

Investigative Journalism And Political Corruption In Nigeria: Unveiling The Impact And Challenges

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Abstract: *This study is on the impact and challenges of investigative journalism and political corruption in Nigeria. A survey research methodology was used in this study. Media practitioners from the Lagos Chapter of the Nigeria Union of Journalist Lagos are the population of this study. The study made use of systematic and purposive sampling techniques and a sample of 120 media practitioners was selected for the study. The Yamane formula was used to determine the sample size. A research questionnaire was used as research instrument. Data analysis was done using SPSS version 23.0 software using descriptive statistics involving frequency tables and percentages. The findings of this study showed that majority of the respondents agree that investigative journalism significantly impacts the exposure and reduction of political corruption by informing and mobilizing the public. Some of the challenges confronting investigative journalists in their efforts to investigate and report on political corruption include pressure from political actors through ownership influence, advertising boycotts, or regulatory sanctions ($X = 3.62$, $SD = 1.26$), lack of funding ($X = 3.58$, $SD = 1.43$), Vague laws frequently used to arrest or sue journalists ($X = 3.19$, $SD = 1.37$) and lack of technical skills to investigate political crimes ($X = 3.71$, $SD = 1.61$). The study recommends that stakeholders, including the government, media owners, and the general public, should continuously support and promote investigative journalism to achieve its goals.*

Keywords: Corruption, Journalism, Investigative Journalism, Media and Politics

Introduction

Political corruption represents one of the most common and rooted hurdles to democratic governance and sustainable development in around the globe. It erodes public trust, weakens institutions, disorients policy-making procedures, and diverts vital resources away from development goals. In several democratic and transitioning nations, the media—especially investigative journalism—has become apparent as an effective weapon for uncovering corrupt practices and encouraging transparency and accountability. Investigative journalism serves as a watchdog by exposing hidden realities, holding public authorities responsible, and informing citizens about abuses of power (Waisbord, 2000). Unlike normal news reporting, investigative journalism requires extensive study, analysis of complex data, and a long-term dedication to uncovering wrongdoing that is purposefully disguised. Its influence has been demonstrated in a number of historic cases around the world, including the Panama Papers, the Watergate affair in the United States, and many exposés in Asia, Latin America, and Africa (Schudson, 2011).

Investigative journalism does not, nevertheless, function in a vacuum. Media ownership arrangements, a lack of finance, political meddling, threats to journalists' safety, and inadequate legal protections are some of the issues that affect its efficacy (Coronel, 2001; UNESCO, 2020). Journalists who conduct controversial investigations can encounter censorship, harassment, or even violence in nations with weak democracies and oppressive regimes. Investigative journalism is still developing in spite of these obstacles. The advent of digital tools like data journalism, open-source intelligence, and cross-border partnerships has improved journalists' ability to find and share corruption stories (Houston, 2009; Meera, 2022). Platforms like The Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) and programs like the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) show how international collaboration may increase the scope and impact of investigative work.

Statement of the Problem

Investigative journalism is widely recognised for its potential to reveal political wrongdoing and encourage accountability, but a number of contextual and systemic issues are progressively undermining its efficacy. Investigative journalism has contributed to the disclosure of many high-profile corruption scandals, including the Panama Papers, the Pandora Papers, and other local exposés. However, it is still challenging to maintain such efforts, particularly in settings where press freedom is restricted, media outlets lack adequate funding, and journalists are threatened with death (ICIJ, 2016; UNESCO, 2020). Media outlets are frequently owned or controlled by political and corporate elites in numerous regions of the world, especially in developing democracies, and they may stifle or impede anti-corruption investigations (Coronel, 2001). Furthermore, investigative journalists usually work in environments with little pay, insufficient training, and restricted information availability, which limits their capacity to carry out in-depth investigations (Waisbord, 2000). The issue is made worse by the frequently inadequate institutional and legal frameworks designed to safeguard journalists and maintain transparency (Reporters Without Borders, 2022).

Additionally, the digital age has created a paradox: new technology and collaborative platforms have increased investigative reporting's reach and resources, but they have also brought with them threats like online harassment, misinformation, and digital surveillance (Meera, 2022). These factors jeopardise not just the individual reporters but also the legitimacy and long-term viability of investigative journalism in general. Consequently, the problem is the growing disparity between investigative journalism's potential to fight political corruption and the practical barriers that restrict its influence. Investigative journalists' role in democratic government may continue to erode in the absence of targeted actions and support networks to safeguard, finance, and empower them, so permitting corruption to flourish unchallenged. This study aims to critically examine these issues by exploring how investigative journalism has influenced the fight against political corruption and the key challenges hinder its effectiveness.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to critically examine the role of investigative journalism in addressing political corruption by analyzing its impact, identifying the challenges faced by investigative journalists. The secondary objectives are to:

- i. assess the impact of investigative journalism on exposing and reducing political corruption.
- ii. identify the major challenges confronting investigative journalists in their efforts to investigate and report on political corruption.

Investigative Journalism

Oluniyi (2020) state that in every society, there are people whose main concern is how to use unethical interaction to obtain contracts, financial enrichment, etc., even when such conducts violate existing laws. In such a system, unless there is a diligent whistleblower interested in creating an ideal system, such unlawful conduct may never get public attention. Investigative journalism aims to uncover this kind of unethical practice (Suntai & Shem, 2022). Investigative journalism involves locating, documenting, and showcasing news that others attempt to conceal. With the exception of the fact that the subjects of the story will typically not assist you and may even attempt to obstruct you from carrying out your duties, it is rather comparable to traditional news reporting. Informing people about what is happening in their community, society, and the wider world is the responsibility of journalists. Finding facts and communicating them to their readers or listeners is how journalists accomplish this. Investigative journalism involves reporters delving carefully into a specific issue of interest, such as corporate misconduct, political corruption, or significant crimes. Researching and reporting a story can take an investigative journalist months or years.

Investigative Journalism in Nigeria

In Nigeria, particularly during the fight for independence from the British colonial authority, the media was crucial to maintaining the stability of the country's democratic structure. Over the years, investigative reporting in Nigeria has continued to be more prevalent in the magazine segment of the print industry than in the newspaper sector. Newswatch magazine, for instance, was instrumental in redefining and bringing investigative and interpretative practices into the public eye. Oluniyi (2019) noted that also in the broadcasting industries increased inclusion in the profession occurred just of recent, with Channels Television situated in Lagos still playing a mentorship role. Oluniyi (2019), Nigerian media professionals have taken practical measures to challenge or expose corruption in public governance since the country returned to democracy in 1999 following years of military rule. He claims that the press has exposed numerous alleged and verified fraudulent practices in the political sphere, including the 1999 expose of former Speaker of the House of Representatives Alhaji Salisu Buhari for making false statements about his age and qualifications, as well as cases involving former Governors Diepreye Alamieyeseigha, Ayodele Fayose, and Joshua Dariye (Oluniyi 2019).

Challenges of Investigative Journalism

Strict government control over the press, media consolidation, and growing market pressures are some of the obstacles facing the media's watchdog role. These difficulties have gotten worse recently, as seen by the progressive decline in freedom of expression during the previous 13 years. Notwithstanding these obstacles, the media still plays a critical role in exposing corruption and encouraging accountability and transparency in public institutions, underscoring the significance of preserving media independence and freedom in contemporary democracies. Asemah and Asogwa (2012) recognized factors that impede the use of investigative journalism for fighting corruption in Nigeria, including press laws, official secret acts, constitutional challenge and corruption among journalists, ownership influence, lack of professionalism, and a lack of ethical standards on the part of investigative journalists.

Empirical Reviews

A study on investigative journalism in Nigeria during the promotional politics era was carried out by Musa and Antwi-Boateng (2023). Politicians' and authority officials' public image plays a big role in political situations in Nigeria and throughout Africa. It is believed that journalism is in charge of holding politicians accountable and keeping an eye on power for the benefit of society. By challenging power on behalf of the people, investigative journalism enables journalists to disassociate themselves from special interests. Nigerian problems, however, go beyond the unfriendly democratic setting because the government and lawmakers both deploy public relations operatives to sway public opinion.

Bankole (2021) conducted a study on the challenges and prospects of investigative journalism practice in Nigeria. The social responsibility theory serves as the foundation for this research. To gather pertinent information from working investigative journalists in a few Nigerian publications, the study used an in-depth interview research method. The International Centre for Investigative Journalism, The Cable, and Premium Times were among the web publications that were chosen. The interview sessions were guided by a comprehensive interview guide, and thematic analysis was used to qualitatively examine the responses. Results indicate that lack of finances, insecurity, ownership influence, threat and suit, time constraint, poor access, inadequate remuneration; among others are important constraints to the practice of investigative journalism in Nigeria.

Methodology

A survey research methodology was used in this study. The population of the study are media practitioners from the Lagos Chapter of the Nigeria Union of Journalist and agricultural extension officers from the Ministry of Agriculture, Lagos. NUJ has a population of about 35,000 members (LeVan and Ukata, 2018). The study made used of systematic and purposive sampling techniques and a sample of 120 media practitioners were selected for the study. The Yamane formula was used to determine the sample size. The Yamane formula is denoted by:

$$n = \frac{N}{(1 + Ne^2)}$$

where:

n = number of samples

N = total population

e = error margin / margin of error

The study adopted research questionnaire as research instrument. Data analysis was carried out using SPSS version 23.0 software. Descriptive statistics involving frequency tables and percentages were used to analyze the responses from the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

Table 1: The impact of investigative journalism on exposing and reducing political corruption

S/N	Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	\bar{x}	Std Dev
1	Investigative journalism significantly impacts the exposure and reduction of political corruption by informing and mobilizing the public	63 (52.5%)	50 (41.7%)	7 (5.8%)	-	-	3.63	1.29
2	In investigative journalism, the media acts as a watchdog, pressuring political leaders to adhere to ethical standards and legal frameworks	64 (53.3%)	48 (40.0%)	8 (6.7%)	-	-	3.41	1.44
3	Investigative journalism uncovers hidden misconduct, such as embezzlement, bribery, nepotism, and electoral fraud	25 (20.8%)	75 (62.5%)	16 (13.3%)	4 (3.3%)	-	3.57	1.82
4	High-profile investigations often lead to legal and institutional reforms aimed at closing loopholes and increasing transparency	67 (55.8%)	23 (19.2%)	23 (19.2%)	7 (5.8%)	-	3.93	1.54

Table 1 shows that 63 (52.5%) of the respondents strongly agree that investigative journalism significantly impacts the exposure and reduction of political corruption by informing and mobilizing the public, 50 (41.7%) of the respondents agree with the statement while 7 (5.8%) of the respondents were undecided. Also, 64 (53.3%) of the respondents strongly agree that in investigative journalism, the media acts as a watchdog, pressuring political leaders to adhere to ethical standards and legal frameworks, 48 (40.0%) of the respondents agree with the statement while 8 (6.7%) were undecided. In addition, 75 (62.5%) of the respondents agree that

investigative journalism uncovers hidden misconduct, such as embezzlement, bribery, nepotism, and electoral fraud, 25 (20.8%) of the respondents strongly agree to the statement, 16 (13.3%) of the respondents were undecided while 4 (3.3%) disagreed. Furthermore, 67 (55.8%) of the respondents strongly agree that high-profile investigations often lead to legal and institutional reforms aimed at closing loopholes and increasing transparency, 23 (19.2%) of the respondents agree and were undecided on the statement respectively while 7 (5.8%) of the respondents disagree on the statement.

Table 2: The major challenges confronting investigative journalists in their efforts to investigate and report on political corruption

S/N	Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	\bar{x}	Std Dev
1	Media outlets often face pressure from political actors through ownership influence, advertising boycotts, or regulatory sanctions	53 (44.2%)	35 (29.2%)	32 (26.7%)	-	-	3.62	1.26
2	Independent and nonprofit investigative platforms often lack funding, affecting their ability to undertake long-term investigations	59 (49.2%)	40 (33.3%)	21 (17.5%)	-	-	3.58	1.43
3	Vague laws such as “spreading false news,” “cybercrime,” or “defamation” are frequently used to arrest or sue journalists	64 (53.3%)	25 (20.8%)	16 (13.3%)	4 (3.3%)	11 (9.2%)	3.19	1.37
4	Many journalists lack the technical skills to investigate complex financial or political crimes, such as tracing offshore accounts or interpreting legal documents	71 (59.2%)	34 (28.3%)	14 (11.7%)	1 (0.8%)	-	3.71	1.61

Table 2 shows that 53 (44.2%) of the respondents strongly agree that media outlets often face pressure from political actors through ownership influence, advertising boycotts, or regulatory sanctions, 35 (29.2%) of the respondents agree to the statement while 32 (26.7%) of the respondents were undecided. Also, 59 (49.2%) of the respondents strongly agree that independent and nonprofit investigative platforms often lack funding, affecting their ability to undertake long-term investigations, 40 (33.3%) of the respondents agree to the statement while 21 (17.5%) were undecided. In addition, 64 (53.3%) of the respondents strongly agree that vague laws such as “spreading false news,” “cybercrime,” or “defamation” are frequently used to arrest or sue journalists, 25 (20.8%) of the respondents agree to the statement, 16 (13.3%) of the respondents were undecided, 4 (3.3%) of the respondents disagree while 11 (9.2%) of the respondents strongly disagree. Furthermore, 71 (59.2%) of the respondents strongly agree that many journalists lack the technical skills to investigate complex financial or political crimes, such as tracing offshore accounts or interpreting legal documents, 34 (28.3%) of the respondents agree to the statement, 14 (11.7%) were undecided while 1 (0.8%) disagree with the statement.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study showed that majority of the respondents agree that investigative journalism significantly impacts the exposure and reduction of political corruption by informing and mobilizing the public, investigative journalism, the media acts as a watchdog, pressuring political leaders to adhere to ethical standards and legal frameworks and high-profile investigations often lead to legal and institutional reforms aimed at closing loopholes and increasing transparency. Also some of the challenges confronting investigative journalists in their efforts to investigate and report on political corruption include pressure from political actors through ownership influence, advertising boycotts, or regulatory sanctions ($X = 3.62$, $SD = 1.26$), lack of funding ($X = 3.58$, $SD = 1.43$), Vague laws frequently used to arrest or sue journalists ($X = 3.19$, $SD = 1.37$) and lack of technical skills to investigate political crimes ($X = 3.71$, $SD = 1.61$). This finding supports the study of Bankole (2021) who reported that lack of finances, insecurity,

ownership influence, threat and suit, time constraint, poor access, inadequate remuneration; among others are important constraints to the practice of investigative journalism in Nigeria.

Conclusion

This study concludes that investigative journalism helps in exposing corrupt practices and unethical behaviour among politicians. However, some of the challenges encountering investigative journalism in Nigeria include pressure from political actors through ownership influence, advertising boycotts, or regulatory sanctions, lack of funding, vague laws frequently used to arrest or sue journalists and lack of technical skills to investigate political crimes. In addition, strict government control over the press, media consolidation, and growing market pressures are some of the obstacles facing the media's watchdog role.

Recommendations

- i. Stakeholders, including the government, media owners, and the general public, should continuously support and promote investigative journalism to achieve its goals.
- ii. There should be provision of funding avenue for media houses and various investigative platforms.

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