GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR BROADCAST MEDIA
COVERAGE OF THE ELECTORAL PROCESS IN NIGERIA

2018

INTRODUCTION

These Guiding Principles constitute an important tool for media professionals to enrich contribution to the development of democracy in Nigeria. They were developed from the deliberations of a Lessons Learned Retreat which brought together representatives of National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and the Broadcasting Organisations of Nigeria (BON) in Kaduna, Nigeria, in September 2018.

It is an important document because it is a reflection and product of contemporary thoughts and expectations on statutory and self-regulation.

It is expected to strengthen the perfomance of media professionals and yield a fair, accurate and ethical coverage of electoral process in Nigeria.

1. TRAINING/CAPACITY BUILDING

1.1. Basic Security

Journalists need appropriate knowledge and skills on security including physical protection and measures (Entry and Exit routes to coverage locations) that could keep them safe (from aggressions and emergencies) during election coverage.

They also need digital security and data protection, location sharing, and geo-tagging (particularly in potentially hostile environments).

1.2. Ethics of the Profession

Responsible journalism thrives on the principles of accountability, humanity, truthfulness and fairness. Other principles include impartiality, independence and accuracy. Ethics of journalism encourages free exchange of information that is accurate, fair and thorough. An ethically conscious journalist acts with integrity and always considers how his/her job impacts other people's lives; he/she treats the news subject not simply as a means, but also as an end.

1.3. Working Knowledge of Relevant Professional Codes

Journalists' understanding and application of the provisions of the Nigeria Broadcasting Code and Industry Professional Codes would prevent infraction as the codes represent the standard for ethical and responsible broadcasting.

When the codes are applied in accordance with the professional ideals of broadcasting, journalists would operate with a high sense of responsibility.

Efforts should be made to circulate among practitioners the codes in their current forms and as reviewed and updated from time to time.

2. GATE-KEEPING

2.1. Pre- and Post-Mortem

Pre- and Post-mortem exercises are quick measurements for and evaluation of news packages and programmes. They should be undertaken religiously to gauge and measure

the extent and limits of broadcast professionals on assignments and give adequate prominence to productions in order to safeguard the next production through avoidance of errors or mistakes of commission or omission.

2.2. Editorial Meetings

Editorial meetings should be encouraged to provide the platform for bringing all departments or unit staff together. On a weekly basis, it should reflect on production, brainstorm on story ideas, prioritize current news and assign topics.

It is an essential exercise, which not only projects the gaps and life cycle of news items or production packages, but also signposts the current assignments as well as foregrounds the existing production schedules.

2.3. Quality Control

Quality control should be consciously strengthened. This is because compromise or absence of effective quality control built into all layers of news production and programme packages may create a crack that could cause infractions. Lack of quality

control could occasion or precipitate ethical challenges for individual Journalist and/or organisation.

2.4. Deployment of Qualified and Competent Personnel to Beats

News organisations should ensure that qualified and competent personnel with sound editorial judgment and reporting skills are assigned to cover beats. This measure, as part of quality control, would retain or sustain respectability and credibility of broadcast organisations and outfits, particularly in the area of news gathering and dissemination.

2.5 Peer Review

Peer review mechanism should be developed among sister stations to enable them to share notes on electoral issues to be broadcast. Peer review efforts should focus more on the areas of adherence to codes and ethics of broadcasting and how other operational challenges are overcome.

Peer review engenders healthy rivalry and high standards.

2.6. Editorial Committees

Broadcasting is a chain. Therefore, there must be a segmentation of duties as well as harmonisation of activities.

Editorial committees are saddled with the task of scrutinizing productions in smaller components with the aim of separating good content from bad content of both news and programme productions.

2.7. Pan Directorate Coordination

Election planning, due to its complex set-up, needs strategic and all inclusive coordination. To achieve a successful coverage of elections, coordination should involve representation from all departments or directorates, to plan, execute and review coverage of the electoral process.

2.8. Screening of Live Broadcasts

Live broadcast exposes the media and makes them vulnerable to excessive tendencies of the politicians. One of the ways to guard against being accused of misconduct and

shenanigan during live broadcasts is to deploy highly experienced operatives to the coverage of such assignments. Also, a mature anchor or a team of highly experienced discussants and analysts must be on hand in the studio to step in and mitigate the effect whenever any unethical or seemingly outright controversial issue is noticed or suspected from a live broadcast location.

PLANNING

3.1.   Budget

In order to ensure independence of journalism, media organisations should, encourage realistic budgets for election coverage activities. This should include training, allowances, logistics, kitting and so on, for the assignments and officers on duty or stringers nominated for the assignments.

3.2.   Kitting

Journalists should be well kitted for efficiency and organisation's unique identity. This can

be by way of identity cards, emblems, jackets, icons, badges and other means of identification. Kitting may also cover protective costumes especially when the reporters are deployed to volatile or violence-prone zones during elections.

3.3. Research

Quality broadcasting is hinged on painstaking research. This is to give stories appropriate contexts and historical backgrounds. Therefore, journalists covering elections should have good skills of research and investigation.

3.4. Equipment

Digital recorders, cameras, recordable discs, tripods, reporters' notebooks, pens, phones, laptops and recharge cards are examples of tools required for assignments. These tools should be made available to nominated journalists and coverage crews well ahead of time.

3.5. Sub-Committees

Budget should capture the responsibilities and activities of different sub-committees

assigned to carry out one role or the other.

3.6.   Recce

Getting valuable information sometimes is beyond the limit of a journalist. An investment in Reconnaissance (Recce) can make a significant difference. It aids operatives' ability to locate and be familiar with assignment venues for easy access and exit routes in case of violence or emergency.

3.7.   General Logistics

Journalistic tasks require a lot of movement. Provisions should be made for conveyance to places of assignment. Besides securing befitting accommodation, good nutrition should be provided while in transit so that journalists do not become extra burden to, or have to beg for support or survival from those they report.

4. SECURITY

4.1.   Insurance (Personnel and Equipment)

Broadcasters should be duly insured. Also, equipment should be insured against crisis-induced damage.

4.2.   Infrastructure

Conducive offices as well as appropriate broadcasting equipment and tools for quality signal should be provided.

4.3   Provision of Security Personnel

News organisations need to review the security of their offices and access to their physical structures (buildings). There is also the need to provide security personnel to ensure the safety of staff.

4.4   Hazard Allowance

Coverage of elections should be compensated as it remains a hazardous assignment in

Nigeria. Other sectors like arbiters and security men deployed for election coverage receive special allowances. Therefore, the media should not be an exception.

4.5   Anticipated/Associated Risk

Election-related risks such as maiming, kidnaping, terrorism and insurgency as well as death should not be ignored. Journalists should be insured, while other mitigation arrangements are put in place.

4.6.   Accreditation/Security Clearance

Journalists should be appropriately accredited and cleared to move around and cover elections without fear or molestation. They must not be hindered or barred from carrying out their constitutional duty on election days.

5. FEEDBACK

5.1. Phone-in (Delay Mechanisms)

Measures should be put in place to profile and blacklist abusers on telephone/voice interactive programmes.

Also, a gatekeeping mechanism should be adopted to trip off any caller who engages in profanity and abuse.

Presenters should establish identity of callers before they are allowed to go on air for comments or observation.

5.2.   Handling Text Messages

Text messages should be filtered. Inappropriate and abusive messages should be disregarded. Contents of insulting messages should be discouraged.

5.3.   Handling User-Generated Contents on Social Media Platforms

Social Media is open to abuse. Experienced and trained online editors should crowd-source and aggregate social media content. Moderation of feedbacks on Facebook and other platforms that enable user-generated contents should be affirmed for the purposes of impartiality, objectivity and preventing hate speeches and fake news from coming to the

public domain.

6. SOCIAL MEDIA

There are skills gap in the area of the use of Social Media. Therefore, in-house training should be conducted for members of staff in Online Journalism to ensure fact checking.

Broadcast organisations are also encouraged to develop and adopt Social Media editorial guidelines and policies in their day to day operations.

6.1   Verification

Verification tools should be applied at all times to verify sources of news to avoid being accused of spreading fake news and misinformation. Media organisations should provide budget for paid sophisticated online tools for fact checking and verification. Examples of these verification tools are Tweetdeck, Botometer, Hoaxy, BS Detector, and Media Bias Fact Check.

6.2 Utilization

Social media could be carefully used to source and disseminate information about elections.

7. AIRTIME MANAGEMENT

In line with the codes of broadcasting, equitable airtime should be allocated to all political parties. This is to ensure balance and fairness.

7.1. Gender balance on air should be observed.

7.2. Equitable airtime should be allocated to people of all age groups, including the young people.

7.3. Equitable airtime should be given to People with Disabilities (PWDs)

7.4. Prominence and voice should also be given to citizens in rural areas.

8. COLLABORATION AND SYNERGY

Collaboration is an effective strategy for getting results from like-minded interests and organisations. Therefore, there is the need to build a strong network with partners for coverage of elections.

8.1. Collaboration and Synergy among broadcasters on the Coverage of the Electoral Process.

8.2. Collaboration with Security Agencies

8.3. Collaboration with Election Observers

8.4. Collaboration with Media NGOs and CBOs

9. COMMERCIALISATION OF POLITICAL NEWS BROADCAST

9.1.Prohibition of commercialization of political news broadcast will reduce allegation of partiality and bias as well as tendency for chaos and insecurity.

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