



Media Ombudsmen on the scale in Africa: How Journalists Assess the Cameroon National Communication Council's Sanction and Non-Suit Decisions of 2013-2015

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Abstract:

This study is an assessment of the content of the Cameroon National Communication Council's (NCC) sanction and non-suit decisions by journalists. The purpose is to determine the perceptions Cameroon journalists have of their National Communication Council and its decisions and to establish a correlation between the perceptions and the content of the decisions." A survey of 108 journalists working in 40 media houses across four major regions in the country was conducted between the 11th of May and the 19th of June 2015. A textual analysis of 31 NCC sanction and non-suit decisions issued from the 5th of September 2013 to the 24th of February 2015 was also done. The results show that 59.3% of the respondents from the survey and 61.3% of data from the textual analysis indicate that NCC sanctions are protective of state officials and VIPs. Paradoxically, most of the respondents made positive assessments of the NCC decisions in relation to accusations that the decisions were biased, selective and politically motivated with 64.8% and 57.4 % in disagreement as compared to 35.2% and 42.6% in agreement, for the survey and textual analysis respectively. But the findings also reveal that there is a common opinion amongst sanctioned and unsanctioned journalists that the government has an influence on NCC decisions. The study, therefore, recommends that NCC should not focus only on sanctioning journalists and media houses but should also work to encourage journalists and press freedom through the organisation of capacity building workshops for journalists in order to build their capacity to respect professionalism. NCC should also communicate the justifications of their decisions to dispel the opinion that their decisions are influenced by the government.

Keywords: Media Ombudsman, Assessments, Africa, Cameroon Journalists, National Communication Council, Sanction, and non-suit decisions.

INTRODUCTION

Media regulation is considered a sensitive and controversial topic in all liberal democracies (Fukuyama & Grotto, 2020). This is because press freedom is often considered the foundation for the setting up of any solid democratic society. Consequently, as seen in Senghore (2012), one of the elements evaluated while measuring the level of democracy in any society has been the level of press freedom. As stated in the Liberties Media Freedom Report (2023) and earlier indicated by Senghore (2012), freedom of the press and pluralism are a prerequisite for establishing a stable democracy.

The media sensitize, educate and control information that can help set the stage for political debates to enable citizens and policymakers to arrive at informed decisions and policies. Though the media serve as the watchdog of those in power and members of the public, media institutions have also been subjected to intense criticisms even in the world's most reputed democratic countries like USA for bad journalistic practices; thus, warranting that the media be regulated (Devaney, 2013). For instance, it is widely argued that radio broadcasting played a substantial part in the Rwanda genocide of 1994 (Des Forges, 2002). According to Snide (2016), propaganda encouraging the slaughtering of Tutsis leading up to 1994 Rwanda genocide was circulated by Kangura, a Hutu extremist newspaper and RTLM (Television Libre des Milles Collines), a Hutu extremist radio station. Considering this kind of controversial role of the media, proponents of this debate argue that the media can incite hostile attitudes and violence if not regulated.

Mill (1863) argued that it is necessary for an authoritarian state control on press freedom. In other words, Press Freedom cannot be provided on a platter of gold. To attend to such calls and implement media regulation in Cameroon, the National Communication Council (NCC) was created in December 1990. As is expected, with the NCC today, accusations and counter accusations are exchanged between members of the NCC and Media professionals. The NCC is sanctioning some media institutions and journalists on the grounds that they practice bad or irresponsible journalism (unprofessional and unethical). Some journalists on the other hand, are accusing the NCC of being used by government as a mercenary body to silence journalists who expose the misdeeds of government officials and VIPs instead of genuinely performing their functions of regulating the excesses of journalists and the media.

The digital age has also opened another window of cankerworms in journalism practice in Cameroon. As found in Ngange and Moki (2019), the social media is reported to have played a negative role in the ongoing Anglophone crisis by propagating falsehood during which activists use computer software to distort pictures and videos, then superimpose content to spread rumours and fake news. This questions the quality and ethics of journalism practice in Cameroon. Looking at the consequence that comes with the dissemination of disinformation and misinformation through social media platforms, Takhshid (2022) remarked that regulating these platforms has become a necessity. It is against this backdrop that this research set out to constructively engage practicing journalists to assess the National Communication Council's sanctions in the Cameroon media landscape as part of the Council's efforts to regulate the sector and journalism practices. The objective is to examine if there is a correlation between the assessment Cameroon journalists make of the National Communication Council's sanction and non-suite decisions and the actual content of the decisions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Origin of Media Regulation and Press Councils

The practice of journalism has a very long history. After Johann Gutenberg developed the printing process by inventing the printing press in the 15th century (1440-1454), the printing of text that was hitherto done by hand became simply a more productive alternative to the copying of manuscript texts (Dominick, 1996). Baran and Davis (2010) stated that the content of media industries that developed in the United State of America, such as the penny press in the 1830s or yellow journalism in the 1890s were characterised by sensational content. The history of media regulation started within this period (1890s) in Western Europe and North America. This saw the struggle against restrictions on publication waged in the name of political freedom and human rights.

According to Dominick (1996), most of these early papers opposed discrimination and helped citizens to gain equal rights and opportunities. Baran and Davis (2010) disclosed that some of the early newspapers were developed by people who wanted to maintain the old political order, and others were created by revolutionaries who wanted to impose radical changes. Notwithstanding, there was one common assumption these ideological opponents shared. The assumption was that the mass media were troublesome, if not, totally dangerous. Though new dimensions have been added to media regulation over time due to the invention of new media, regulatory frameworks have often been amended to reflect the new economic and/or political priorities and realities rather than being removed. It has been observed that media all over the world are being closely regulated by national laws implemented by state bodies or a regulatory body like Press Councils.

According to Köylü (2006) and Ritter and Leibowitz (1974), the very first press council was set up in Sweden in 1916, to promote high standards of conduct in journalism. Köylü adds that the Swedish Press Council was harmonised in 1969 when the office of Press Ombudsman, which handles complaints against newspapers and decides whether to refer them to the Council, was introduced. Zlatev (2008) says the Press Council, in principle, is the most common form of self-regulatory body which is mainly composed of media professionals who are independent of political power. These media professionals work collectively and take decisions to guarantee the quality of information the public receives by ensuring that media professionals demonstrate professional responsibilities. In the same vein, Pritchard (1991) said the Press Council represents a form of corporate responsibility which allows people to complain about unethical and irresponsible journalism and help generate trust in the quality of news.

Models and Concepts of Media Regulation

Mtimde (2012) stated that the media being recognised as the fourth estate (in addition to the legislature, judiciary and the executive) is an important medium of communication that informs, educates, and entertains. It provides a platform for dialogue necessary for democratic discourse. Yet, Mtimde (2012) argued further that freedom of the media must be protected by a legislative framework, in particular the constitution, and by implication be protected by an independent judiciary. Mîza (2021) described media regulation to include the holistic and complementary interplay of controls and guidance through established rules, procedures, and standards. This regulation according Mîza (2021) can be internal, or self-regulation, which takes place when standards and controls are implemented within the media sector itself, or on the other hand, external regulation, which occurs when the government or other outside establishments apply rules to control media outlets and journalists. Within these two forms of media regulation (internal and external) that exist, there are four basic concepts frequently discussed in media regulation scholarships. These include statutory regulation, self-regulation, independent regulation, and co-regulation, (Richards, 2011; Feintuck, 1999; Cishecki, 2002; Jenkins, 2004; Mtimde, 2012).

Statutory Regulation:

In the statutory regulation, it is the state that sets the needed legislative or regulatory rules, then monitors and enforces compliance in a transparent way (Mtimde, 2012). Kimumwe (2014) stated that the media regulators in this model are not independent of the state, right from establishment, composition and accountability, and the government is directly involved in the appointment of members of the council, which answers to a government representative. He added that the statutes setting up the regulatory body also establishes the professional standards

that the media must adhere to, as opposed to the self-regulatory model where the industry itself comes up with the professional standards. According to Mîza (2021), state-supported regulation is usually conducted through an independent regulatory body that has the authority to enforce the applicable legislative framework regulating media and impose punishments, such as fines, for non-compliance.

Self-regulation:

Mtimde (2012) describes this model as a peer review system operating within a set of self-imposed rules by the media. Under this model, the media is expected to establish its own regulator through a consultative and all-inclusive process, which then develops and adopts media codes of conduct, and examines complaints against the media. Looking at the nature of self-regulation, Haraszti (2008) claimed that self-regulation is not censorship and not even self-censorship. According to him, it is about establishing minimum principles of ethics, accuracy, personal rights and so on, while fully preserving editorial freedom on what to report and what opinions to express. According to Hugh (2012), self-regulation requires that the press is allowed to act as both the judge and jury in its own courtroom. That is, they write the rules and decide when to enforce them. Breit (2005) opined that good practice in self-regulation is built on two principles. That is, the system must address the specific problems of the industry objectives in the first place and secondly, it must offer an effective minimum solution.

Independent Regulation:

Independent regulation according to Mtimde (2012) implies independence from both the media and the government. He identified the Press Council of Ireland as an independent regulator that embodies qualities of independent regulation, where the Press Council itself and the Press Ombudsman are independent of government and operate independent of the media. Kimumwe (2014) described press regulation in Ireland as an incentivised model of media regulation. According to him, while the regulation is voluntary, statutory incentives are also given to media for adhering to the system in this model. Given the current arguments relating to the impact the Internet has on global democracy, Fukuyama and Grotto (2020) reported that recommendations for state regulation of social media have been submitted as a solution to problems like fake news, hate speech, conspiracy-mongering, and similar ills.

Co-regulation:

Furnémont and Smokvina (2017) noted that co-regulation involves a combination of government and the media industry regulation. The government and the media industry negotiate the rules of the game for those in the sector. According to Kleinstauber (2004), co-regulation is when the State and the private regulators co-operate in joint institutions. An example of this kind of media regulation is found in Mtimde (2012). This example is the Indonesia Press Council that was created by the 1999 Statute Law of the Press in that country. Mtimde (2012) explained that its source of funding is a mixture of journalists, media owners, assistance from the state and other sources. Its membership also consists of media representatives and public figures. Kimumwe (2014) noted that in this situation, the regulator is independent from the state, but the Council is composed of members from the industry and the public. In this system of regulation, the media industry is relatively independent in ensuring the compliance with the rules while the regulator only interferes in case the legally set goals are not respected.

State Control:

In addition to the four media regulation models discussed above, Hugh (2012) extended

regulation models to include the concept of state control media regulation. This model according to Hugh (2012) experienced the direct management of the media by the government, enabling full pre-publication censorship as practised in North Korea. Coder (2015) disclosed that the flow of information in and out of this country is highly restricted since media is strictly controlled by the totalitarian government. Information in North Korea is presented only in support of the regime. The country has *The Korean Central News Agency* that serves as the only source of information for all media outlets in North Korea. Since all media is under state control and under direct control of the North Korean government, Coder (2015) opined that all media opinions in line with the regime underlie all news within the country.

Debates and Relevance of Media Regulation:

As noted in Baran and Davis (2010), the later years of the nineteenth century witnessed a lot of competition among the newspapers which were then the main medium for mass communication. In a bid to increase circulation and readership, the papers resulted in publishing defamatory and sensational stories which led to a style of journalism that was termed, "yellow journalism". This led journalists to embark on a crusade to "clean" the media from this kind of unwelcome practices by insisting on accuracy and objectivity. This eventually led them to develop theoretical guidelines on how the media is expected to operate.

The authoritarian theory was initially used to explain early approaches to media regulation. It maintained that media practitioners could not be trusted to communicate responsibly or to use the media to serve public needs, especially during times of war or social upheaval, (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1956; and O'Malley & Soley, 2000). The media and all forms of communication ought to be placed under the control of the governing elites or authorities. The main principle of this theory was that the media should not be permitted to disseminate anything which can undermine the established authorities (Skjerdal, 1993). Therefore, there was press censorship and no press freedom.

Wojcieszak, Nisbet, Kremer, Behrouzian, and Glynn (2019) disclosed that the authoritarian theory was later opposed because autocratic leaders used the media to sustain their legitimacy and to propagandize dominant narratives about the nation. Proponents who rejected the authoritarian theory were of the view that the "laissez-faire" doctrine should be applied to the mass media and that media ideas should be "traded" freely among people. In this light arose the libertarian theory which argued that humans are rational and can always choose ideas and values; hence, the press should not be restricted from publishing anything. The advocates of a libertarian or free press also maintained that the media should serve as a watchdog to ensure that people in power give a good account of their actions and inactions (Baran and Davis, 2010).

However, the idea of a free press failed to realise the promises that press freedom will expose the truth, and achieve the information, social and moral needs of the society. This led to the quest for a socially responsible media leading to the establishments of media regulatory bodies like the Press Council. There was general demand of the media to be responsible and accountable to the government and to the audience in the 19th century. Ritter and Leibowitz (1974) stated that the possibility of using a press council was suggested in the First Amendment Law in the United States of America of June 8, 1789. Despite the priority given to freedom of communication in the United States, Baran and Davis (2010) noted that, it is important to recognise that many restrictions accepted by media practitioners and media consumers alike have been placed on communication. For example, libel laws protect against the publication of information that will damage

reputations. Judges can issue gag orders to stop the publication of information they think will interfere with a defendant's right to a fair trial.

Scholars studying the role of journalism in a democratic society branded the 1800-1970 periods as the era of Social Responsibility Tradition (Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng & White, 2009). This norm that was supported by social reformist movements, included a quest for education, ethical considerations, and professionalism among journalists. Studies on media effects in DeFleur and Lowery (1983) had also indicated the growing concern parents have shown based on the effects of media contents on their children. Advocates of media regulation have often expressed fears that the media if not regulated can have a lot of negative effects on the audience, especially the children. Regulating the media to protect children from violent media content has increasingly become of great concern.

To minimise the extent of illegal content and content that is harmful from reaching children, like child sexual abuse material, terrorist content and online fraud, Ofcom (2022) and the National Audit Office Report (2023) stated that an online safety bill was introduced in UK to regulate a comprehensive range of online harms. The bill requires search engines, firms which host user-generated content, and providers of pornographic content who fail to meet the duties of minimizing online harm to children to be accountable to Ofcom, the body that regulates communication activities in UK. This concern generally focused on the understanding that children are impressionable and easily influenced either by the type of media content or by the technology itself. Baran and Davis (2010) maintained that laws and regulations protect against false advertising, child pornography, and offensive language. Jacobs (2022) agreed that the recent prevalence of the spread of misinformation experienced in American is indication that regulatory interventions targeting media content is appropriate.

Regulatory intervention can be seen as limiting communication freedom. However, the limits to communication freedom are constantly renegotiated. Bovee and Arens (1994) brought into light the aspect that some media content has been found to be guilty of containing untrue, deceptive, or misleading material that calls for regulation. To this effect, Baran and Davis (2010) added that laws and regulations that protect against false advertising, child pornography, and offensive language have been put in place in the United States of America. In a quantitative survey by Karlsen and Syvertsen (2004), it was clearly demonstrated that advertisements are unwanted in connection with children and youngsters. Of the several aspects discussed in the focus groups, the findings suggested that parents feel their children are subjected to considerable commercial pressure and moreover, parents are not altogether satisfied with signals advertisements send to children about lifestyles.

One cannot underestimate the power of the media. Flaounas (2011) said the media system directly influences people's view in our society than by personal experience. He argued that public opinion and awareness are more influenced by the way news is reported in media as suggested by the 1972 agenda-setting theory of McCombs and Shaw. Using the experience of the Balkan wars and the Rwanda Genocide in the 1990s, White (n.d) holds that journalists have become more aware of the power of the media to do great harm especially when left at the mercy of fanatical and ruthless individual forces. White (n.d) therefore, recommended the institution of codes with warnings to guard journalists and editors against all forms of speeches that can incite violence or prejudicial actions against others. In other words, recommending that the media should be regulated.

Allan (2019) believed that some media organs in Rwanda laid the ground work for the genocide by intentionally disseminating hate messages that led to a dichotomy between the Hutus and Tutsis leading to massive loss of lives. Considering this situation, it will therefore, not be favourable to support the idea by Ritter and Leibowitz (1974) earlier mentioned in this study who claimed that Press Council should not exist since the audience have adequate opportunity to criticise a media organisation through letters addressed to the Editor-in-chief. According to Ritter and Leibowitz (1974), the literate audience (usually of minority in developing countries) can decide not to buy newspapers if they are dissatisfied with media content. In the mist of the debate on whether the media should be regulated or not, Von Krogh (2012) stated that to avoid legislators and other external newsroom instruments against the media, newsroom editors in Sweden prefer that an established system of self-regulation with national code of ethics, a supportive press council and national press ombudsmen be put in place to enhance their credibility. For example, they will prefer to train their journalists to report responsibly than to expose their media houses to external criticisms.

History of Cameroon Media, Legislation, and Regulation:

McQuail (2010) said, every act of communication is shaped by the norms of the society in which it occurs. So too have various historical situations in Cameroon shaped the structure and functioning of the media over time. Lots of changes have taken place in terms of ownership and control (legislation and regulation) policies. Muluh and Ndoh (2002) traced the history of the Cameroon media back to the early 1900's during the period of European colonial rule. In Muluh and Ndoh (2002), it is noted that the European missionaries were the first (early as 1903 to 1908) to publish newspapers in Cameroon as a medium to help spread the gospel. On the other hand, the German colonial administration also published the *Amtsblatt* or the *Official Gazette*.

It was until at the end of the Second World War that a wind of change blew across Africa and this affected the ownership and control of the mass media across the continent, including the Cameroon media landscape. In the French speaking part of Cameroon, a twelve-page weekly publication, *La Presse du Cameroun*, in Douala and *L'Effort Camerounais*, were founded in 1955. The two French language papers were very influential. In spite of several seizures, *L'Effort Camerounais* helped in shaping the mind frame of Cameroonians. It made the government panic as it pointed out the ills that blighted the Cameroonian society (Muluh and Ndoh, 2002).

The media in French speaking Cameroon like all other French-speaking African colonies during this period operated under the press law of 1881. Eko (2008) stated that though the 1881 press law granted French colonies the right to publish newspapers, this right was highly constrained as all publications had to be under the control of a European French citizen. In addition to this, all publications were systematically censored and anything that appeared in print was done at the discretion of the colonial authorities. Worst still, Eko (2008) further disclosed that all African journalists who did not follow the dictates of the French colonial administration were jailed or exiled to other French colonies.

Before 1960, most of what existed as reading material in the English part of Cameroon was from Europe and neighbouring Nigeria. The first two papers to spring up in this part of Cameroon were *Cameroon Times* and *Cameroon Champion*, both founded on the eve of reunification in 1960 (Muluh & Ndoh, 2002). These researchers posited that, while the former newspaper supported the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) of John Ngu Foncha that stood for the attainment of independence by reunifying with East Cameroon, the latter supported the

Cameroon People's National Congress (CPNC) of Dr Emmanuel Lifafa Endeley, which stood for independence by integrating with Nigeria.

Muluh and Ndoh (2002) reported that the first press laws were enacted in Cameroon in 1966, just six years after independence and it led to the closure of many papers. Until 1966, Ewumbue-Monono (1992) maintained that pressmen in Francophone Cameroon were regulated by the civil law while those in Anglophone Cameroon were regulated by the common law. Ewumbue-Monono (1992) said the French Law on press freedom of July 29, 1881 was first introduced in French Cameroon as a mandated territory in 1923 and was amended in 1936. The French Cameroon Assembly adopted the French Law as law No. 55-35 of May 27, 1959. Whereas in the Anglophone Cameroon, Ewumbue-Monono (1992) traced the sources of press law back to the Britain Licensing Act of 1662. He however noted that, the laws that affected journalism practice in this part of Cameroon was the Nigeria Newspaper Ordinance No. 10, of 1903 which was further amended by the Newspaper Ordinance No. 40 of 1917, the Newspaper Ordinance 26, 1941 and the Eastern Nigerian Law of 1955.

West Cameroon (Anglophone Cameroon) re-unified with Eastern Cameroon in 1961 and the West Cameroon Newspaper Ordinance was passed to govern the establishment of newspapers. Ewumbua-Monono (1992) noted that the practice of vetting and censorship under the instruction of the Minister of Territorial Administration as provided for in the 1959 French Law was extended to Anglophone Cameroon just after unification. Though the Anglophone Cameroon journalists decried the practice, the situation went worst in 1966 when the Federal Assembly adapted Law No. 66/LF/13 of December 21, 1966. According to Eko (2008) the 1966 press law that was enacted by the government of President Ahmadou Ahidjo was a slightly modified version of the content based highly restrictive colonial press law, modelled on the French law of 1881 on freedom of the press. Tanjong and Diffang (2007) described the 1966 press laws as powerful censorship machinery that witnessed pre and post publication censorship. The law was simply draconian. Officials of the Ministry of Territorial Administration (Governors, Senior District and District officials) practically became "editors-in-chief "as they were supposed to read through the newspapers two hours before being published and anything deemed anti-government was blotted out or the paper simply suspended.

Looking at the mass media in Cameroon between 1966-1990 (that witnessed almost thirty years of one-party rule), Tanjong et al (2002) maintain that this period reinforced the tendency by media owners to consider media ownership as a political rather than an economic venture. The 1966 press laws were amended five times notably by Decree No. 69/LF/13 of November 1969; Decree No. 73/6 of December 1973; Decree No. 76/27 of December 14, 1976; Decree No. 80/18 of July 14, 1980, and Decree No. 81/244 of June 22, 1981. In 1990, another piece of legislation regulating the operation of the media in Cameroon was drafted as Law No. 90/52 of 19 December 1990. Ewumbua-Monono (1992) noted that this law was done within the context of a politically charged environment in Cameroon. On his part, Ngangum (2022) revealed that the media landscape in Cameroon was liberalised following the passage of this law (Law No. 90/052 regulating the press). Though the 1990 laws eliminated constraints of administrative and financial requirements for setting up press organs, it extended the concept of mass communication to cover both print and audio-visual media. Ewumbue-Monono (1992) concluded that, the main objective of the 1990 press law was to suppress the media whenever the latter was in "conflict" with the principle of public policy. Ngangum (2022) highlighted the same view stating that the

liberalisation of the Cameroon media space came with a paradoxical face he described as liberal traits mixed with authoritarian characteristics.

The 1990 press laws were followed by the creation of the National Communication Council (NCC) in 1991 by Presidential Decree No. 91/287 of 21 June 1991 and placed under the authority of the Prime Minister, Head of Government, (Tanjong, 2012). It was later reorganised in January 2012 before going operational in February 2013. The main mission of the NCC is to assist the State in monitoring and implementing national communication policies. The reorganisation of the NCC by Presidential Decree has also given the media regulatory body sanction powers. These sanctions can range from warnings to bans of media outlets. The Council thus, has the disciplinary role over media organisations and professionals with the objective of ensuring a responsible media. But while sanctioning, many have cried foul stating that the members of the NCC are overstepping their bounds.

The Image of Cameroon Journalists in The Eyes of The Public:

The perceptions others have about journalists are very important for professional journalists because it helps them to understand the impression the public has about them to make amends. Positive perception will guarantee trust and credibility while negative perception will mean bad business. Within the realm of ethics, Nyamnjoh (2001) argues that poor images of journalists have negative consequences. Nyamnjoh found that the synonym for Brown Envelope Journalism in Cameroon, is "Ngombo" and it in turn resulted in poor output, stimulating conflicting relations among colleagues, low levels of professionalism, and the loss of respect for evidence and balance.

Looking at the Cameroon media landscape, one finds it difficult to differentiate between who is a journalist and who is not. According to Section 46 of Law No. 90/052 of December 19, 1990 on Freedom of Mass Communication, a journalist in Cameroon is defined as one whom on the bases of his intellectual faculties, his training and talents, is recognised as fit to carry out research and process information intended for mass communication. Tanjong (2012) underscored that the word "talent" in this definition has given anyone who deems himself/herself "talented" the title of a journalist. From observation, this has led to a state of cacophony, disorder and the non-respect of journalism ethics as it gives credit to mostly people who get into the profession by "accident", intuition, zeal or prevailing circumstance especially when it comes to the struggle of surviving the economic hardship and high unemployment rate in Cameroon. The journalism profession has become a free-for-all profession and this is what has bedevilled journalism practice in Cameroon because even college dropouts (quacks and charlatans) sneak into the profession without having any formal or informal (hands-on) training. The result is a media industry inundated with poorly edited and published stories that fail to answer the basic 5Ws and H questions that most often gives completeness to a news story.

Though Tanjong and Ngwa (2002) posited that even though there is often very limited public awareness and knowledge of journalistic professionalism, public views of Cameroon journalists are often negative. According to them, it is commonplace to hear journalists in Cameroon being described with negative terms as biased, unprofessional, unethical, ignorant, weak in their command of English and French languages, corrupt, lazy and shabbily dressed. They add that many critics believe journalists deliberately slant stories to embarrass people and cause them untold misery. Though these remarks about Cameroon journalists may be unjustified, we believe findings from empirical studies will not be far from the above claims.

Theoretical Framework (Social Responsibility Theory)

The Social Responsibility theory serves as the theoretical guide for this study. This is one of the Four Theories of the press propounded by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956). They are also known as the Normative Theories of the Press. These scholars use the normative theories of the press to explain that the media takes on the form and colouration of the social and political structures within which it operates. As one of the normative theories, the social responsibility theory recommends for a free press without any censorship (Winkler, 2012). The theory also advocates for a move from simple reporting of facts to interpretative reporting or investigative reporting. This means that although news should be factual and truthful, it is of utmost importance that the news be analysed or interpreted with clear explanations. Despite the positive arguments for a free press without any censorship, the question that arises is if it is possible for the media to perform its social responsibility roles without being regulated. The position of this theory is that the media do not only have rights, but they also have responsibilities or obligations to the public. Such responsibilities are a form of regulation (through media ethics, laws, acts, etc), one way or the other, to check the excesses of a liberal or authoritarian media.

METHODOLOGY

This study combined both quantitative (textual analysis) and qualitative (quantitative content analysis and survey) research methods (mixed method). Shorten and Smith (2017) explained that the use of mixed methods in research facilitates different avenues of exploration that enrich the evidence and enable questions to be answered more deeply. For the qualitative method, the researchers conducted a textual analysis of 31 NCC sanction and non-suit decisions they could gather from the NCC Head Office in Yaounde. Botan and Kreps (1999) explained that there are two general categories of text which include; transcripts of communication (verbatim recordings) and outputs of communication (messages produced by communicators).

In this case, the text constituted NCC sanction and non-suit decisions that were signed from the 5th of September 2013 to the 24th of February 2015. Textual analysis was used to study the content of these decisions by identifying the who, what, when, where, why and how of the text based on Study Smarter (n.d), recommendations. These decisions were tabularised using codes that described their nature in terms of types (suspension, warning, banning, etc.), the journalists and/or media organs sanctioned, the complainants and the reasons NCC gave to justify the decisions. This qualitative data from the textual analysis was later quantified and displayed in a frequency table. This was done by counting the frequency of occurrence (categorising) of certain characteristics in the text (who, what, when, where, why and how) (Botan & Kreps, 1999; Coe & Scacco, 2017; Study Smarter, n.d.).

For the survey, 113 questionnaires were administered to journalists by applying the proportionate sampling technique across five major cities in Cameroon (Buea, Limbe, Douala, Yaounde and Bamenda). These cities were selected because most media houses and journalists in Cameroon are based in these town. Their diversity best reflects the Cameroon media landscape (Tanjong & Diffang, 2007). The proportionate sampling technique according to Amin (2005), is used when it is not possible to list all the members of the population of interest. In the case of Cameroon, Teke (2010) reported that empirical material for journalism studies is drastically lacking in Cameroon. It was difficult to list the number of the journalists in Cameroon at the time data was collected for this study. Hence, the researchers resolved to use the convenient sampling approach by obtaining data from accessible individual journalists by visiting different media houses during work hours. A total of 108 questionnaires were effectively completed with a response rate of 88.5%. The

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.0 was used to analyse data. Descriptive statistics using frequency tables were used to present the data. A chi-square test was used to generate the probability values on the relationships between sanctioned and unsanctioned journalists' opinion on government influence on NCC decisions.

RESULTS

The presentation of the results of this study begins with establishing the nature of NCC sanction and non-suit decisions from September 2013 to February 2015. Using textual analysis, the content of the sanction and non-suit decisions have been tabulated to describe their type (banning, suspension, warning, etc.), those the sanction and non-suit decisions were meted on, the complainants, and the justifications NCC gave for the decisions that were taken. The decisions are also identified by their reference number and date signed.

Textual Analysis of NCC Sanction and Non-Suit Decisions

Table 1: Textual display of NCC sanction and non-suit decisions (September 2013 - February 2015)

SN	Decision Number/Date	Type of Sanction & period	Journalists & Media organs sanctioned	Complainant	Reasons
1.	No. 00013/PC/SG of 05 Sept. 2013	One month suspension from any publication	L'epevier Newspaper and editor-in-chief Noudjou Leopold Clovis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Director of the office of Baccalaureates, Dr. Mbatsongo 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sanctioned for purporting that official of the office of Baccalaureates (French Secondary Education Examination Board) are corrupt and that they sell certificates
2.	No. 00014/PC/SG of 05 Sept. 2013	One month suspension from broadcasting	Sky One Radio and Youth FM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NCC Monitors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sanctioned for failing to respect the law prohibiting the publicity of pharmaceuticals
3.	No. 00015/PC/SG of 05 Sept. 2013	Banned	Djacom FM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NCC Monitors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sanctioned for failing to respect the law prohibiting the publicity of pharmaceuticals
4.	No. 00016/PC/SG of 05 September 2013	Three months Suspension	Chronicle Newspaper and the Editor-in-chief, Eric Motomu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NCC Monitors John Fru Ndi Ngole Philip Ngwese 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sanctioned for failing to respect the law prohibiting the publicity of pharmaceuticals Reported that "Paul Biya- Fru Ndi secret talks yield dividends as SDF reaps 14 Senators in West and Adamawa". NB: Paul Biya is president of the Republic while Fru Ndi was the leader of the SDF—main opposition party. The paper reported that "Paul Biya humiliated Ngole Philip Ngwese, the non-starter politician that was erroneously catapulted to the post of Minister of Forestry and Wildlife"

5.	No. 00017/PC/SG of 05 Sept. 2013	Two months suspension	The Guardian Post based in Yaounde and the Editor-in-chief, Ngah Christian Mbipgo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NCC Monitors • John Fru Ndi 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failing to respect the law prohibiting the publicity of pharmaceuticals • Reported that “Fru Ndi backpedals on decisions for SDF not to participate in the April 14 Senatorial Elections after meeting Presidency money bag.
6.	No. 00018/PC/SG of 05 Sept. 2013	Warned	The Watchdog Tribune based in Bamenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minister Secretary General at the Presidency of the Republic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Published the hymn of a secessionist group named Southern Cameroon National Council (SCNC)
7.	No. 00019/PC/SG of 05 Sept. 2013	Three months Suspension	Mr. Peguy Meyong of Radio Satellite based in Yaounde	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KONO Marcel Francois, Head of the Intergraded Health Centre, Nkoabang 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is reported that the journalist said during a programme that Mr. Kono is at the centre of organising the sales of babies.
8.	No. 00026/PC/SG of 21Nov. 2013	Warned	Roger Tende, the Editor-in-chief of Pile au Face based in Yaounde	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The President of the Electoral Board of ELECAM, Fonkam Azu’u 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sanctioned for publishing an article describing Dr. Fonkam Azu’u as the virus in ELECAM (Elections Management Body).
9.	No. 00027/PC/SG of 21Nov. 2013	Three months Suspension	Guardian Post based in Yaounde and the editor-in-chief, Ngah Christian Mbipgo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cameroon Association of English-Speaking Journalists (CAMASEJ) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Ngah published an article claiming that CAMASEJ (Cameroon Association of English-Speaking Journalists) members at the National Communication Council were those who mounted pressure that his Newspaper should be suspended.
10.	No. 00028/PC/SG of 21 November 2013	Warned	The editor-in-chief of L’oeil du Sahel newspaper, Guibai Gatama	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delegate General of National Security 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reported military operations at the Cameroon-Nigeria frontier claiming that the displaced persons were treated as members of the Boko Haram sect.
11.	No. 00030/PC/SG of 21 November 2013	Three months Suspension	The newspaper, Ouest Littoral and the Publisher of, Benjamine Zebazé	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bishop of Kribi and President of the National Communication Council, Befé Ataba 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Zebaze was sanctioned for publishing an article describing the Bishop of Kribi who also at the time doubled as the President of the National Communication Council as a clergyman supporting a satanic regime.
12.	No. 00002/CNC of 30 May 2014	Warned	Editor-in-chief of Emergence Newspaper, Magnus Biaga	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speaker of the Cameroon National Assembly, Cavaye Yeguie Djibril 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Biaga was sanctioned for publishing unjustified information claiming that Mr. Cavaye Djibril who is supposed to be the second personality in Cameroon has been humiliated and passport seized for pocketing

					billions meant for the fight against Boko Haram insurgents.
13.	No. 00003/CNC of 30 May 2014	Six months Suspension	La Scene newspaper and the Publisher, Christian Emok	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ambassador of the Republic of Ivory Coast 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr. Emok was sanctioned for publishing the photo of the Ivorian Minister of Communication, Madame Affoussiadou Bamba Lamine defaming her to be a prostitute.
14.	No. 00004/CNC of 20 August 2014	Warned	Sky One Radio based in Yaounde	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NCC Monitors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A presenter of one of their programmes and the panellists used the programme to insult some public officials as impostors and thieves.
15.	No. 00005/CNC of 20 August 2014	Two months suspension	Lazare Zambo of Sky One Radio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NCC Monitors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr. Zambo was sanctioned for using his programme and panellists to insult some public officials as impostors and thieves.
16.	No. 00006/CNC of 20 August 2014	One month suspension for radio station and three months for each journalist	Royal FM and journalists named, Paul Daiza Biya, Papi Simi, Dimitri Amba and Dominique Tita	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NCC Monitors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They were sanctioned for using a programme called Royal Hit to defame public officials.
17.	No. 00007/CNC of 27 November 2014	Warned	Equinox Television and their journalist, Erick Kouamo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NCC Monitors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Was warned for broadcasting shocking images running down the dignity of an individual through his programme "Regard Sociale"
18.	No. 00008/CNC of 27 November 2014	Three months suspension	Parfait Ayissi Etoa of Vision 4 Television based in Yaounde	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NCC Monitors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr. Etoa was sanctioned for using a guest in his programme called "Arrêtmajeur" who made statements against the Director of the Civil Cabinet of the Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon.
19.	No. 00009/CNC of 27 November 2014	Six months suspension	The publisher of La Nouvelle newspaper based in Ngoumou, Jacques Blaise MVIE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Director of Finances at the National Social Insurance Fund, Hortense Assim Abisone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The article reported Madame Abisone to be an unfaithful and adulterous wife.
20.	No. 00010/CNC of 27 November 2014	Six months suspension	Ernest OBAMA of Vision 4 television based in Yaounde	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NCC Monitors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> He was sanctioned for using a guest in the programme "Décryptage" who made claims that he was not afraid to say that the elites of the Grand North do not want President Paul Biya, the

					guest also claimed that Madame Jeannette MARAFA was a sick person and also made defamatory statements against other state officials.
21.	No. 00011/CNC of 27 November 2014	One month suspension	Inès BELINGA of Vision 4 Television	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NCC Monitors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sanctioned for broadcasting images of a lady involved in a ghastly road accident without protecting the victim's dignity and without warning the viewers.
22.	No. 00012/CNC of 27 November 2014	One month suspension	Roméo MBIDA of Vision 4 television based à Yaoundé	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NCC Monitors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For broadcasting shocking images of a dead man involved in a road accident without taking into consideration the persons dignity and also without warning the viewers.
23.	No. 00005/CNC of 24 Feb. 2015	Six months suspension	The editor-in-chief of La Nouvelle newspaper base in Ngoumou , Jacques Blaise Mvie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Director of Finances at the National Social Insurance Fund, Hortense Assim Abisone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The article reported Madame Abisone to be an unfaithful and adulterous wife.
24.	No. 00006/CNC du 24 Feb. 2015	One month suspension	Martinez Zogo of Amplitude FM base in Yaounde	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minister Delegate in charge of special duties at the Presidency of the Republic, Mr Paul Atanga Nji 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr Zogo was sanctioned for making defamatory statements against Mr. Atanga Nji claiming he was a thief from CAMPOST who was appointed to a post of responsibility at the Presidency.
25.	No. 00006/CNC of 24 Feb. 2015	One month suspension	The Publisher, Armand Mbianda and the newspaper, Le Soir	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Afriland First Bank 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Though six officials of the bank appeared in the Special Tribunal Court, Mr. Mbianda was sanctioned for reporting that the court had already condemned the officials whereas that was not the case.
26.	No. 00008/CNC of 24 Feb. 2015	Six months suspension for the publisher and the paper	The Publisher of Le Devoir newspaper, Harrys Robert Mintya Meka base in Yaounde	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Director of the Hydroelectric Project at Memve'ele, Dieudonne Bisso 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr Meka was sanctioned for describing Mr. Bisso as one who promotes women he dates and that he makes no distinction between married and unmarried women he dates among other defamatory statements.
27.	No. 00010/CNC of 24 Feb. 2015	Banning of the publisher and the newspaper	The publisher, Gilbert Avang and DEPECHE du Cameroun base in Yaounde	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NCC Monitors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr Avang was sanctioned for defaming state officials with sexual scandals. For example, he accused the Minister of Agriculture, Essimi Menye of sexual

					affaires with the wives of top government officials like the Prime Minister, Philimon Yang, Former PM, Inoni Ephraim, etc.
28.	No. 00011/CNC of 24 Feb. 2015	One month suspension of the publisher and the newspaper	The Publisher, Symphorien Olivier Mbelle and Le Courrier	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minister Delegate in charge of special duties at the Presidency of the Republic, Mr Paul Atanga Nji 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr Mbelle Mbelle was sanctioned for reporting in an article associating Mr Atanga Nji (then Minister Delegate in charge of Special Duties at the Presidency of the Republic) to have received 300 million Fcfa to cover for an illegal mineral exploitation, etc.
29.	Non-suit decisions No. 00003/NCC of 24 Feb. 2015	No sanction	The Publisher, The Guardian Post newspaper and the author of the article, Ezieh Sylvanus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minister Delegate in charge of special duties at the Presidency of the Republic, Mr Paul Atanga Nji 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not sanctioned because the information Mr Atanga Nji claimed was published against him was taken from an official document. The publisher agreed that he made an error by reporting that Mr Atanga Nji served as cadre at CAMPOST (National Post Office) whereas he was just a client but that they rectified that on his own initiative on the issue following the contested edition.
30.	Non-suit decisions No. 00004/NCC of 24 Feb. 2015	No sanction	Reporter of The Post Newspaper, Kini Nsom	Minister Delegate in charge of special duties at the Presidency of the Republic, Mr Paul Atanga Nji	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not sanctioned because the information Mr Atanga Nji claimed was published against him was established to have been made public in official documents of accredited institutions, NACC and CAMPOST.
31.	Non-suit decisions No. 00007/NCC of 24 Feb. 2015	No sanction	Claude Tadjon of Le Jour newspaper	Minister Delegate in charge of special duties at the Presidency of the Republic, Mr Paul Atanga Nji	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information published was based on official documents

Source: (Authors, 2015)

The data in table 1 revealed that there were two kinds of decisions by the NCC on issues concerning the conduct of journalists and media houses. These included sanction and non-suit decisions. The sanctions were meted against some journalists and media houses for offences ranging from defamation against individuals, advertising pharmaceuticals and traditional medicines which is prohibited, broadcasting of violent images, false reporting and using hate and sensational languages in their reports. The sanctions included warnings, like the case of Decision No. 00007/CNC of 27 November 2014 warning Equinoxe Television and their journalist, Erick

Kouamo for broadcasting shocking images running down the dignity of an individual through his programme "Regard Sociale", suspensions that ranged from one to six months like the case of Decision No. 00005/CNC of 24 Feb. 2015 suspending the Editor-in-Chief of La Nouvelle newspaper, Jacques Blaise Mvie for six months for publishing an article purporting that the Director of Finances at the National Social Insurance Fund, Hortense Assim Abisone to be an unfaithful and adulterous wife, and banning like in the case of Decision No. 00010/CNC of 24 Feb. 2015 banning the publisher, Gilbert Avang and the newspaper, DEPECHE du Cameroun for defaming state officials with sexual scandals. For example, Mr Ayang accused the then Minister of Agriculture, Essimi Menye of sexual affairs with the wives of top government officials like the Prime Minister, Philimon Yang, Former PM. Inoni Ephraim, etc. However, there were no decisions requesting the withdrawal of licence from any journalists or a media house.

On the other hand, the non-suit decisions were decisions that did not sanction journalists or media houses for offences they were accused of. For example, non-suit decisions No. 00007/NCC of 24 Feb. 2015 did not sanction Claude Tadjon of Le Jour newspaper after a complaint from the then Minister Delegate in charge of Special Duties at the Presidency of the Republic, Mr Paul Atanga Nji. It was stated in the decision that the information published was based on official documents. This finding is contrary to some of the claims by Cameroon journalists that NCC does not investigate complaints submitted against journalists and media organisation before meting out sanctions. The data also revealed that NCC does not depend on complaints submitted by victims but has also set a mechanism that monitors and reports misconducts of journalists and media houses.

Quantitative Content Analysis of NCC Sanction and Non-Suit Decisions

Table 2: Quantification of NCC sanction and non-suit decisions (September 2013 - February 2015)

Reason for the sanction	Warning	Suspension	Banning	Withdrawal of License	No sanctions	Total
Defamation against state officials and VIPs	(4) 12.9%	(14) 45.2%	(1) 3.2%	(0) 0.0%	(4) 12.9%	(23) 74.2%
Advertising pharmaceuticals and traditional medicines	(0) 0.0%	(2) 6.5%	(1) 3.2%	(0) 0.0%	(0) 0.0%	(3) 9.7%
Broadcasting of violent images	(1) 3.2%	(1) 3.2%	(0) 0.0%	(0) 0.0%	(0) 0.0%	(2) 6.5%
False reporting	(0) 0.0%	(2) 6.5%	(0) 0.0%	(0) 0.0%	(0) 0.0%	(2) 12.9%
Using hate and sensational language	(1) 3.2%	(0) 0.0%	(0) 0.0%	(0) 0.0%	(0) 0.0%	(1) 3.2%
Total	(6) 19.4%	(19) 61.3%	(2) 6.5%	(0) 0.0%	(4) 12.9%	(31) 100%

Source: (Authors, 2015)

The NCC sanction and non-suit decisions were analysed quantitatively, and the data displayed in table 2. The data revealed that majority (74.2%) of the decisions were because of defamation against state officials and VIPs. However, 12.9% of the decisions were non-suit decisions, while 61.3% of the sanctions were related to defamation against state officials and VIPs. Only 12.9% of the sanctions were taken because of false reporting. This was followed by 9.7% for advertising pharmaceuticals and traditional medicines, 6.5% for the broadcast of violent images and the least was 3.2% for using hate and sensational language.

Data from Survey

Table 3: Journalist's assessment of NCC sanctions

Nature of sanctions	Level of agreement		Total
	Agree	Disagree	
Biased & Selective	(38) 35.2%	(70) 64.8%	(108) 100%
Politically motivated sanctions	(46) 42.6%	(62) 57.4%	(108) 100%
Discourages bad journalism	(94) 87.0%	(14) 13.0%	(108) 100%
Protective of state officials and VIPs	(64) 59.3%	(44) 40.7%	(108) 100%
Encourages journalists and press freedom	(30) 27.8%	(78) 72.2%	(108) 100%

Source: (Authors, 2015)

Five elements (biased & selective, protective of VIPs and state officials, politically motivated, discourages bad journalism and encourages journalists and press freedom) were presented to journalists to assess the nature of NCC sanctions. The data suggests that respondents made a more positive than negative assessments of NCC sanctions in three of the elements. Majority (64.8%) of the respondents disagreed as compared to only 35.2% who agreed that NCC decisions were biased & selective in nature. Also, a majority (57.4%) of the respondents disagreed that the sanctions taken by the NCC were politically motivated as opposed to 42.6% who agreed. A majority (87.0%) of the respondents also agreed that NCC sanctions discouraged bad journalism as compared to only 13.0% who disagreed.

Notwithstanding the positive assessment the journalists made relating to the nature of NCC sanction decisions, most (59.3%) agreed that the sanctions were protective of state officials and VIPs while 40.7% disagreed. This finding ties with the content of the sanctions in table 2 indicating that most of the sanctions were because of defamation against state officials and VIPs. Most of the respondents, representing 72.2% disagreed that NCC sanctions encouraged journalists and press freedom as opposed to only 27.8% who agreed.

- Hypothesis: There is a significant difference between the opinion of sanctioned journalists and those who have never been sanctioned on government influence on NCC decisions.

Table 4: Sanctioned and unsanctioned journalists' opinion on government influence on NCC decisions

Category of journalists	Government's influence on NCC			Total
	Much influence	Average influence	No influence	
Sanctioned journalists	(6) 85.7%	(1) 14.3%	(0) 0.0%	(7) 100%
Unsanctioned journalists	(65) 64.4%	(26) 25.7%	(10) 9.9%	(101) 100%
Total	(71) 65.7%	(27) 25.0%	(10) 9.3%	(108) 100%

$$\chi^2 = 1.491^a, df = 2 \text{ and } P\text{-value} < .474$$

Source: (Authors, 2015)

The hypothesis of this study measured if there was a significant difference in the opinions of sanctioned and unsanctioned journalists in relation to the influence of the government on NCC decisions. The computed data in table 4 indicates that majority of the respondents (85.7% of

journalists who have once been sanctioned) and 64.4% of journalists who have never been sanctioned are of the opinion that the government influences NCC decisions. However, the Pearson's Chi-square test was conducted to determine if this difference was significant and the produced values, $\chi^2 = 1.491^a$, $df = 2$ and $P\text{-value} < .474$, indicate that there is no significant difference between the opinions of these two sets of respondents. Therefore, the hypothesis is rejected since the statistical data is not enough to prove this statement. This test was intended to ensure that those with the opinion that NCC decisions were influenced by the government did not do so out of bad faith resulting from the fact that they have once been sanctioned. The fact that majority of those who have never been sanctioned also have the opinion that NCC sanctions are influenced by the government indicates that this is a general opinion amongst journalists.

CONCLUSION

This study had one major objective; that was to examine if there was a similarity between assessment Cameroon journalists make of the National Communication Council's sanction and non-suit decisions and the actual content of the decisions. The findings revealed higher percentages in both the content of the NCC decisions and the journalists' assessment of NCC decisions; thereby, suggesting that NCC sanctions were protective of state officials and VIPs. For example, out of 31 NCC decisions within the study period, 23, representing 74.2% were because of defamation against state officials and VIPs. However, only 61.3% of these decisions effectively sanctioned journalists and media organisation for defaming state officials and VIPs. These results align with Boh (2014) earlier mentioned in this study who described the NCC as a machinery used by the government to protect government officials and VIPs.

It is important to note that, only 12.9% out of 74.2% of these decisions which were complaints against some journalists and media houses by top government officials, were not sanctioned. For example, the case of non-suit decisions No. 00004/NCC of 24 Feb. 2015 and No. 00007/NCC of 24 Feb. 2015 where NCC rejected a defamatory complaint from a top government official, then Minister Delegate in charge of Special Duties at the Presidency of the Republic, Mr. Paul Atanga Nji, on grounds that the information published about him was based on official documents. This finding suggests that the NCC does not act without proper investigation. Without proper investigation, NCC would not have found that the media report, which Mr Atanga Nji complained about, was based on official documents.

The results also suggest that most of the respondents, (72.2%) disagreed that NCC sanctions encouraged journalists and press freedom. This finding also related with Pritchard (1991). Pritchard noted that journalists accused the Press Council of being more concerned with sanctioning journalists than defending press freedom --one of their basic functions and hence, some journalists have refused to give their support to them. Despite these negative assessments of NCC decisions, the respondents made more positive assessments of the sanctions with a majority refuting that the sanctions were biased & selective and being politically motivated while a majority agreed that the sanctions discouraged bad journalism. The Pearson's Chi-square test results, $\chi^2 = 1.491^a$, $df = 2$ and $P\text{-value} < .474$ indicate that the general opinion amongst journalists is that the government has an influence on NCC decisions.

This study, therefore, recommends that NCC should not only focus on sanctioning journalists and media houses but should also work to encourage journalists and press freedom. The encouragements should be in the form of organising capacity building workshops to build their professional skills so that they will learn ways of shunning irresponsible journalism. If done, this

can encourage journalists to lend their support to NCC. The NCC should also work to dispel the opinion journalists have that their decisions are influenced by the government. The findings of this study reveal that some complaints against journalists from some top government officials were rejected. This is a good thing for journalism, press freedom and democracy in Cameroon but has not been communicated effectively because NCC hardly organises press conferences to justify their decisions.

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