

Journalists Satisfaction of Remuneration in Cameroon

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Abstract:

The creeping decline in journalists' pay and working conditions may undermine the reputation of the media industry. This paper seeks to assess journalists' satisfaction of their remuneration in Cameroon. The paper made use of a descriptive cross-sectional survey research design and data was collected with the use of questionnaires. 270 journalists were sampled purposively and conveniently from television stations, radio stations, newspaper organisations and online bloggers in the Southwest, Northwest, Centre, Far North and Littoral Regions of Cameroon. Findings revealed that journalists in the public media were more satisfied with their remuneration 21.7% followed by freelance journalists 17.6% with the least satisfied being journalist from the private media (14.5%). Journalists especially in the private media, through their unions, should lobby for better pay to enhance the goal of professionalism.

Keywords: Journalists, Remuneration, Satisfaction, Media, Cameroon.

Introduction

Understanding journalists' remuneration in the Cameroon media is relevant as poor remuneration of journalists is a drive that necessitates unprofessional practices. Professionalism concerns exist due to the economic stance of the profession. Lack of professionalism subject journalists not only to public scrutiny but state control. Despite the quantitative growth of media after the 2000 audio-visual liberalisation law in Cameroon, it is hard to say the media outfits are sustainable and independent. Advertising is weak and media owners are often forced to lean towards political and other interest groups to stay on the market (AMB, 2011). The government media subsidy amounting to 250million francs (approximately \$554,000) per year is considered ridiculously small to sustain the private media in Cameroon. This and others account for corruption practices in the Cameroon media. The phenomenon of gombo within Cameroonian journalism has evolved into a common way of practising journalism in the country (Ndangam, 2010; Ngangu, 2016) and journalists even practice blackmailing, ransoming and other corruptive practices (Ze Edo'o & Abina, 2016). Ethical standards in journalism emphasise "responsible, truthful, objective and reasonable actions" (De Beer & Froneman, 1996, p. 15) in newsgathering and dissemination. Some authors acknowledge that regardless of variations in context, journalistic ethics compose of "some universally accepted elements of concern" that include "the quest for truth, an aspiration for responsibility, and a dedication to the principle of free expression" (Rønning & Kasoma, 2002, p. 7).

Economic factors such as the 50% devaluation of the country's currency in 1994, the high production costs, low advertising revenue, and the poor transport infrastructure that impairs the distribution of newspapers, have left many private media organisations in financial crises (Ticha, 2006) hence most private media journalists earn very low wages. The average monthly salary for journalists in the private media is 50.000FRS CFA. By comparison, the basic salary of a junior reporter at Cameroon Radio and Television (CRTV) ranges between 160.000 FRS and 175.000 FRS (including benefits). The salary of degree holders recruited by the state corporation range between 300.000FRS and 350.000 FRS, while senior journalists and those with postgraduate qualifications earn up to 400.000 FRS (Ticha, 2006). Based on a hundred private journalists interviewed in Cameroon, eight out of ten report that they are owed multiple months of salary in a row, often work without employment contracts or any legally binding document, lack an adequate pension because most of private media journalists are not affiliated with the National Social Insurance Fund. To them, gombo keeps most journalists going as less than 25% of private media proprietors pay their staff more than FCFA 36,250 (approximately 65.9USD) which is the legal minimum wage (Animbom, Fomusoh, Toh, Abang, & Lee, 2022)

Ileri (2012) notes that income predicts job satisfaction. Based on a multiple regression analysis to test whether income and four other independent variables (education, work experience, freedom in work, and job security) were strong predictors of job satisfaction among Kenyan journalists, income emerged as the only strong predictor. Despite the fact that only 44.9% of the respondents were satisfied with their earnings, findings underscore the importance of income in understanding Kenyan journalists' job (Ileri, 2012). Findings of Ndangam (2010) study revealed that low wages are the main reason for soliciting and receiving gombo (particularly for those in the private media who are poorly paid). Some media houses pay their reporters based on the number of stories published per edition, regardless of the fact that these reporters are full-time employees not stringers. Many journalists working in the private press frequently go for months without pay and have to rely on different forms of gombo for subsistence. Several journalists in the private media sector find themselves unable to pay their rent and bills regularly; they find themselves incapable of providing for their families or maintaining a particular lifestyle which is perceived to go with the profession (for instance drinking). This situation points to the fact that journalists pursue gombo (promised, pledged or guaranteed) as a means to earn a living, and maintain their living standards, however selfish these are (Ndangam, 2010). However, since Ndangam (2010)

study is qualitative with 15 journalists in-depthly interviewed, it cannot be generalised that gombo is the lifeblood of many journalists in Cameroon as professionalism still exist and especially in the private media sector. This view is supported by Wantchami and Ngange (2017) and Tanjong (2009) who ascertain the power of the private press in the fight against corruption in Cameroon.

The creeping decline in journalists' pay and working conditions may undermine the reputation of the media industry. For instance, in Cameroon, this has generated two types of corruption within the media: There is hard-core corruption, that is when journalists use their power to blackmail people about whom they have sensitive information; or journalists receive payments from influential sources in order to either kill or put a positive spin on stories. According to Lush, Le Pelley and Funck (2012) an increasing number of journalists and publishers in Cameroon practice investigative blackmail. Furthermore, some media organisations simply don't pay at all, and encourage their reporters to live on transport money from news sources and event organisers. The second type of corruption is variously referred to as 'Participation Fee, Motivation Fee, Gombo, and Final Communiqué in Cameroon. This ranges from bribes or gifts in return for positive coverage of specific issues and events, to journalists receiving transport, food and accommodation allowances from the organisers of events they cover. Some journalists are so poorly paid or not paid at all that they rely fully on these allowances to survive (Lush et al, 2012). Ndangam (2006, 2009) observes that a significant number of journalists in Cameroon live entirely on 'gombo' payments and have perfected their strategies to approach the sponsors. Ireri (2012) supports that corruption is a blot in African journalism. He laments that Kenyan journalists seem to be wallowing in a miasma of unethical journalistic behaviours and specifies that The cash-for-story phenomenon in Africa is a well-documented fact as in the 2010 third issue of *African Communication Research* journal entirely focuses on the topic of bribery and corruption in African journalism. Ronning (2005) points out that low competence, low wages for journalists and the lack of economic resources have an impact on the ethical standards of reporting in many parts of Africa.

Ngangu (2016), Ndangam (2006) and Che Tita (2022) supports that a variety of constraints are adversely affecting the context under which journalists operate. Most journalists, particularly in the private media, operate in dire economic conditions, resulting from low salaries, absence of health insurance and social security benefits. For this reason, requesting or being offered money and other material benefits to cover specific news is a widespread malpractice. Corruption thrives in this environment. For many media organisations and journalists, corruption is a means to survive Thus, debates informing the need of improved working conditions for journalists have increased culminating in the 2008 signing of the National Collective Convention of journalists. The difficult working conditions for journalists also mean that a commitment to professionalism and ethical journalism is not a priority for most journalists. This paper argues that within this context, not only is the credibility of the profession damaged, there is the collapse of independent, accurate and objective journalism. The role of the media as a public watchdog and investigative journalism are seriously undermined questioning the social responsibility function and subjecting the media to government and public scrutiny.

Mano (2005) found out in his study that journalists sought jobs across the media divide (private and government), sometimes finding work in newsrooms with media policies that conflict with their own sense of professional norms, largely because of the need to earn 'decent salaries' and 'attractive benefits.' In some cases, decisions to change employers were motivated by journalists' need to follow 'professional principles and ethics'. However, better remuneration was the main reason why Zimbabwean journalists switched newsrooms. As one self-exiled Zimbabwean journalist put it: '*journalists are also human beings with families to feed!*' (L1, February 2005). The search for better remuneration was the main reason given for changing employers. It was reported that some Zimbabwean journalists left journalism for good after landing high paying jobs in the public relations industry. Journalists changed employers because the training they received enabled them to work 'wherever they find [better paying] jobs'. Mano (2005) findings further revealed that journalists' movement from one newsroom to another affects professional journalism and freedom as journalists affirmed that such movements makes them to conform to subsequent media policies, lose the 'trust and confidence' of sources.

According to Mano (2005) journalists lament on the lack of balance and fairness in private media news coverage. When it comes to the government, they use the 'the-nothing-can-ever-come-out-of-this-wretched-government attitude. He added that the private media failed to report on corporate abuses for fear of losing advertising income. As James Curran, a British media historian asserts 'the market can give rise not to independent watchdogs serving the public interest but to corporate mercenaries which adjust their critical scrutiny to suit their private purpose' (2002, p.221). In private and public news rooms, it is also the case that editors 'may arbitrarily rewrite reporters' stories and delete crucial facts without telling the reporter, and yet still attach the reporter's by-line to the now unrecognisable product' (*Media Professionalism and Ethics* 2002, xii in Mano, 2005). Needless to say such practices undermine professionalism and freedom of the news media as without adequate job security, Zimbabwean journalists tend to follow the whims of the editors, and who themselves are at the mercy of media proprietors (Mano, 2005).

Journalists who see themselves as professionals who can independently define and describe what they ought to do, see their work as motivated by truthfulness, accuracy, objectivity and balance, all of which are vital in legitimating the journalistic text (McNair 1998). Journalists' professional norms often conflict with business norms, especially with proprietor and advertiser values. In his argument for the normalisation of the conflict between professional and commercial norms, Bantz (1985) illustrates some of the usual outcomes in the conflict: The incompatibility of professional and business norms can produce a variety of effects: (1) workers leave the workplace, seeking work in organisations that seem to have developed norms more consistent with their training; (2) workers may alter their meanings and expectations to become more consistent with the workplace they currently are in, or (3)

workers may make the conflict between professional norms and existent organisational norms (e.g. business norms) itself an expected occurrence –i.e. make conflict a ‘norm’ (p.136). He notes that the incompatibilities caused by professional norms and business norms result in conflict that can be seen as ordinary, routine and perhaps even valuable.

Gans’ (1980) points that journalists write and act to please their superiors in the newsrooms more than anybody else. When the business side wants to save money by paying less (Breed 1999), the professional journalists may be forced to move on. Mano (2005) argued that Zimbabwean news media are increasingly becoming an antidemocratic force owing to the political, economic and professional problems that are continuously bedeviling the profession of journalism in the country. He insisted that public and private media owners have created ‘regimes’ that undermine professional and ethical roles of journalists. What is even more troubling according to the author, is that the country’s journalists have resigned to these developments, seeing them as ‘normal’, and finding it natural that they have to adjust their professional roles to suit the new unfair environment. To set a way forward, the author recommended that whilst the journalist cannot take all the blame, the state and media proprietors are publicly mandated to promote and uphold the highest standards of professional journalism. This means that levels of remuneration and benefits must not be used to defeat professional journalism and ethics, the author so emphasized before concluding that free and open media practices are important for democratic processes to fully take root in Zimbabwe.

This paper therefore addresses the extent to which journalists in Cameroon are satisfied with their remuneration. Hence, the main research question is:

1. To what extent are journalists satisfied with their remuneration in Cameroon?

Methodology

This study used the descriptive cross-sectional survey research design and data was collected with the use of questionnaires. The sample size was estimated probabilistically using sample calculation for one population proportion with the support of EpiInfo 6.04d (CDC, 2001) as explained by Nana (2018), considering a population of 2000 journalists. A nonprobability sampling method was used to select participants for the survey. Altogether, 270 journalists were sampled purposively and conveniently from television stations, radio stations, newspaper organisations and online bloggers in the Southwest, Northwest, Centre, Far North and Littoral Regions of Cameroon. These five regions were sampled purposively because they are socio-politically and economically more buoyant, and four of which constitute the media rich regions (South West, North West, Centre, and Littoral) and with the North region purposively sampled in order to cater for a fair distribution of cultural and religious diversity and experience in journalism practice, thus offering an environment proper for the entanglement of journalistic objective and subjective dynamism. Journalists that were involved in the study were conveniently sampled from this purposively defined population (at least three years of work experience in Cameroon to improve the quality and validity of the data). The main socio-demographic characteristics such as category of journalist, professional language and sex were included in the questionnaire as to ensure sampling representativeness. Quantitative data was entered using EpiData Version 3.1 (EpiData Association, Odense Denmark, 2008) and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Standard version, Release 21.0 (IBM Inc. 2012). The questionnaire was made of categorical variables and data were analyzed using counting techniques; namely frequency and proportions while Multiple-Responses- Analysis was used to calculate the aggregate score for conceptual components (Nana, 2018).

Results

Extent to which journalists are satisfied with remuneration

Table 1 presents the overall satisfaction rate of journalists on their remuneration while Table 2 presents specific rate of journalists’ satisfaction based on their background information.

Table 1: Journalists’ extent of satisfaction with remuneration

Extent to which satisfied with remuneration as journalist	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Very Low Extent	40	14.8	14.8
Low Extent	43	15.9	30.7
Average Extent	143	53.0	83.7
High Extent	36	13.3	97.0
Very high Extent	8	3.0	100.0
Total	270	100.0	

Majority were satisfied with remuneration as professional journalists only to an average extent 53.0% (143), while cumulatively, minority, 30.7%, was satisfied to a low or very low extent. This therefore means that cumulatively only 16.3% was satisfied to a high extent or was really satisfied. This implies journalists were moderately satisfied with remuneration as journalists.

Table 2: Extent to which satisfied with remuneration as journalist by background information

Background information		Extent to which satisfied with remuneration as journalist			N	Chi-Square test
		Very Low Extent and low extent	High Extent & very high extent	Average extent		
Category of journalist	Public	18.3%(11)	21.7%(13)	60.0%(36)	60	$\chi^2=6.103$ P=0.192
	Private	34.2%(66)	14.5%(28)	51.3%(99)	193	
	Freelance	35.3%(6)	17.6%(3)	47.1%(8)	17	
Coverage	National (Cover only the national territory of Cameroon)	38.7%(46)	14.3%(17)	47.1%(56)	119	$\chi^2=14.156$ P=0.007
	International (Cover the national territory of Cameroon and foreign countries)	26.7%(27)	22.8%(23)	50.5%(51)	101	
	Both	20.0%(10)	8.0%(4)	72.0%(36)	50	
Gender	Male	29.8%(48)	18.6%(30)	51.6%(83)	161	$\chi^2=1.598$ P=0.450
	Female	32.1%(35)	12.8%(14)	55.0%(60)	109	
Age	18-30	32.4%(48)	15.5%(23)	52.0%(77)	148	$\chi^2=0.870$ P=0.929
	31-45	29.9%(29)	16.5%(5)	53.6%(52)	97	
	46+	24.0%(6)	20.0%(5)	56.0%(14)	25	
Marital Status	Single	30.1%(50)	15.7%(26)	54.2%(90)	166	$\chi^2=7.972$ P=0.240
	Married	30.0%(30)	18.0%(18)	52.0%(52)	100	
	Divorced/Separated	100%(3)	0.0%(0)	0.0%(0)	3	
Area of study	Widowed	0.0%(0)	0.0%(0)	100%(1)	1	$\chi^2=11.559$ P=0.021
	Journalism	24.4%(44)	17.2%(31)	58.3%(105)	180	
	Non-journalism	38.6%(17)	18.2%(8)	43.2%(19)	44	
Mode of training	Journalism and a non-journalism	47.8%(22)	10.9%(5)	41.3%(19)	46	$\chi^2=3.073$ P=0.215
	Formal training (like in a university)	29.4%(63)	15.0%(32)	55.6%(119)	214	
	Informal training (like seminar, workshops, in-service/in-house, self-taught)	35.7%(20)	21.4%(12)	42.9%(24)	56	
Qualification	At least a professional qualification in the field of JMC in a formal training institution	27.1%(46)	18.8%(32)	54.1%(92)	170	$\chi^2=16.728$ P=0.010
	A non-journalism related qualification from a formal training institution	28.0%(14)	10.0%(5)	62.0%(31)	50	
	A journalism related qualification from informal training	59.4%(19)	9.4%(3)	31.3%(10)	32	
	No certificate or attestation in the field of journalism	22.2%(4)	22.2%(4)	55.6%(10)	18	
Level of school attained	Diploma	40.9%(27)	15.2%(10)	43.9%(29)	66	$\chi^2=5.953$ P=0.428
	Undergraduate	26.4%(34)	19.4%(25)	54.3%(70)	129	
	Master	37.7%(20)	13.2%(7)	49.1%(26)	53	
Work experience	Ph.D.	33.1%(1)	33.1%(1)	33.1%(1)	1	$\chi^2=6.535$ P=0.366
	1-3	31.8%(35)	10.0%(11)	58.2%(64)	110	
	4-6	30.5%(25)	22.0%(18)	47.6%(39)	82	
Language	7-9	33.3%(9)	14.8%(4)	51.9%(14)	27	$\chi^2=10.060$ P=0.039
	10+	27.5%(14)	21.6%(11)	51.0%(26)	51	
	French	27.6%(16)	13.8%(8)	58.6%(34)	58	
	English	39.4%(39)	10.1%(10)	50.5%(50)	99	

The extent to which journalists were satisfied with their remuneration as journalist was significantly dependent of coverage whereby those involved in international journalism were significantly ($P=0.007$) more satisfied than those confined to national coverage. The proportion of those that were satisfied to a high extent & very high extent was 22.8% (23) in the former, significantly higher than the 14.3% (17) recorded among national journalists. Hence, international journalists were more satisfied with their remuneration compared to national reporters.

Satisfaction with remuneration was also significantly ($P=0.021$) dependent of area of study where those that did journalism and a non-journalism study were least satisfied with proportion of 10.9% (5) followed by those who specialised in Journalism that were satisfied to a high extent & very high extent 17.2% (31) and 18.2% (8) for those that have done non-journalism study. Hence, the most satisfied group of journalists based on the area of study were those that did not study journalism, followed by those that studied journalism and least by those who had read both a journalism and non-journalism.

The next significant ($P=0.010$) predictor was qualification whereby those with no certificate or attestation in the field of journalism were the most satisfied with proportion of those that were satisfied to a high extent & very high extent of 22.2% (4).

Then with respect to language, those that could exercise in both French and English had significantly ($P=0.039$) the highest proportion of those that were satisfied to a high extent & very high extent 23.0% (26).

Journalists' satisfaction with remuneration was not significantly dependent of category of journalist though journalists of the public sector were the most satisfied; was not significantly dependent of gender though male were more satisfied; was not significantly dependent of marital status though the married were the most satisfied; was not significantly dependent of mode of training though those that have done informal training (like seminar, workshops, in-service/in-house, self-taught) were more satisfied as compared to those that have done formal training in a University or professional institution for instance; was not significantly dependent on level of school attained though Ph.D. holders were the most satisfied; and work experience whereby those with the smallest duration of work experience were least satisfied.

Discussion

Only 16.3% (44) out of 270 journalists were satisfied with their remuneration as journalists to a very high and high extent while majority 53.0 (143) were satisfied at the average extent with their remuneration and 30.7 (83) were satisfied at a low extent. This finding is supported by Ndamgam (2010), Ronning (2005), Ticha (2006), Lush et al. (2012), Che Tita (2022) who decry the economic viability of the Cameroon press with poor salaries accounting for lack of professionalism and ethical practices being undermined by some journalists. Corruption and unethical practices thrive in the media due poor salaries (Ileri, 2012), Ronning (2005). Journalists in the public media were more satisfied with their remuneration 21.7% followed by freelance journalists 17.6% with the least satisfied being journalist from the private media (14.5). Ticha (2006) highlighted that most journalists in the private earn very low wages while those in the public sector was satisfactory and the results actually reflects the state of satisfaction based on category of journalists. Animbom, Fomusoh, Toh, Abang, & Lee (2022) further decried the poor state of pay of journalists in the private media of Cameroon. Findings also revealed that international journalists were more satisfied with their remuneration compared to national reporters, journalists who did not study journalism were more satisfied with their remuneration, followed by those that studied journalism and least by those who had studied both a journalism and non-journalism field; those with no certification in journalism were more satisfied with remuneration and those that could exercise in both French and English had significantly ($P=0.039$) the highest proportion of those that were satisfied to a high extent & very high extent 23.0% (26). Bantz (1985), Gans (1980) supports this finding as they highlight that workers leave the workplace, seeking work in organisations that seems to have developed norms more consistent with their training. Journalists that are not trained thereby are more comfortable with the remuneration as they are less critical on ethics of profession and abide to any form of remuneration.

Conclusion

Journalists in Cameroon are moderately satisfied with their remuneration. Journalists especially in the private media, through their unions, should lobby for better pay to enhance the goal of professionalism. Journalism is a noble profession requiring journalists to be properly remunerated in order to reduce unprofessional practices in the media. Entrepreneurial journalism and training is therefore needed to enhance the capacity of journalists to be financially viable to enhance editorial independence. Trained journalists decry the state of remuneration compared to untrained journalists. An open gate for untrained journalists therefore water downs payment as media proprietors can recruit anyone to stand as journalists, a critical perspective to be revised for professionalism in the media sector in Cameroon.

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