Impact of Demographic Factors on Ethical Compliance Amongst Professional Accountants in Nigeria

Stanley Ogoun
Department of Accounting, Niger-Delta University, Wilberforce Island, Amassoma, Nigeria.
Email: stanelyogoun@gmail.com

Opudu Derek Okubokeme
Department of Banking&Finance/Accounting, University of Africa, Toru-Orua (UAT), Bayelsa State, Nigeria.
Email: derekopudu@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study attempts to answer the question of the influence of demographic factors on ethical compliance using professional accountants in Nigeria as the base, contingent on the lack of consensus in prior studies. The study employed the survey research design and regression analysis was deployed on the data obtained via a structured research instrument applied on selected professional accountants from both the public and private sectors. The hypotheses were tested using t-test. Three demographic variables of Level of Education, Gender, and Age were operationalized as independent variables; while ethical compliance was operationalized as the dependent variable. From the analysis of the data and the resultant hypotheses tests conducted, we observed that gender has a negative but significant relationship with ethical compliance. Whereas, Age and Level of Education has positive and significant influence on ethical compliance amongst professional accountants in Nigeria. It was therefore concluded that personal demographics are significantly crucial in explaining ethical compliance amongst professional accountants in Nigeria. However, this conclusion did not put to rest the lack of universal consensus in the direction of conclusion about the influence of demographic factors on ethical compliance, but the conclusion relying on professional accounting practitioners in Nigeria lends further credence to the body of knowledge which concludes that our individual attribute count shapes our response to the world around us. Therefore, it is recommended that demographic factors should be integrated into ethics education in the accounting profession to minimize dysfunctional behaviour, through enhanced understanding of individual attributes.

Keywords: Ethical Compliance, age, gender, education, influence

1. Introduction

The debate about the role of ethics permeates all forms and spheres of human socio-economic interactions. This discourse about ethics has dominated global discussions as dysfunctional behaviour tends to have continually manifested itself in our various professional and no-professional settings. The severity of ethical dilemma informs the premises for its enshrinement as principles and codes of conduct, to regulate various domains of human endeavour. There is practically no recognized professional body that does not have a code of ethics to regulate the conduct of its members. However, the presence of these several codes of ethics, designed to regulate and sustain positive behaviour, have not necessarily translated into the elimination of all forms of dysfunctional or unethical conduct. This no doubt throws up the very fact that ethics is a human phenomenon and its continued prevalence, underscores the dynamic nature of humans as recognized by human behaviour theorists. This dynamic and often none accurate predictable nature of human behaviour is predicated on a complex web of internal (individual) and external (societal or contingency) variables, that defines each situation. The foregoing, in additional to the complex nature of the human decision-making process, will continue to throw up issues of ethics in our socio-economic lives sphere.

Two critical areas of human life that have continually thrown up ethical questions are the areas of governance (management of public funds and institutions) and the business world (the domain of production of goods and services). By nature, these two domains are central to our very existence as a people and our sense of identity as nation-states. Their centrality is underscored, not only by the sheer number of personae involved, but also by the magnitude and often complex transactions, as well as individual and group decision making scenarios. No wonder, in no other domain of human social and economic interface has there been more ethical scandals as these two. Following, the observation by Viswesvaran, Deshpande, & Joseph, (1998) within the sphere of human economic interaction that the advent of business expansion and global competition has increased the need of ethical compliance in modern business world finds relevance even now.

One unique attribute of business expansion and the interplay of technology is the fact that in most major corporations, ownership is far separated from the daily running of the business. Also, requirements for expansion, premised on resource constraints have compelled an alternative form of business ownership called the public corporation with a much-dispersed ownership base. This has resulted in the engagement of various categories of employees with designated levels of responsibility predicated on the hope that each employee will act at any given time in the best interest of the organization. Included in this category of employees are accounting personnel who are saddled with the onerous responsibility of, not only documenting but reporting, the financial implications and by extension, the performance of the firm. The resultant communication, which finds its use in the multiple external and internal stakeholders, imposes a duty of utmost care and responsibility on the accounting profession. Therefore, society's expectations are very high and it must not be seen that, there is a gap in terms of the reliability of the financial reports so provided. The various reported instances of failure, have resulted in several financial scandals thus leading stakeholders to observe that (Armstrong, 2008; Enofe, Utomwen & Ganjuma, 2014), there is a renewed demand for accountants to improve and provide users with credible financial reports. Available historical evidence, is clearly indicative of unethical business practices as the reason behind large-scale business scandals and collapses (Ryan, 2005; Ajibolade, 2008; Luftig & Quellete, 2009; Sanusi, 2010; Ogbonna & Appah 2012). Weak morals, technical and the unstandardized accounting reports lie at the hearth of these scandals. Hence, the need for a continued interrogation of the ethical question.

Behavioural studies have documented that individual and societal context variables shape conduct. Hence, belief systems, personal upbringing or personal ambitions, often time interfere with their professional values. However, professionalism often presents an illusion of being bias free. But the extant literature documents various instances of ethical misconduct. The problem is worsened now, as society stereotypes and benchmarks success on wealth acquisition and celebrates it to the detriment of morality and consideration for others. The drive for success, as currently narrowed down to being defined in money terms, have ignited a push for wealth acquisition at the expense of morals and circumspection, resulting in the current wave of

unethical business and employee dysfunctional behaviour.

However, efforts have being expended to halt the tide of dysfunctional behaviour and restoring confidence in the system. For instance, the Nigeria Government enacted various policies, acts, and institutions, like the Companies and Allied Matters Act, 2004 Cap C20, LFN, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) Act, 2004, the Investment and Securities Act (ISA) 2007, the Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences (ICPC) Act 2003, Banks and other Financial Institutions Decree 2004, the Nigerian Deposit Insurance Corporation Act 2006, Money Laundering Act towards stemming the tide. In addition, the Nigeria professional bodies such as, Institutes of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN) and Association of National Accountants of Nigeria (ANAN) also contributed their quota in combating the problem by aligning with government policies to that regard. To achieve this, they introduced some measures like the Mandatory Continuing Professional Education (MCPE) and the issuance of ethical codes to its professional members with the purpose of equipping professional accountants with the required tools to mitigate ethical dilemma. In spite of these, corrupt and sharp practices are still on the rise (Akadakpo & Izedonmi, 2013) and the level of development, sustainability and ensuring moral values in the accounting profession, have not be able to out run criticism from various interest groups, as well as halt corporate misconduct (Okike, 2004).

Also, the extant literature on ethical issues and demographic factors has contrasting view amongst scholars. Some revealed that demographic factors has significant impact on ethical compliance amongst employees, while some others do not; see (Rest & Narvaez, 1994; Abdolmohammadi & Reeves, 2000; Dellaportas, 2006; Peterson, Rhoads, & Vaught, 2001; Harris, Feder, & Taman-Maitis, 2006; Alleyne, Devonish, Nurse, & Cadogan-McClean, 2006; Devonish, Alleyne, Cadogan-McClean, & Greenidge, 2009; Sidani, Abib, Rawwas, & Moussawer, 2009; Alleyne, Devonish, Allman, Charles-Soverall, & Young, 2010). Their findings to this regard, appears to be inconsistent as such, there is no clear agreement regarding what demographic factors are crucial in influencing ethical compliance and how these factors could influence ethical behaviour. Nevertheless, there

is a consensus by scholars that besides personality differences like competitiveness and locus of control and situational factors, the strongest predictors of ethical behaviour are demographic factors (Dobrijevic, Boljanovic & DZamic, 2015). It is on this backdrop, that we seek to contribute to the continuing debate on ethics by examining the role of selected demographic factors on ethical compliance level amongst professional accountants in Nigeria. A further impetus to this effort is the earlier reports by the World Bank (2010) and International Monetary Fund, 2012), which underscored several ethical deficiencies in professional accounting practice in Nigeria.

2. Literature and Hypotheses Premise
2.1 Ethics

Ethical issues are as old as the history of man himself (Hanekom, 1984). It deals with the character, conduct, as well as morals of human beings. Such ethical conduct issues are evaluated against some absolute criteria and are given negative or positive values (Enofe, Utomwen and Danjuma, 2014). In the same vein, Miner (2002) defined ethics as right or wrong actions that stems from the value and expectation of society. While, compliance to (Mohammed, 2011) can be seen as all-inclusive programme, that is design to assist institutions and employees to align and conduct operational activities ethically, with the highest level of integrity, as well as meeting legal and regulatory requirements. He depositioned that for a compliance programme to be effective, an organisation must establish and sustain, a culture of ethical value and compliance commitment, that is adherence to laws and order.

Moreover, Mintz & Morris (2007) explained that ethics are acceptable standards of behaviour that define how a person ought to act (prescriptive), not how people really act (descriptive). Furthermore, ethical code outlines a set of fundamental principles by which operational requirements (things one must do); and operational prohibitions (things one must not do), is anchored upon. The effect of ethics and ethical issues on accounting profession cuts across developed and developing economies (Enofe, Utomwen & Danjuma, 2014). In his contribution to the dialogue on ethics, Fisher (2004) defines ethics as an individual's personal belief about what is right or wrong, good or bad. Further, Aswathappa, (2005) refers to ethics as a

system of moral principles, a sense of right and wrong, and goodness and badness of actions and the motives and consequences of these actions. As applied to business firms, ethics is the study of good and evil, right and wrong and just and unjust actions of business men.

In his own submission Griffin (1999), defines the concept as an individual's personal belief about what is right or wrong, good or bad. Nevertheless, the generic sociological meaning of the concept of ethics seems to provide a common ground for most of them. Professionally, ethics is commonly referred to those principles and codes of behaviour that guide the conduct of any profession. The term usually carries along moral values, normative judgments and moral obligations, revealing the fact that every profession possesses its own ethics. However, there are some commonalities in professional ethics. Hence, a basic theoretical framework for organisational ethics, is best explained through the Agency theory. Therefore, to adhere to stated professional standards and principles, is the thrusts before accountants by which, ethical compliance could result in successful dealings with stakeholders to rejuvenate and sustain accounting reputation. As can be gleaned from the literature, the term ethics refers to the issue of morality and not as to what is considered as rationale and right. The domain of ethics, thus entails weighing individual actions in the light of societal morale values of right and wrong, as opposed to being pragmatic in pursuit of individual or business goals at the expense of others.

Premised on the foregoing submission, the accounting profession in Nigeria has endeavoured to promulgate its own set of ethical codes to guide her members in practice. The two leading Professional Accounting Bodies in Nigeria (the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria-ICAN- and the Association of National Accountants of Nigeria) have developed rules of professional conduct in form of fundamental principles, as well as the duties owed by members of the accounting profession (in practice and as employees of organization) to the public. The demand for integrity, objectivity, professional competence, due care and diligence, confidentiality and professional behaviour are well captured in the code of conducts and other regulatory books of accounting practice and work place.

2.2 The Demographic Domain

Demographic domain deals with individual or group characteristics using specific attributes. Demographic data have been found to be very useful for planning and research in different domains. Also, the extant literature has documented how the study of demographics has been found to be very useful in the study of work place behaviour. Therefore, its relevance cannot be jettisoned in any study on human behaviour. Thus, demographics is the collection and study of socio-economic information, expressed statistically to include: gender, level of education, occupation, area name, income level, marital status, place of work, culture, religious orientation, work experience, marriage rate, employment rate, age, race and other factors of a particular group or population characteristics (Alleyne, Devonish, Allman, Charles-Soverall, & Young, 2010; Mohammed, 2011; Chappelow, 2019). Such studies are usually designed to learn more about a population's characteristics for various reasons, which may be used for the development of policy or for economic research. It is mostly a tool used in business marketing, that determines the most effective and efficient way to reach customers and evaluate their behaviour (Chappelow, 2019) for marketing purposes.

Its relevance in the accounting domain, stems from accountants being humans and the associated value relevance of accounting output, in the light of multiple financial scandals. Thus, as recognized in the literature, the issue of ethical compliance has often received researchers' attention, due to the persistence deficiencies in moral values, which has caused dysfunctional behaviour in the accounting practice (Rest & Narvaez, 1994; Abdolmohammadi & Reeves, 2000; Peterson, Rhoads, & Vaught, 2001; Dellaportas, 2006; Devonish, Alleyne, Cadogan-McClean, & Greenidge, 2009; Sidani, Abib, Rawwas, & Moussawer, 2009; Alleyne, Devonish, Allman, Charles-Soverall, & Young, 2010; Mohammed, 2011).

Therefore, the demographic domain of an individual is defined by where the individual falls within the attributes count of the demographic distribution template of: gender, age, educational level, income level, marital status, religion, number of children, occupation, work status (employed or unemployed) place of work, culture, religious orientation, work experience, race and other factors, that serves each particular situation of interest. This is

clearly indicative of the numerous natures of the demographic attributes count, which often times inhibits their overall inclusion for a meaningful study premised on scope. Against this background therefore, the current study is limited to a consideration of only the demographic attribute counts of; gender, age and educational levels. Educational level is included in recognition of the fact that all professional accountants do not possess the same educational qualifications beyond the professional certification.

2.3 Demographics and the Ethical Question

Demographic factors however, have been revealed to have significant relationship with ethical compliance, but there is yet no consensus among scholars on which demographic factors are crucial in influencing it, and how these factors affect ethical behaviour. Obasi & Uagbule-Ekatah (2016) studied demographic indicators and professional ethical behaviour of accounting students at Benson Idahosa University, Edo State in Nigeria. The study made used of 91 questionnaires and OLS regression technique. The findings revealed that demographic indicators have significant effects on ethical behaviour amongst accounting students. That the demographic factors of gender, marital status and age is crucial in explaining ethical behaviour. This also agrees with the relativity theory in the sense that, the demographic factor of marital status is said to have no significance by some scholars, but it is relatively critical in this Nigeria study.

Abhishek & Rajeev (2016) based on ethical ideology model, studied the influence of ethical ideology and socio-demographic characteristics on turnover intention on retail industry in India. The study surveyed 564 employees and used multiple regressions technique for the data analysis. The findings revealed that the relationship between demographic characteristics and ethical ideology can predict turnover intention in the surveyed organizations. In addition, Desh, (2016) examines Executive's perception of proper ethical conduct: The effect of sex, age and level of education on ethical values in Nigeria. The study administered 255 questionnaires to managers of firms in Nigeria and the collated data were analyzed using ordinary least square regression technique. The findings revealed that, the effect of sex, age and level of education has no significant influence on manager's ethical conduct, in the selected Nigeria firms.

Gender

Researchers have agreed that besides personality differences (i.e. competitiveness, locus of control and situational factors), the strongest predictors of ethical behavior are demographical factors. Several studies revealed conflicting opinions on the impact of gender on ethical compliance. Hence, the works of (Peterson et al, 2001; and Albaum, 2006; Landry, Moyes, & Cortes, 2004; Alleyne et al., 2010; Kelly, Ferrell & Skinner, 1990; Smith & Oakley, 1997; Dawson, 1997; Desh, 2016) gave better credit to women, claiming that they have higher ethical standards than men. The work of Kelly et al (1990) showed that females and older participants had higher ethical standards. That ethical standards increase along with age and experience in one's chosen profession.

On the other hand, the works of (Gupta, Swanson, & Cunningham, 2010; Nikoomaram, Roodposhti, Ashlagh, Lotfi, & Taghipourian, 2013; Cruz, 2003; Dobrijević, 2014) reveals no gender-based differences in ethical decision-making. According to Wyatt (1999), women in business dealings, desire to achieve a fair deal, while men negotiate to win. In Gender Socialization Theory, Volkema (2001) found an explanation for these gender differences. From an early age, boys are taught to obey rules and justice, while girls are instructed to pay attention to mutual relationships and compassion. Thus, the ethical reference point chosen by each gender is based on the difference in the socialization techniques instilled throughout their developmental stages in life (Adebayo, 2005).

However, Gilligan (1982) argued that there are contrasting difference between males and females, with respect to their morality, which may have arisen due to the early socialization process. As a result, females tend to be more friendly, unselfish and submissive. Thus, their perception is directed towards caring or maintaining relations, while disapproving of those who threaten this position. In contrast, males are generally taught to be independent, assertive, fierce and aggressive in their perceived automatic obligations of financially providing – usually for their mothers – and subsequently their new family (child and/or child mother). Thus, males have been found to possess a

stronger ethical view in issues relating to duty and justice, but may ignore laws when placed in a situation where there is a choice between adhering to ethical conduct and the pursuit of wealth or self-interest goals, regardless of costs (Enofe, Utomwen & Ganjuma, 2014; Obasi1 & Uagbule-Ekatah, 2016).

Evidently, there is no universal agreement as to whether gender is a determinant of the level of ethical compliance. The inference is that situations define the relevance of gender influence as can be seen to commitment to family responsibility as espoused (Enofe, et al. 2014; Obasi1 & Uagbule-Ekatah, 2016), which instigates the need for continued research.

Age

The works of Emerson, Conroy & Stanley, (2007) revealed that age as a factor, can influence ethical behaviour. Borkowski & Ugras (1992) stated that ethical position changes with age, however, their study were unable to identify the factor causing this change. Their study was based on a meta-analysis in 1998 of 47 studies and found out that individuals' behaviour and attitude tend to be more ethical with age, which was supported by Kohlberg's (1984) theory which revealed that individuals may experience a moral maturation, as they proceed through the stages of moral behaviour (Emerson, et al, 2007). Whereas, the works of Dawson (1997) compared sales professionals in two age groups. Salespeople in their twenties had lower ethical standards than the salespeople in their forties and fifties. Volkema's (2001) study also showed that younger male in their business dealings may be more likely to use some dishonest tactics than the older ones, whose findings are as similar to that of Peterson et al (2001).

One key interpretation of age differences could be that young people are more pressured to achieve good results at work (Volkema, 2001). According to moral development theory (Kohlberg, 1984, as cited in Robbins & Coulter, 2012) "as people grow older, they progress through stages of morality throughout their lifespan". Rahwah and Abu, (2014) investigated the effects of gender and age on ethical sensitivity: The case of Nigeria bank staff. They administered 455 questionnaires to 11 banks in Nigeria and the data were analyzed using correlation and regression approach. Their findings revealed that gender and age factors have significant positive relationship with ethical sensitivity amongst staff of Nigeria banks.

The literature is suggestive of the idea that age influences the level of morality and therefore ethical compliance. However, does this not negate the reality in the age bracket of the principal persona in the various major corporate and public scandals? The indicted chief executives and principal actors in the major scandals were those, who no longer belong to the young age classification. The reality of the key actors in these celebrated cases gives further impetus for continued research.

Educational level

Previous studies reported that a person who has higher education may have access to more work opportunities and be more aware of ethical issues and compliance than those who do not have higher education and have less turnover intention (Medina, 2012). Rest & Narvaez (1994) revealed that education is a strong and powerful predictor of moral development, emphasizing that the longer students continue in formal education, the higher they comply with ethical standards. Hence, continuous learning and professional training has the potential influence accountants in compliance with ethical rules and principles (Abdolmohammadi & Reeves, 2000; Rest & Narvaez, 1994); Emerson, et al, 2007). Therefore, educational level was hypothesized to have significant relationship with ethical values, indicating that those with more education, generally tend to adhere to ethics than the less professionally qualified ones, as well as those with lower educational levels.

Furthermore**,** Mohammed (2011) examined the impact of social, administrative & demographic factors of (gender, marital status, level of education, salary, area name and type of work) on the compliance of work ethics amongst staff in the education sector in Palestine. The study administered questionnaire to a sample size of 223 and used descriptive analytical approach to evaluate the data. The findings revealed that the selected demographic factors have positive effect on staff's compliance with work ethics.

Despite, the foregoing some have argued that the more educated ones are better equipped with requisite skills to circumvent processes and to optimize their personal gains, at the expense of the system. Also, that the complexity in some operational settings, where these scandals have occurred, is only indicative of educational attainment as the most requisite tool for

compromising the system. These concerns necessitate further studies such as the current effort.

However, there is a gap in literature since there is no consensus among scholars as per what demographic factors are crucial in influencing ethical values and how these factors could influence ethical behaviour. However, their findings are in conformity with relativity and objectivity theories, based on the facts that workers are governed by the principle of moral obligation and act of duty. Performing moral obligation does not really depend on desires, interests, motives, beliefs, feelings, attitudes and approval alone, but it can be hinged on moral principles that are in consonance with the objective of moral standards

(Forsyth, 1992; Obasi1 & Uagbule-Ekatah, 2016).

2.4 Conceptual Model

This discriminated the demographic variables of gender, age and level of education, to find the effect of individual characteristic on ethical compliance amongst professional accountants in Nigeria. Though previous works have evaluated other factors like culture, marital status, religion etc. as demographic variables, but the selected factors are adopted and hybridized to take specific account of the Nigerian experience, as well as considering the unique nature of these variables.
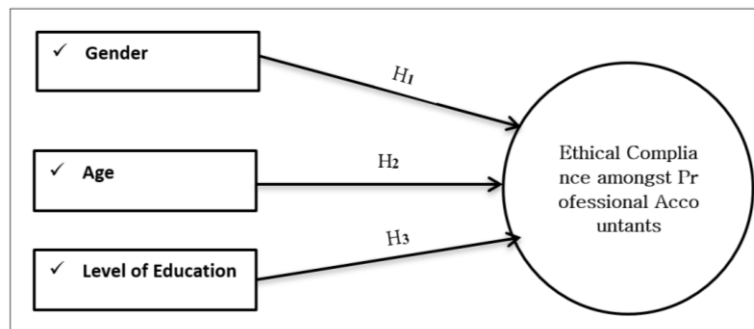

Figure: 2.1 Conceptual Model
Sources: Researchers Conceptualization, 2019

On the basis of this, we hypothesize that:

Ho₁: There is no significant correlation between gender and ethical compliance level amongst professional accountants in Nigeria.

Ho₂: Age bracket does not significantly influence ethical compliance amongst professional accountants in Nigeria.

Ho₃: Ethical compliance amongst professional accountants is no significantly dependent on education level.

2.5. Theoretical Foundation

Objectivism theory suggests that ethical action, moral values and principles exist independently of a particular person's view and taste. Such objective values and principles provide norms by which ethical statements can be judged as true or false (Mohammed, 2011). In practical living, our moral judgements are

fusions of factual and moral beliefs. It is upon this factual belief that we respect promises made by us. Furthermore, the objectivists reviews that a moral obligation is a principle of compulsion enforced by moral conscience or a moral law. Thus, it is one's duty to obey the law. This kind of enforcement to comply with the law is done by a personal conscience. Hence, obligation refer to as a regular work that is governed by the principle of compulsion; when we say an act is our duty, this stands to mean that we fulfil our moral obligation. Performing our moral obligation does not depend on our desires, interests, motives, beliefs, feelings, attitudes and approval but we act on principles as moral persons in pursuance to the objective of moral standards (Forsyth, 1992).

On the other hand, Relativism Theory suggests that ethical values or moral habits, feelings and opinions follow cultural conditions. Hence, moral judgement

differs from place to place and from person to person. Ethical relativism as a theory claims that moral standards are relative; that they vary over time, among persons and other cultures. There is no one moral appraisal of any given issue. Accordingly, two contending parties never agree on ethical principles and such ethical action is based on whether it is tolerated and sanctioned by the individual's family, culture or tradition. A relativist, Forsyth (1992) stated that moral actions depend upon the nature of the situation and the individual's involved, and when judging others, they weigh the circumstances more than the ethical principle that was violated. Thus, persons who are high relativists are perceived as skeptics and feel that the situation and ethical principle involved, do not influence the moral action (Karande, Rao & Singhapakdi, 2002). In contrast, low relativists feel that moral behaviour is influenced by moral principles, norms or laws. Hence, it is believed that female accountants, because of cultural norms may avoid putting themselves in dirty deals. While, the male counterparts may feel that the laws or cultures are not made for them per se (Obasi1 & Uagbule-Ekatah, 2016).

This study is therefore premised on these two theoretical strands of interpreting the world around us. Basically, both theoretical paradigms are accepted in the body of knowledge for cognitive developmental and individual epistemological espousals, as well as the further espousals of convergence models.

3. Methodology

The research design for this study is the survey design, since the research work entails the collection or observation of the behaviour of some number of respondents involved in the research. The data for the study, is made up of 197 questionnaires retrieved from the pool of respondents. These respondents were drawn from private (56) and public (141) organisations. Respondents were drawn from the pool of professional accountants in Port Harcourt and Yenagoa (Nigeria) in the selected organisations and the questionnaires were distributed to 15 purposeful sampled accounting/auditing departments (where these employees are engaged) in the public ministries/agencies, as well as private firms in the ratio of 10:5 respectively. The agencies where the respondents were drawn from were shielded to satisfy their demand for anonymity. Thus, the questionnaires

that were distributed to the selected public ministry/agencies were 170 (17 each) and the ones distributed to private firms were 85 (17 each) given a total of 255. Notwithstanding, only 197 (77%) of the questionnaires were filled completely and met the criteria for the sample selection that can be processed for further testing.

The instrument consists of fifteen (15) items questionnaire, using the Likert scale rating type. The questions are structured into a five (5) point Likert scale of strongly agree (SA)-1, Agree (A)-2, Indifferent (ID)-3, Disagree (DA)-4 and Strongly Disagree (SD)-5. Hence, the source of data collection for this research was basically primary data and the t-test statistical method was employed to test the hypothesis, beyond the descriptive statistics deployed.

3.1 Model Specification and Operational Definition of the Variables

The data is to be analyzed using the regression analysis which could be termed to be a statistical technique used to find relationships between variables for the purpose of predicting future values. The regression equation is as follows:

Ethcomp= f (gend, age, ledu)…………….1
The above equation can be stated mathematically and explicitly be expressed as:
Ethcomp= $\beta_0 + \beta_1 gend + \beta_2 age + \beta_3 ledu + \mu$
Where:
Ethcomp = Ethical compliance
β = Coefficient of the parameter,
Age = Age factor
Gend = Gender
Ledu = Level of education
μ = residual value

3.2 Data Estimation Technique

The study adopted the use of quantitative analysis technique to process and analyze the collected data, premised parametric statistics for the analysis of interval data and ratio. Since, the data of this study were in ordinal scale, data were firstly transformed into interval data by using Method Successive Internal (MSI) so that parametric statistics could be used. The analytical tool used to test the hypotheses was simple linear regression analysis. Furthermore, the use of

coefficient of determination, t test and F Test were applied to analyze the data generated.

A priori Expectation of Coefficient of Estimate

The main model used in this study is Ethcomp=β_0+$\beta_1$gend+$\beta_2$age+$\beta_3$ledu+μ. Thus, it aimed at evaluating the impact of demographic factors on ethical compliance amongst professional accountants in Nigeria. Consequently, the relationship between demographic factors and ethical compliance amongst accountants is expected to have a positive impact.

4. Data Analytics and Findings

4.1. Profile of the Respondents and Demographic Information:

The survey showed that 58% (115) respondents were male and 42% (82) were female (Table 1). Most of the respondents (21%, 42) were 30 years old and below, and in the 31–40 age group category (35%, 69), while the rest was in the 41–50 (25%, 50) age group category, and 51 years old and above (18%, 36). This result indicated that the majority of the participants in this study comprised of male accountants and the age of the participants fell into the 31–40 age group categories.

The results indicated that most of the accountants in this study were educated at tertiary level and are professionally qualified with ANAN or ICAN and other professional certifications. About 70% (138) respondents are first degree holders with professional qualification(s). While, the other categories are postgraduate degrees holders with professional certifications, they are about 30% (59) respondents.

Table 4.1: Profile of Respondents

Demographic characteristics		N (197)	Percentage (%)
GENDER	Males	115	58
	Females	82	42
AGE 51-above 36 18	20-30	42	21
	31-40	69	35
	41-50	50	25
LEVEL OF EDUCATION	Graduate with Prof Qualification	138	70
	Post graduate with Prof Qualification	59	30
ETHICAL COMPLIANCE	Strongly agree	94	48
	Agree	67	34
	Indifferent	16	8
	Disagree	14	7
	Strongly disagree	6	3

4.2 Diagnostic Test

When confronted with large data set, exploratory data analysis should be conducted first prior to the data cleaning process. As the range of skewness values for all the variables were from 0.882 to 1.355 and that of the kurtosis was from −0.234 to 1.254, all data was considered normal.

The value of 0.70 and above was considered acceptable for good measure of internal consistency (Nunally, 1978; and Pallant, 2007). Therefore, the Cronbach's Alpha values of demographic factors: gender, age, level of education and ethical compliance amongst accountants were recorded as high as 0.970, 0.938, 0.934 and 0.942 respectively, which indicated good internal consistency of data.

Correlation examines the relationship between two variables in a linear fashion (Koutsoyainnis, 1977) and deploying it, helps identify whether one variable is related to another. All the variables are considered highly correlated to each other and explain the dependent variable, which addresses the problem of multicollinearity, as observed by (Baridam, 1995). Table 4.3 shows the summary of the results when using bivariate analysis to test the correlation between one variable to another. The statistical results showed that the correlation values between the predicting variables and the dependent variable are: 0.831, 0.890 and 0.753, respectively. This finding indicated no

multicollinearity among the variables given that all of the correlation was more than 0.8 except between gender and ethical compliance.

From the regression statistics, we observed that the adjusted R-squared (R2) measures the explanatory ability of the model as 0.754. This suggests that the model explains 75% of the systematic changes in the dependent variable. This also mean, that the predictor variables (gender, age and level of education) explained 75% of the variance in ethical compliance amongst professional accountants in Nigeria as revealed in (Table 4.4).The F-stat value is used to test for the goodness of fit of the model and it serves as a test of the joint statistical significance of all the variables examined and it also tests the existence of a significant linear relationship between the dependent and independent variables. Hence, the decision rule is to accept the F-stat as significant if the probability value is less than 0.05 otherwise it is rejected. Therefore, the associated p-value of the F-stat for both estimations is less than 0.05. As a result, we accept the joint statistical significance of the model and state that there is a significant linear relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

The first objective of this study was to investigate the relationship between gender and ethical compliance level. Thus, Ho1 proposed a negative relationship between demographic factors based on gender and ethical compliance amongst professional accountants, as revealed in (Table 4.4). Hence, hypothesis one was supported because a negative significant relationship was found between gender and ethical compliance as (β = -0.079, t= -1.072, p= 0.028). This result revealed that the increase of female accountants than the males will lead to decrease in ethical compliance, hence the fewer the female accountants, the higher the

ethical compliance amongst professional accountants in Nigeria. This is supported by Gender Socialization Theory, as explained by Volkema (2001) that due to gender differences, males are taught to take pride in obeying rules and justice from childhood, while the females are trained to be religious with compassion and mutual relationships, which at the long run could affect the ethical compliance level because their primary duty is to their family (Gismondi, 2006). This result finds credence in the works of Obasi & Uagbule-Ekatah, (2016), Singhapakdi, Vitell, & Franke, (1999) and Peterson et al. (2001). However, the effect is significant at 5% level. The significance of the variable also suggests that gender is crucial in explaining ethical compliance amongst accounting professionals in Nigeria.

Table 4.2: Exploratory Data Analysis (EDA)

Variables	Mean	Skewness	Kurtosis	Cronbach's Alpha
ethcomp	1.84	1.355	1.254	0.970
gender	1.42	0.342	-1.902	0.938
age	2.41	0.170	-1.072	0.934
level of education	1.30	0.882	-0.234	0.942

Source: SPSS output

Table 4.3: Correlation Test Result

variables	ethcomp	gender	age	ledu
ethcomp	1.000	0.831	0.890	0.753
gender	0.831	1.000	0.870	0.774
age	0.890	0.870	1.000	0.762
ledu	0.753	0.774	0.762	1.000

Source: SPSS output
Note: **Correlation is significant at p<0.05 level.

Table 4.4: Regression Analysis

Variables	Standardized Coefficients	Std. Error	t-stat	p-value	Collinearity Statistics	
	Beta				Tolerance	VIF
Constant		0.120	-4.048	0.000		
Gender	-0.079	0.155	-1.072	0.028	0.234	4.282
Age	0.720	0.075	9.812	0.000	0.233	4.287
LEdu	0.263	0.136	4.419	0.000	0.354	2.822
R^2			0.758			
Adjusted R^2			0.754			
F-statistics			201.157			
Significance at p<			0.0000			

Source: SPSS output

Secondly, the evaluation of the slope coefficients of the explanatory variables of (Age) revealed that demographic factor based on Age, has a positive significant relationship with ethical compliance amongst professional accountants in Nigeria (β = 0.720, t= 9.812, p=0.000). Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis Ho_2 and accept the alternate. This reiterates the earlier conclusion from the works of (Kohlberg, 1984; Borkowski & Ugras, 1992; and Emerson, et al 2007). Nevertheless, the effect is significant at 5% level. The significance of the variable suggests that age is crucial in explaining ethical behaviour. The result is not consistent with the observation by (Nikoomaram et al. 2013; Gupta et al., 2010; Dobrijević, 2014).

While, the last hypothesis Ho_3 revealed that Level of Education has the standardized beta coefficient of (β= 0.263, t=4.419, p=0.000), which reveals a positive significant relationship between level of education and ethical compliance amongst professional accountants in Nigeria. Hence, the finding indicated that Level of Education has a strong contribution in explaining ethical compliance amongst professional accountants in Nigeria. Therefore, the inference here finds consistency in the observations of Walsh & Taylor (2007) and Rest & Narvaez (1994), despite our earlier query.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Financial reporting and the provision of financial information entail sequence of technical processes and a proper adoption of accounting principles, as well as adherence to standards and ethical values, which has made accounting practice a challenging one. These processes are influenced by some inherent personal attribute counts in the preparers of the accounting records. Which of course, may result in conflict of interest amongst stakeholders of accounting information. It is against this backdrop that ethical compliance is being projected and its relevance becomes unavoidably necessary, due to the reports of the continued business scandals that the accounting profession is being held liable for. Therefore, the acquisition of a better understanding of the individual characteristics and its influence on ethical compliance has practical implications for accounting practice and research.

From the outcome of the inferential statistical tests conducted, it was observed that the discriminated demographical variables espoused in the current study does influence ethical choices in accounting practice. Hence, individual accountant's conduct in instances of ethical dilemma is contingent on gender, age and educational level. Hence, the three demographic variables espoused in the current study are significantly crucial in explaining ethical compliance amongst professional accountants in Nigeria. However, this conclusion did not put to rest the lack of universal consensus in the conclusion about the direction of influence of demographics, but the conclusion relying on professional accounting practitioners in Nigeria lends further credence to the body of knowledge which concludes that our individual attribute count shapes our response to the world around us. Therefore, the study recommends that demographic factors should be integrated into ethics education in the accounting profession to minimize dysfunctional behaviour, through enhanced understanding of individual attributes.

This study contributes to anchoring the relevance of non-work-based determinants of individual behaviour well anchored in the field of behavioural sciences. The study further accentuates the need for individual attributes tailored measures in the effort to mitigate disruptive behaviour in accounting practice. This is because, ethics study stands as the single biggest challenge in workplace conduct, which has greatly undermined the stewardship rich pedigree of the accounting profession. Trust issues seems to be overwhelming the nobility of the accounting profession, hence research on interrogating behavioural determinants of accounting practitioners is imperative as the world increasingly slips into a state of values flux, as the propensity to accumulate individual wealth heightens.

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