

DISSECTING NIGERIAN JOURNALISTS' INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING THROUGH THE MEDIA PRACTITIONERS' INQUISITORIAL LENSES

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Abstract

The survey was conducted to determine the viewpoints of media professionals on the state of investigative reporting in Nigeria today, the breadth of the reporting, and the existence of obstacles to that reporting there. The study's foundations were the Teleological Ethical Theory (TET) and Social Responsibility Theory (SRT). The study's goals included finding out the media professionals' opinions on various topics, including whether or not journalists in Nigeria do or engage in investigative reporting, the scope of that reporting, the existence of obstacles to that reporting in Nigeria, and more. Using a convenience selection strategy, 24 media professionals from Nigeria's six geographical zones—12 practising journalists and 12 journalism teachers—were chosen for the interviews. The results show, among other things, that most media professionals concur that Nigerian journalists do not now engage in investigative reporting, that there are several obstacles to this practice, and that the scope of investigative reporting in Nigeria is relatively limited. The research consequently suggests, among other things, that journalists be trained, retrained, and made aware of the value of investigative reporting to Nigerian society and media organisations.

Keywords: Dissecting, Nigerian Journalists, Investigative reporting, Media Practitioners, Inquisitorial Lenses

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1. INTRODUCTION

Journalism includes a wide range of topics that are often reported on seldom. This role includes, among other things, the professional, research-driven unearthing of social, economic, or cultural changes by journalists. Investigative journalism is a popular form of reporting that must be comprehensive to unearth topics of social consequence. Investigative journalism is an essential subset of journalism that serves society by seeking out problems like corruption and other wrongdoings to increase transparency and strengthen public opinion. According to experts, doing the abovementioned tasks takes extensive or in-depth

investigation. Investigative journalism entails an in-depth analysis of a subject to disclose evidence and disseminate findings of individuals or organisations to a larger audience. Investigative journalists carefully investigate, evaluate the facts, and present proof to support their assertions. Investigative journalism, which crosses all media platforms, frequently requires careful planning, preparation, and research to present research findings to its diverse audience adequately. It should be emphasised that obtaining, analysing, and disseminating information keeps journalists on their toes in journalism. Exceptional beat journalism allows the writer to focus on one beat, notwithstanding the

comprehensive coverage of stories. The common good is the focus of another type of journalism, which entails an in-depth investigation of a topic of interest that typically includes crime or governmental wrongdoing. Investigative reporting differs from other kinds of journalism because of this. Investigative reporting is a dangerous career since it entails exposing crises shattering society to bring offenders to justice. Journalism is one of the most hazardous occupations in the world, according to the United Nations, which supports the statement mentioned above. Journalists go out into the streets to investigate and report what is occurring. Unfortunately, the tales documented in this line of work may lead to kidnapping, violence, or even death.

The danger involved calls for fury, bravery, and a sense of the greater good. Scholars concur that journalists suffer substantial daily hazards and threats merely for carrying out their duties as news reporters and public information providers. A journalist has been murdered on average every four days during the previous ten years (UNESCO Report 2021). Investigative journalists advance the media's tendency to set the agenda to its peak by discovering crucial facts on topics of general interest. Investigative journalists can cross the firing line and reveal facts for the benefit of society by using unconventional approaches and strategies. According to evidence that is now accessible, some media academics have recognised investigative reporting by Nigerian journalists in the past as the cause of the country's numerous constitutional and social achievements. Some of these experts believed that, among other things, the persistence of journalists and the use of investigative journalism techniques were responsible for Nigeria's independence, the end of military governments, the restoration of constitutional democracy, and the maintenance of democracy in Nigeria.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

A specialised set of knowledge and expertise is required for investigative reporting, which has traditionally been regarded as a more specialised area of journalism. As a result, many journalists find it difficult and consider it one of the riskiest jobs. Numerous investigations show that investigative journalism, as a result, acts as a watchdog, uncovering crimes and other misdeeds, safeguarding the public's health and safety, preventing the public from being misled by a statement or action of a person or government, and, among other things, exposing corruption, conflicts of interest, corporate greed, and hypocritical government behaviour. Given the subpar

journalistic standards now prevalent in the Nigerian hemisphere, experts are still split over the presence of investigative journalism in Nigeria despite its promising future. Despite the existence of legislative frameworks that encourage investigative journalism and the fact that Nigeria is believed to have one of the firm and most free media environments in Africa (Demarest & Langer, 2018), this is the case. Section 39 of the Federal Republic of Nigeria's 1999 Constitution, as amended, guarantees freedom of expression, which includes the right to access and disseminate information; Section 22 gives the press the right to hold the government accountable to the people; Sections 1 and 4 of the Freedom of Information Act of 2011 grant journalists and the general public access to information about any public or governmental organisation as well as the right to request information from any public or governmental organisation. According to the evidence that is currently available, journalists are threatened. Among the threats they face while conducting investigative reporting are being arrested and prosecuted for their work, obstruction caused by the passage of new laws intended to implicate the journalists, encouraging self-censorship or pressuring journalists to stop their investigations, bullying related to the exit from ownership structures, and others. Scholars concur that this may impact journalists' indulgence in investigative reporting.

Investigative reporting is seen as the foundation of any nation and is intended to function as a watchdog and make the government responsible to the people. Given the signs mentioned above and the risks they face, it is unknown whether journalists in Nigeria still engage in investigative reporting. Thus, the study concentrates on media researchers' opinions of Nigerian journalists' investigative reporting.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study are to:

1. Assess media practitioners' perspectives on the current position of journalists' investigative reporting in Nigeria.
2. Examine media practitioners' perspectives on the extent of investigative reporting carried out by journalists in Nigeria.
3. Find out media practitioners' perspectives on whether challenges exist that hamper investigative reporting in Nigeria.
4. Find out the media practitioners' perspectives on Nigeria's challenges of investigative

reporting.

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the above, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What are the media practitioners' perspectives on the current position of journalists' investigative reporting in Nigeria?
2. What are the media practitioners' perspectives on the extent of investigative reporting carried out by journalists in Nigeria?
3. What are the media practitioners' perspectives on whether challenges exist that hamper investigative reporting in Nigeria?
4. What are the media practitioners' perspectives on Nigeria's challenges of investigative reporting?

5. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Exposition on the meaning and definition of Investigative Journalism

Investigative journalism has many different definitions (Houston, 2010). It is also referred to as muckraking journalism, advocacy journalism, public service journalism, watchdog journalism, exposé journalism, adversarial journalism, in-depth journalism, and journalism of indignation. These names show a variety of concepts through their diverse meanings. Investigative journalism conjures up images of crime reporting in the minds of the general public. Because it takes research before a reporter can publish the news, some people view all news as investigative (Ismaila, Ahmada, and Mustaffa) (2014). Investigative journalism is reporting where reporters delve closely into a specific subject of interest, such as significant crimes, government corruption, or corporate misconduct. An investigative journalist may put months or even years into their investigation and report-writing. Investigative reporting relies on information acquired via the reporter's initiative, as opposed to traditional reporting, which relies on materials provided by the government, NGOs, and other organisations. Investigative reporting calls for the reporter to delve thoroughly into a problem, incident, or subject of general interest.

Because investigative journalism has so many facets, it is always challenging to provide a specific definition because, for many journalists, all journalistic work in some capacity entails Inquiry. The world's largest non-profit investigative journalism organisation, Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE),

described investigative journalism as systematic, in-depth, and original research and reporting focusing on social justice and accountability. It frequently involves the discovery of secrets, extensive use of public records, and computer-assisted reporting. In a similar spirit, academics concur that investigative journalism is an essential subset of journalism that serves society by seeking out problems like corruption and other wrongdoings to increase transparency and strengthen public opinion. In-depth research, dedication, and industry are all necessary for achieving objectives. It should be emphasised that occasionally, leads from daily reporting are what lead to this degree of reporting. Which takes significantly more time, talent, and effort to investigate, question, carry out an investigation, and acquire more data before publishing in investigative journalism. Investigative journalism differs from traditional journalism because it must serve the public interest and is based on in-depth investigation and information follow-up. It requires patience and frequently entails fine-grained verification, meticulous preparation, and a preoccupation with verifying and rechecking data to make sure the tale makes sense. It often includes exposing corruption and behaviours that violate norms and values.

The distinction between Investigative Reporting and Investigative journalism

Investigative journalism is described as a type of journalism in which reporters delve deeply into a particular topic to learn more about it. These stories frequently reveal secrets or corruption, examine government practices, or highlight societal concerns. They use public documents and archives to conduct this in-depth reporting. To get to the bottom of things, they speak with specialists and misbehaviour victims in interviews. At the same time, there are many different ways to define investigative reporting. The two have a lot in common, according to professional journalism organisations, including serving the public interest, using a systematic approach, in-depth Inquiry, multi-sourced data, proactive research, and reporting that frequently involves revealing secrets. Several academics have noted that investigative reporting and investigative journalism practice heavily rely on and use public documents and data emphasising social justice and accountability, supporting those mentioned above. Investigative reporting is "critical and in-depth journalism," according to the Dutch-Flemish investigative journalism association (VVOJ). Despite the lack of supporting proof, some journalists assert that all reporting is investigative. The reality is

that investigative reporting necessitates more critical and thorough techniques than other sorts of reporting, which do not deal with in-depth uncovering of hidden truths or muckraking classified material on government corruption.

Importance of Investigative Reporting

It is impossible to overstate the value of investigative reporting. Without investigative media, citizens may be in the dark about all political concerns and wrongdoings, even killings. Investigative journalism is crucial to society for these reasons. Investigative journalism aims to make influential individuals, politicians, criminals, businesses, and the government responsible for their deeds. According to Mustapha-Koiki and Ayedun-Aluma (2013), investigative reporting in journalism is commendable because it enables journalists to carry out their most crucial social responsibility as the public watchdog. The media have played, and continue to start, critical choices in restoring values and standards of public (and indeed private) policy management, according to Dapo Olorunyomi, reported in Mustapha-Koiki and Ayedun-Aluma (2013). It is what the media's traditional watchdog function has always meant. According to Frost (2007), the media's most significant function is to inform the public and promote political discourse. by way of its participation in investigative reporting. Investigative reporting is also essential for highlighting underrepresented groups and giving the voiceless a much-needed platform. It has sparked legislation and cultural norms reforms, resulting in healthier societies with higher rates of respect and dignity. Investigative journalism acts as a government check and balance. It is how the people hold their leaders and those in higher authority accountable by allowing the people to keep an eye on what they are doing. A vital part of journalism is investigative reporting. It aims to bring wrongdoing to light and inspire reform (Ntibinyane, 2018). Above all else, investigative reporting by the media strengthens democratic governance, raises public knowledge, and deters government officials from misusing their positions of authority. Despite the preceding, several academics concur that investigative reporting is the most complex and challenging since it often entails scoops and exclusive coverage.

The misconception of Investigative Journalism

The general public views investigative reporting as a sophisticated sort of reporting. Such that solely highlights the prominent and wealthy members of society. It should be mentioned that even though investigative journalism covers famous people, the

affluent, and the social elites, its primary goal is to serve the public interest. In agreement, Kaplan, cited in Looney (2018), notes that investigative journalism is a systematic approach to a hunch, requiring in-depth, original research and reporting. It adheres to the scientific method of formulating and testing a hypothesis, rigorous fact-checking, unearthing secrets, focusing on social justice and accountability, heavy use of public records, and, typically, data. He added the following items to his list of what investigative journalism is not:

It is not beat reporting.

Some journalists believe that only investigative reporting is worthwhile. But additional research and analysis are needed for investigative reporting. Investigative methods are used by beat reporters, although the two are not the same.

It is not critical reporting.

Investigations take weeks, months, or even years to complete. Critical aspects may be included in investigative journalism, but just because you write something challenging and vital does not indicate you have done the research required for investigative reporting.

It is not crime and corruption reporting.

Although there is considerable overlap, defining investigative journalism as crime and corruption reporting restricts the field's use. But excellent investigative reporting prioritises topics like education, power abuse, money tracking, compelling business stories, etc. "Just because you cover crime and corruption on a beat doesn't mean you're employing investigative reporting techniques" (Kaplan, cited in Looney 2018:2).

Empirical Review

In 2008, Mustapha-Koiki researched instances of investigative reporting in Nigeria. The study showed various methods or techniques that investigative reporters used, concluding that these methods are appropriate for investigative reporting. Similar research was done by Mustapha-Koiki and Ayedun-Aluma (2013) on investigative reporting methods, the public's right to know, and people's right to privacy. The study's findings showed, among other things, that working journalists believed some investigative reporting techniques, like impersonation, to be both immoral and illegal. They also discovered that using evasive techniques in investigative reporting—methods of reporting that are not obvious,

like in a direct interview—can occasionally invade people's privacy and came to the ethical conclusion that using them is unethical (Especially impersonation, which is criminal). The study on Malaysian Media Practitioners' Perspectives on the Conceptualisation of Investigative Journalism that Ismaila, Ahmada, and Mustaffa (2014) conducted is instructive. The study identified four key themes summarising how Malaysian media professionals conceptualised investigative journalism. It concluded that, despite the stimuli differing from those in other nations, their understanding of investigative journalism was still consistent with that of the general public. However, they modified the practice to fit the local media environment, values, and culture.

Theoretical Framework

The Teleological Ethical Theory (TET), often known as consequentialism, and the Social Responsibility Theory served as the study's theoretical foundations. According to Okoye (2007), TET is concerned with the outcome of the action, and activity is seen to be excellent if it yields favourable outcomes. As a result, people who hold to this ethical perspective are known as consequentialists. The teleological school is divided into three subgroups. They are pragmatism, egoism, and utilitarianism. Koiki Mustapha and Ayedun Luma (2013). Ethical utilitarianism is relevant to this investigation. According to Mustapha-Koiki and Ayedun-Aluma (2013), ethical utilitarians think that people should behave in the interests of everyone involved. "The greatest good for the greatest number" is their catchphrase. Instead of one person's claim, the benefit of the majority is their driving desire.

On the other hand, the Social Responsibility Theory (SRT) is a spinoff of Libertarian Theory and was developed by F.S. Siebert, T.B. Peterson, and W. Schramm. Peterson, referenced in Chukwu & Ihejirika (2018), claims that the principles of SRT specify that freedom entails responsibility and that the press, which enjoys a privileged position under the government (Constitution), is required to be accountable to society. He added the following to his list of what social duty entails: protecting individual rights by acting as a watchdog against the government, serving the political system by giving information, discussion, and debate on public matters, and educating the populace to enable it to exercise self-governance (p.3). These clarifications can unquestionably only be made in a society where investigative reporting survives and remains the central tenet of journalistic practise.

6. METHODOLOGY

The study used a qualitative research methodology, and convenience sampling was used for the sampling process. 24 media professionals from Nigeria's six (6) geographical zones participated in in-depth interviews, including 12 working journalists (two from each zone) and 12 journalism professors (two each from the zone). The interview schedule was used to solicit answers from the respondents in an informative manner.

7. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Responses from the interview with the respondents regarding question one:

What are the media practitioners' perspectives on journalists' investigative reporting in Nigeria?

Table 1: Journalists' Investigative Reporting in Nigeria?

Questions	Respondents' responses
Do you understand the meaning of investigative reporting?	All the respondents said Yes
Do journalists in Nigeria currently engage in investigative reporting?	Eight (8) respondents answered that journalists in Nigeria now perform investigative reporting, while sixteen (16) respondents said no.

The table demonstrates that every respondent (media professionals) knows what investigative reporting entails. Most (67%) of these professionals claimed that Nigerian journalists do not currently engage in this reporting.

Responses from the interview with respondents regarding question two:

What are the media practitioners' perspectives on the extent of investigative reporting carried out by journalists in Nigeria?

Table 2: Extent of investigative reporting carried out by journalists in Nigeria?

Questions	Respondents' responses
How often do journalists carry -out investigative reporting in Nigeria?	Twenty (20) respondents joked that "the degree of investigative reporting by journalists in Nigeria is Very low - Almost non -existent," with the remaining (4) respondents agreeing that it is Low but "absolutely not very low."

According to the table, the majority (84 percent) of respondents, who were media professionals, joked that Nigerian journalists don't do much investigative reporting. The upshot of the foregoing is that Nigerian journalists do not frequently do investigative reporting.

Responses from the interview with respondents regarding question three:

What are the media practitioners' perspectives on whether challenges exist that hamper investigative reporting in Nigeria?

Table 3: Whether challenges exist that hamper investigative reporting in Nigeria

Question	Respondents' responses
Do challenges that hamper investigative reporting exist in Nigeria?	Twenty-two (22) of the respondents agreed that Nigeria has problems preventing investigative reporting, while the other two (2) disagreed.

The above table indicates that most (92%) of the media practitioners agree that challenges that hamper investigative reporting exist in Nigeria.

Responses from the interview with respondents regarding question four:

What are the media practitioners' perspectives on Nigeria's challenges of investigative reporting?

Table 4: Challenges of investigative reporting in Nigeria

Questions	Respondents' responses
What are the challenges of investigative reporting in Nigeria?	The problems of investigative reporting in Nigeria were identified by the respondents as follows: Inadequate compensation for journalists, the impact of ownership structure, security concerns; job instability, lack of competent workers in the field; unqualified individuals who continue to pose as journalists; policy of the media establishment Lack of resources, a lack of coverage for journalists, and an unfriendly atmosphere for the media; bribery and the brown -envelop syndrome poor state of operation; absence of necessary supplies; excessive friendship; Threats, consequences, and retaliation assaults.

The table highlighted the challenges of investigative reporting in Nigeria identified by the media practitioners.

8. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results show that every respondent (media practitioners, including working journalists and journalism educators) knows what investigative reporting entails. Most (67 percent) of these media practitioners believe that Nigerian journalists do not currently practise investigative reporting. Given the significance of investigative reporting proclaimed in the literature study of this research, the conclusion of the foregoing is that Nigerian society does not benefit from the excellent attributions of investigative reporting. The results mentioned above contradict the findings of the empirical assessment of this work by Ismaila, Ahmada, and Mustaffa (2014), which indicated that Malaysian media practitioners generally agreed that journalists in Malaysia used four main themes while doing investigative reporting. Additionally, the results are at odds with the theoretical framework's teleological ethical theory (TET) assumptions, which claim that TET is concerned with the action's consequence and that action is seen to be good if it results in beneficial outcomes. In addition, it is essential to note that given the results of this study, it will be improbable for Nigerian journalists to fulfil the obligations cited by Peterson in Chukwu & Ihejirika (2018) regarding the Social Responsibility Theory (SRT), one of the theories on which this study is based. In addition, information gleaned from the interview on the volume of investigative reporting done by Nigerian journalists shows that the majority (84 percent) of respondents (media professionals) said that the importance of investigative reporting done by journalists in Nigeria is relatively low. The inference from the foregoing is that Nigerian journalists rarely engage in investigative reporting, which may explain why corruption in government and other vices plaguing Nigerian society have multiplied fourfold and persisted unabatedly. The result above presents an instructive contrast to the underlying premises of the theories examined in this book. The results also support the claim made by many experts that investigative reporting is one of the pillars of good journalism and that its absence degrades journalism and society.

Furthermore, the study's data shows that the majority (92 percent) of media professionals concur that Nigeria has obstacles to investigative reporting. The survey also emphasised Nigerian media professionals' difficulties in investigative reporting.

Poor pay for journalists; ownership structure influence; security concern; job insecurity; lack of skilled workers in the field; unskilled individuals still posing as journalists; media establishment policy; lack of funds; lack of an insurance policy for journalists; lack of a media-friendly environment; Brown-envelop syndrome/bribery; poor working conditions; lack of availability of resources; The data above suggest that there are enormous obstacles that prevent journalists in Nigeria from doing investigative reporting and its duties, notably the watchdog role, which is to keep the government response to the people. A function that, in actuality, necessitates the use and utilisation of the investigative reporting style of journalism. The results also show that there are many obstacles in journalists' capacity and skill to snitch on corruption plaguing Nigerian society and expose it. These obstacles might hinder the media's ability to uphold the principles of its social obligation to the community. The researcher jokes that this needs and demands immediate attention to head off these manageable difficulties.

9. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that journalists do not currently practise investigative reporting in Nigeria and that the scope of investigative reporting by journalists in Nigeria is minimal. In light of the foregoing, the researcher suggests training, retraining, and educating journalists and media organisations on the value and need of investigative reporting in Nigerian society. The study also concludes that there are several obstacles facing investigative reporting in Nigeria. Given the magnitude of these issues, the research urges immediate government and media stakeholder involvement to address these enormous problems, which media practitioners have characterised as the chokehold on investigative reporting in Nigeria.

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