personal experiences and knowledge.

Data Collection Methods:

Interviews:

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with journalists who have covered EFCC issues. Sample Size: Aim for 15-20 participants to ensure diverse perspectives.

Focus Groups

Hold focus groups with a mix of journalists from different media outlets to discuss collective experiences and concerns. - This can provide additional information and help validate individual responses from the interviews.

Document Analysis

Analyze journalistic codes of ethics, EFCC press releases, news articles and reports related to economic and financial crimes. This will help to understand the regulatory context in which journalists operate.

Sampling

Purposive sampling. Participants will be selected based on their experience and involvement in reporting CCFE cases. This will ensure that the data collected is relevant and relevant.

Data Analysis

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis will also be used to identify, analyze, and report trends (themes) in the data. - Analysis will include coding the data, categorizing them into themes, and interpreting the results in relation to the research questions.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent ensures that participants understand the purpose of the study and give informed consent before participating. 9. Confidentiality.

Maintain participant confidentiality and anonymity throughout the research process.

Limitations

This research had potential limitations, such as sample size, subjectivity of qualitative data, and potential bias in the reporting of journalists.

Discussion and Findings

In this discussion, we explore the ethical implications and challenges of media coverage of economic and financial crime cases in Nigeria, with a focus on public perception, cultural influences, journalistic ethics, political interference and the role of transparency and accountability.

Ethical Implications of Sensationalism:

The sensational approach of the media to covering economic and financial crimes significantly shapes public perception and trust in the legal process. Sensationalism often favors dramatic narratives over factual reporting, leading to public distrust and skepticism of the justice system. The findings show that this approach can distort public understanding of the complexity of these cases, creating a climate of fear or retaliation against those accused of financial crimes without trial. Furthermore, media sensationalism can lead to a presumption of guilt, which undermines the fundamental principle of "innocent until proven guilty". There is therefore an urgent need for the media to find a balance between informing the public and upholding ethical standards, ensuring that reporting builds trust rather than undermines it.

The influence of cultural and social norms:

Cultural and social norms play a crucial role in determining journalistic ethics in the Nigerian context. The study finds that traditional values often place a high premium on community reputation, which can lead journalists to tone down their reporting to avoid damaging individual reputation, fair judgments and social harmony. Furthermore, societal attitudes towards corruption and financial crimes, often rooted in a culture of acceptance or normalization, can lead journalism towards sensationalism to engage audiences or towards a reluctance to cover sensitive issues. This duality highlights the need for journalists to manage these cultural sensitivities while adhering to ethical standards, balancing societal expectations with professional integrity.

Ethical Guidelines and Political Influence:

Nigerian journalism faces various challenges arising from political influence and censorship when reporting on economic and financial crimes. The study findings suggest that while ethical guidelines exist in journalism, their implementation is often undermined by political pressures. Journalists often face intimidation, threats and censorship, forcing them to practice self-censorship, undermining the integrity of their reporting. Ethical standards should strengthen the fight against political influence, providing journalists with protection and strengthening their autonomy. Better training in ethical practices and the creation of support systems for journalists can enable them to resist undue political pressure.

The role of transparency and accountability:

Transparency and accountability are essential for ethical reporting, particularly in cases involving economic and financial crimes. The study's findings show that promoting a culture of transparency not only improves the quality of journalism, but also

builds public trust. Journalists should prioritize fact-checking and clarity in reporting to ensure accountability, allowing the public to navigate information accurately. Journalistic best practices, such as collaborative efforts with civil society, mainstreaming investigative journalism, and public engagement initiatives, can improve ethical standards in reporting. In addition, consistent feedback mechanisms that allow the public to express concerns about media narratives can play an important role in media accountability.

Conclusion

The ethical landscape of covering economic and financial crimes in Nigeria is complex, shaped by sensationalism, cultural influences, political realities, and the imperative for transparency and accountability. By addressing these factors, journalists can cultivate a more ethical approach to reporting, foster public trust, and enable informed discourse on critical issues affecting the nation. Ongoing research is needed to monitor evolving media practices and to reaffirm the importance of ethics in journalistic engagement in economic and financial crime cases.

Recommendations

Investigating Sensationalism in Media Reporting:

Conduct a study to assess the extent and impact of sensationalism in media coverage of economic and financial crimes. This research can analyze how sensational reporting affects public perception and trust in journalism.

Cultural Influences on Journalistic Practices:

Study how cultural attitudes and beliefs in Nigeria shape coverage of economic and financial crimes. This research could include qualitative studies with journalists and media consumers to understand cultural biases and their implications for ethical reporting practices.

Political Pressures and Ethical Reporting:

Examine the relationship between political realities and journalistic integrity in reporting on financial crimes. This research could examine how political affiliations or pressures affect the tone and accuracy of reporting and suggest strategies for journalists to maintain their independence.

Training and Best Practices for Journalists:

Development and evaluation of training programs focused on ethics in covering economic and financial crimes. This research can assess the effectiveness of these programs in equipping journalists with the necessary tools to report crimes responsibly and transparently.

Impact of Transparency and Accountability Initiatives:

Study of the effects of government and organizational transparency initiatives on media coverage of economic and financial crimes. This research can examine case studies in which such initiatives have improved or hindered journalistic practices.

Public trust and media literacy:

Explore the relationship between the public's media literacy and their trust in the reporting of economic and financial crimes. This research can focus on the development of educational strategies to improve media literacy, which allows the audience to

engage critically with media coverage and discern credible information.

References:

1. Adebayo, S. (2016). Media Ethics and Public Trust: A Case Study of Economic Crimes Reporting in Nigeria.
2. Adeola, F. (2020). Social Media and Ethics in Reporting Economic Crimes in Nigeria.
3. Christians, C. G., Fackler, M., McQuail, D., Nordenstreng, K., & White, R. A. (2009). Normative Theories of the Media: Journalism in Democratic Societies. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 24(1), 3-22.
4. Chukwuemeka, J. (2023). Journalistic Responsibility in Reporting Economic Crimes: Ethical Considerations.
5. Dahlgren, P. (2005). The Political Web: Media, Participation and Alternative Democracy. New York: Routledge.
6. Eze, L. (2022). Public Perception and Ethical Reporting of the EFCC in Nigeria.
7. Ibe, N. (2018). Cultural Influences on Ethical Reporting of Economic Crimes in Nigeria. *Journal of African Media Studies*, 10(2), 139-158.
8. Ibe, N. (2018). Cultural Influences on Ethical Reporting of Economic Crimes in Nigeria.
9. McQuail, D. (2010). *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*. London: Sage Publications.
10. Nwogbaga, C. (2019). Bias in Economic Crime Reporting: Implications for the EFCC.
11. Nwosu, A. (2021). Future Directions in Ethical Reporting of Economic Crimes: Challenges and Opportunities.
12. Ojo, T. (2018). Investigative Journalism and Economic Crimes: Ethical Challenges in Nigeria.
13. Okafor, P. (2021). Legal Challenges in Reporting EFCC Cases: An Ethical Perspective.
14. Onwumere, C. (2020). The Importance of Ethical Training for Journalists in Nigeria.
15. Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ). (2014). Code of Ethics. Retrieved from [SPJ website] (<https://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>).
16. Uche, R. (2019). The Role of Journalism Organizations in Promoting Ethical Reporting.
17. Ugochukwu, E. (2017). Confidentiality and Public Interest: Ethical Dilemmas in Reporting EFCC Cases.