

REPORTING CORRUPTION IN NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS: A MIXED-METHODS EVALUATION OF THEMES, OWNERSHIP AND CHALLENGES.

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ABSTRACT: This study explores corruption reporting in Nigerian newspapers: a mixed-methods evaluation of themes, ownership, and challenges with a focus on *The Punch* and *Premium Times*. Employing both quantitative and qualitative data analysis, the study examined the frequency, themes, and framing of corruption stories over six years. The quantitative analysis counted corruption-related articles, categorized the types of corruption reported, and evaluated the prominence of these stories based on headline placement, word count, and page location. The qualitative analysis involved thematic coding, examining how corruption was portrayed and the narratives constructed around it. Findings indicated a high frequency of political corruption reporting, with public sector embezzlement and corporate corruption also prominently featured. Investigative journalism played a significant role in exposing corruption, particularly in *Premium Times* and *The Punch*. However, challenges such as threats to journalists and media ownership influenced the scope and nature of coverage. Addressing the gap in research on how media ownership shapes corruption reportage, the study revealed that political affiliations significantly impact editorial independence, affecting corruption coverage. These findings align with the agenda-setting theory, as the media's emphasis on high-profile corruption cases shaped public discourse. The study concludes that while Nigerian newspapers have contributed to anti-corruption efforts, a broader and more balanced approach is needed to address under-reported areas of corruption. Recommendations for improving investigative journalism and ensuring editorial independence are provided.

Keywords: Corruption Reporting, Media Ownership, Investigative Journalism, Agenda-Setting Theory, Nigerian Newspapers

INTRODUCTION

Corruption remains a pervasive challenge in Nigeria, affecting governance, economic development, and public trust in institutions. Newspapers play a crucial role in exposing corrupt practices and holding public officials accountable, but their effectiveness is often undermined by political interference, censorship, and media ownership biases. Investigative journalism has been instrumental in uncovering corruption scandals, yet journalists frequently face threats and intimidation that hinder their work (Justine & Egere, 2018). Despite these challenges, Nigerian newspapers continue to strive towards promoting transparency and accountability.

Multiple factors, including the legal framework, media ownership, and the evolving role of digital platforms shape the landscape of corruption reportage in Nigeria. Although the Freedom of Information Act was enacted to improve transparency, journalists often struggle to access critical government-held data, limiting their ability to report effectively (Oberiri, 2016). Additionally, the dominance of politically affiliated media owners raises concerns about selective reporting, as newspapers may prioritize the interests of their proprietors over objective journalism. Moreover, the rise of online platforms has expanded the reach of corruption reportage but has also facilitated the spread of misinformation, further complicating media credibility (Suntai & Shem, 2018).

Despite these hurdles, Nigerian newspapers have made significant contributions to exposing corruption, particularly during high-profile anti-corruption campaigns. However, financial constraints, declining print readership, and competition from digital media pose additional threats to investigative journalism. Strengthening press freedom, improving financial support for independent media, and enhancing legal protections for journalists are crucial steps towards ensuring more effective corruption reportage. Moving forward, greater public engagement and institutional reforms will be necessary to bolster the role of newspapers in Nigeria's fight against corruption.

This study evaluates how Nigerian newspapers report corruption, focusing on the influence of media ownership, the prominence of investigative journalism, and systemic challenges in coverage. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following research questions: How does media ownership bias affect the frequency and framing of corruption stories? To what extent does investigative journalism contribute to uncovering corruption in Nigeria? What are the key challenges that Nigerian newspapers face in corruption reporting, and how do they impact journalistic independence?

Media ownership bias can significantly impact the frequency and framing of corruption stories, as owners with vested interests or political affiliations may influence editorial decisions to suppress or distort reporting on corruption. For instance, media outlets owned by politicians or business elites may downplay or omit stories of corruption involving their own interests while amplifying stories of corruption involving their political opponents. This can result in a skewed public narrative, where certain types of corruption are overemphasized while others are ignored, ultimately undermining the media's watchdog role and the public's right to know.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Corruption

Corruption, as a concept, has been widely debated across disciplines, with various definitions offered depending on the context. Corruption is seen as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain." This definition captures the essence of corruption in both public and private sectors, where individuals in positions of authority misuse their power for personal benefits. Corruption can take many forms, including bribery, embezzlement, fraud, and nepotism, and its effects are particularly damaging in developing countries like Nigeria, where weak institutions and poor governance structures create fertile grounds for corrupt practices.

Corruption in Nigeria is systemic and embedded within the country's political, economic, and social fabric. This systemic nature makes it difficult to address through traditional means, requiring more innovative approaches such as investigative journalism to expose and curtail it. Corruption persists in Nigeria due to a combination of factors, including the lack of transparency, weak legal frameworks, and public apathy towards anti-corruption efforts.

Concept of Investigative Journalism

Investigative journalism is a specialised branch of journalism that involves in-depth research and reporting to uncover hidden truths, particularly in relation to corruption, abuse of power, or other forms of wrongdoing. Kaplan (2013) defines investigative journalism as "a form of journalism that seeks to uncover facts and information that are of public interest, often involving the exposure of corruption or abuses of power." This type of journalism requires persistence, extensive research, and a commitment to truth, even in the face of threats or intimidation. Oberiri (2016) argue that investigative journalism is essential in the fight against corruption, as it provides the public with vital information that would otherwise remain hidden. In the Nigerian context, investigative journalism has played a key role in uncovering high-profile corruption cases, particularly those involving public officials and politicians. However, the practice faces significant challenges, including political interference, censorship, and limited financial resources for conducting in-depth investigations (Dogari & Shem, 2017).

Concept of Media Ownership

Media ownership refers to the control and influence exerted by individuals or organisations that own media outlets, such as newspapers, television stations, and online platforms. According to Oberiri (2016), media ownership plays a crucial role in determining the editorial policies and content of news organisations, including how corruption is reported. In Nigeria, media ownership is often concentrated in the hands of a few wealthy individuals or corporations, many of whom have close ties to political elites. Komolafe, Nkereuwem, and Kalu-Amah (2019) assert that the concentration of media ownership in Nigeria creates a conflict of interest, where owners may prioritise their political or economic interests over the public's right to know. This often leads to biased reporting, selective coverage of corruption scandals, or outright suppression of stories that could harm the interests of the media owners. As a result, media ownership in Nigeria has been identified as a significant barrier to the effective reportage of corruption.

The Role of Investigative Journalism in Exposing Corruption in Nigeria

Investigative journalism has been a vital tool in exposing corruption in Nigeria, especially in high-profile cases involving politicians and public officials. Newspapers such as *Premium Times* and *The Punch* have been at the forefront of this effort, publishing detailed reports on corruption scandals that have led to public outcry and, in some cases, legal action (Edmond & Wilson, 2018). Investigative journalism plays a crucial role by bringing hidden issues to light, holding public officials accountable, and fostering a culture of transparency in governance (Suntai & Shem, 2018).

Despite its significance, investigative journalism in Nigeria faces several challenges. According to Kaplan (2013), one of the biggest hurdles is the lack of financial support. Conducting thorough investigations requires resources, including funds for travel, access to information, and legal protection. Many Nigerian newspapers, however, struggle with limited revenue streams, especially in the age of declining print sales and competition from online platforms (Justine & Egere, 2018).

Political interference is another significant challenge. Journalists who expose corruption often face threats, intimidation, and even physical harm from those in power. The absence of strong legal frameworks to protect journalists exacerbates this problem, leaving many investigative reporters vulnerable to reprisals. This environment of fear and uncertainty can lead to self-censorship, where journalists avoid reporting on sensitive issues to protect themselves and their families (Mustapha-Koiki & Ayedun-Aluma, 2013). Moreover, investigative journalism in Nigeria is hampered by the lack of access to information. Although the Freedom of Information Act was passed in 2011, its implementation has been inconsistent, with many government agencies reluctant to release information that could expose corrupt practices (Oberiri, 2016). Without access to critical documents and data, journalists find it difficult to substantiate their reports, weakening the impact of their investigations.

Public support for investigative journalism is another key factor in its effectiveness. According to Sowunmi, Raufu, Oketokun, Salako, and Usifoh (2010), when the public is engaged and informed, there is greater pressure on corrupt officials to resign or face justice. However, public apathy, fuelled by a long history of unaddressed corruption, often weakens the impact of investigative journalism. People may become desensitised to corruption scandals, viewing them as an inevitable part of Nigerian society rather than issues that can be resolved through collective action.

In summary, investigative journalism has proven to be a powerful tool in the fight against corruption in Nigeria. However, its effectiveness is undermined by political interference, limited financial resources, poor access to information, and public apathy. To strengthen investigative journalism, there is a need for more robust legal protections for journalists, increased funding for investigations, and greater public engagement in anti-corruption efforts (Kaplan, 2013).

The Impact of Media Ownership on Corruption Reportage in Nigerian Newspapers

Media ownership has a profound impact on how corruption is reported in Nigerian newspapers. Most media outlets in Nigeria are privately owned, and the interests of their owners often shape editorial decisions (Oberiri, 2016). Owners with political connections may use their newspapers to protect their allies or attack their rivals, leading to biased reporting on corruption issues (Komolafe, Nkereuwem & Kalu-Amah, 2019).

In many cases, media owners exert direct control over the content of their newspapers, dictating which stories should be covered and how they should be presented. This influence is particularly evident in the coverage of corruption scandals, where certain stories are either downplayed or ignored altogether to avoid offending powerful individuals or organisations. Such practices undermine the credibility of the media and prevent the public from receiving accurate and unbiased information.

The concentration of media ownership also limits the diversity of perspectives in corruption reportage. With a small number of individuals or corporations controlling a significant portion of the media landscape, there is a lack of alternative voices that can challenge the dominant narratives being presented. This homogeneity in media coverage reduces the potential for investigative journalism to uncover corruption and hold public officials accountable (Oberiri, 2016).

In addition to political interests, media owners in Nigeria often have economic stakes that influence their newspapers' editorial policies. For example, owners may have business dealings with government officials or private companies that they are reluctant to criticise in their publications (Komolafe et al., 2019). This conflict of interest further compromises the independence of the press and its ability to report objectively on corruption.

However, not all Nigerian newspapers are subject to these pressures. Some independent media outlets have demonstrated a commitment to ethical journalism and have reported on corruption without fear or favour. These newspapers often rely on external funding or donor support to maintain their independence, but such funding sources are not always reliable or sustainable (Kaplan, 2013).

The role of online media in diversifying corruption reportage in Nigeria cannot be overlooked. With the rise of social media and online news platforms, there are now more avenues for reporting on corruption outside of traditional newspapers. These platforms offer greater freedom from the influence of media owners and provide opportunities for independent journalists to publish their work (Suntai & Shem, 2018). However, the credibility of online media is often questioned, as the lack of editorial oversight can lead to the spread of misinformation and unverified reports.

In conclusion, media ownership significantly affects how corruption is reported in Nigerian newspapers. The political and economic interests of media owners can lead to biased reporting, selective coverage, and a lack of diversity in perspectives. To ensure more objective and comprehensive corruption reportage, there is a need for greater media independence and more support for investigative journalism.

Empirical Review

Corruption reportage in Nigerian newspapers has been widely studied by scholars both within and outside the country. The empirical studies reviewed in this section provide insight into investigative journalism, media ownership, and the challenges faced in reporting corruption.

Asemah and Asogwa (2012), in their study titled *Investigative Journalism, Corruption and Sustainable Development in Nigeria: A Critical Overview*, aimed to examine the role of investigative journalism in promoting transparency and good governance. Using the Social Responsibility Theory as their framework, they employed a content analysis approach to evaluate corruption reportage in selected Nigerian newspapers. Their findings revealed that while investigative journalism has exposed several corrupt practices, government interference and poor journalistic ethics hinder its effectiveness. The study concluded that a free and responsible press is crucial for Nigeria's development.

Burgh et al. (2008), in their book *Investigative Journalism*, explored global investigative journalism practices, with a focus on their impact on governance and corruption exposure. Using a comparative case study method, they analysed investigative journalism in different countries, including Nigeria. Their findings highlighted that investigative journalism is most effective in societies with strong legal protections for journalists. They concluded that legal reforms and institutional support are necessary for investigative journalism to thrive in Nigeria.

Dogari and Shem (2017), in *Exploring the Issues of Investigative Journalism in Nigeria: A Narrative Review*, sought to identify the challenges confronting investigative journalists in Nigeria. Adopting Agenda Setting Theory, they conducted a qualitative narrative review of existing literature. Their findings indicated that investigative journalists face intimidation, financial constraints, and a lack of access to government documents. They concluded that the protection of journalists and improved funding for investigative reporting are essential.

Kaplan (2013), in *Global Investigative Journalism: Strategies for Support*, examined strategies for sustaining investigative journalism worldwide. Using the Institutional Theory. His findings revealed that countries with strong institutional frameworks for press freedom tend to have more effective investigative journalism. He concluded that Nigeria must strengthen its institutional framework to support investigative journalism.

Komolafe, Nkereuwem, and Kalu-Amah (2019), in *Corruption Reporting in the Media in the 2015 Nigerian Elections: Setting the Agenda or Toeing the Line*, aimed to assess how Nigerian newspapers reported corruption during the 2015 elections. Employing the Agenda Setting Theory, they conducted a quantitative content analysis of major Nigerian newspapers. Their findings showed that while independent newspapers exposed corruption cases, politically affiliated newspapers were selective in their coverage. The study concluded that media ownership significantly affects the objectivity of corruption reportage.

Komolafe, Nkereuwem, and Kalu-Amah (2019), in another study titled *Media Ownership and the Coverage of Corporate Scandals in Nigeria*, examined the influence of media ownership on corporate scandal reportage. Using the Political Economy of Media Theory, they analysed the coverage of corporate scandals in Nigerian newspapers through a mixed-method approach. Their findings revealed that newspapers owned by business conglomerates downplayed corruption cases involving their owners. They concluded that editorial independence is critical to objective corruption reporting.

Mustapha-Koiki and Ayedun-Aluma (2013), in *Techniques of Investigative Reporting: Public's Right to Know and Individual's Right to Privacy*, assessed the ethical dilemmas in investigative journalism. Using the Social Responsibility Theory, they conducted interviews with Nigerian investigative journalists. Their findings indicated that while journalists strive to expose corruption, ethical concerns about privacy and defamation laws often restrict their investigations. The study concluded that legal reforms are needed to balance press freedom and individual privacy rights.

Omojola (2010), in *Mass Media Interest and Corruption in Nigeria*, examined the role of the media in shaping public perception of corruption. Using the Framing Theory, he conducted a survey of

newspaper readers across Nigeria. His findings showed that newspapers play a significant role in shaping public attitudes toward corruption, but sensational reporting sometimes undermines credibility. He concluded that ethical journalism practices must be upheld to maintain public trust.

Suntai and Shem (2018), in *Tackling Institutional Corruption through Investigative Journalism*, analysed how investigative journalism contributes to anti-corruption efforts. Using the Institutional Theory, they conducted a case study of high-profile corruption cases exposed by investigative journalists. Their findings revealed that while investigative journalism has led to policy reforms, a lack of legal protection for journalists remains a major challenge. The study concluded that legal frameworks need to be strengthened to protect investigative journalists.

Uche (2017), in *Electoral Corruption in Nigeria: The Role of the Media*, assessed how Nigerian newspapers report electoral corruption. Using the Media Agenda Setting Theory, he conducted a content analysis of election-related corruption reports in major newspapers. His findings indicated that while newspapers exposed electoral corruption, the coverage was often influenced by the political affiliations of newspaper owners. The study concluded that regulatory frameworks should be implemented to ensure unbiased election coverage.

Gaps in the Literature

The reviewed studies have contributed significantly to understanding corruption reportage in Nigeria; however, certain gaps remain. Asemah and Asogwa (2012) highlighted the importance of investigative journalism but did not examine how digital media has influenced corruption exposure. Burgh et al. (2008) focused on global investigative journalism but did not explore Nigeria's unique challenges. Dogari and Shem (2017) identified the barriers to investigative journalism but did not suggest practical solutions for overcoming them. Kaplan (2013) provided global strategies for investigative journalism sustainability but did not address how they can be adapted to Nigeria. Komolafe et al. (2019) revealed media bias in corruption reportage but did not propose regulatory mechanisms to ensure balanced reporting. Mustapha-Koiki and Ayedun-Aluma (2013) discussed ethical dilemmas but did not provide empirical data on their impact on investigative journalism. Omojola (2010) assessed public perception of corruption reportage but did not explore how digital platforms influence audience engagement with corruption reports. Suntai and Shem (2018) examined investigative journalism's impact on anti-corruption policies but did not measure its long-term effectiveness. Uche (2017) focused on electoral corruption but did not assess other forms of corruption, such as bureaucratic or financial corruption.

This research explicitly addresses Komolafe et al.'s (2019) call for regulatory mechanisms by proposing reforms for media ownership transparency. By examining how ownership structures influence corruption reportage and advocating for policies that promote editorial independence, this study seeks to contribute practical recommendations for ensuring balanced and unbiased corruption reporting in Nigeria. Additionally, it aims to fill gaps in existing literature by exploring the role of digital media in investigative journalism and evaluating the long-term effectiveness of corruption reportage on governance and policy reforms.

Theoretical Framework

Agenda-Setting Theory

The agenda-setting theory, first introduced by McCombs and Shaw in 1972, argues that the media has the power to influence public perception by selecting which issues to cover and how to present them. In the context of corruption reportage, Nigerian newspapers can shape the public's understanding of corruption by choosing which scandals to highlight and which ones to downplay (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

The media's agenda-setting function is particularly relevant in the fight against corruption. By giving prominence to corruption scandals, newspapers can raise public awareness and create pressure on government officials to take action. Conversely, when newspapers choose to ignore or minimise corruption stories, it sends a signal to the public that such issues are not important, reducing the likelihood of accountability (Sowunmi et al., 2010).

The agenda-setting theory also suggests that the media's focus on certain types of corruption, such as political corruption involving high-profile individuals, can skew public perceptions of the problem. For example, if newspapers primarily report on corruption involving politicians, the public may come to believe that political corruption is the most prevalent form of corruption, even though other types, such as bureaucratic or petty corruption, may be just as widespread (Oberiri, 2016).

In Nigeria, the agenda-setting role of the media is complicated by the influence of media ownership. As discussed earlier, media owners often have their own political or economic interests, which can shape the newspaper's agenda. When media owners have ties to corrupt officials, they may direct their newspapers to downplay or ignore certain stories, limiting the public's exposure to information that could hold these officials accountable. In conclusion, the agenda-setting theory provides a useful framework for understanding how Nigerian newspapers can influence public perceptions of corruption. By highlighting certain stories and downplaying others, the media plays a key role in shaping the national discourse on corruption. However, this agenda-setting function is often constrained by the political and economic interests of media owners, which can limit the effectiveness of the media in promoting transparency and accountability (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employs a descriptive research design to investigate how Nigerian newspapers report on corruption. A descriptive design is appropriate because it allows for a systematic and comprehensive examination of existing patterns in the reportage of corruption, including the frequency of coverage, types of corruption reported, and the framing of corruption stories. This design enables the researcher to capture and analyse data from selected Nigerian newspapers,

providing insights into trends in corruption reporting without altering the behaviour of the media organisations being studied.

The newspapers used were purposively selected based on their track records in corruption reportage, their width coverage among other peculiar characteristics that distinguishes them.

Data Collection

Data was collected through content analysis, which is an effective method for systematically examining communication materials such as newspaper articles. The content analysis focused on selected Nigerian newspapers over a specified period (2018-2024) with particular attention given to articles that report on corruption. Key variables included the frequency of corruption-related stories, the themes covered, the tone of reporting (neutral, positive, or negative), and the prominence of articles (front-page stories, editorials, etc.). Secondary data sources, including academic articles, government reports, and anti-corruption publications, were also used to provide a broader context for the analysis.

Sampling Strategy

Purposive sampling was employed to select five prominent national newspapers in Nigeria for this study: The Punch, Premium Times, ThisDay, Vanguard, and The Guardian. These newspapers were chosen due to their extensive national reach, strong reputation for investigative reporting, and consistent coverage of corruption-related issues. Their significance in Nigeria's media landscape and history of publishing in-depth investigative reports on corruption scandals make them well-suited for this analysis. The study examined newspaper articles published between January 2018 and June 2024. Articles were identified using targeted keyword searches, including "corruption," "embezzlement," "fraud," "scandal," and "misappropriation" from the newspapers' online archives. To ensure a balanced representation of corruption reporting, 50 articles were selected from each newspaper, resulting in a total sample size of 250 articles. The selected articles encompassed a wide range of corruption cases, including political corruption, corporate corruption, and public sector corruption. This method ensured that the sample reflected the diversity of corruption coverage in Nigerian newspapers, enabling a comprehensive analysis of investigative journalism practices and media ownership influences.

Data Analysis

The study employed both quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques. Quantitative analysis involved counting the frequency of corruption-related articles, categorising the types of corruption reported, and measuring the prominence of these stories in terms of headline placement, word count, and page location. Qualitative analysis was used to examine the themes and framing of the corruption stories, focusing on how corruption was portrayed and the narratives constructed around it. The data was analysed using descriptive statistics and thematic coding, with the results presented in tables and charts to aid interpretation.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to all ethical guidelines in conducting media research. First, the research ensured that all data collected from newspapers was publicly available, thereby not violating any confidentiality agreements. Secondly, credit was given to all sources, ensuring that there was no plagiarism. Additionally, the research respected the intellectual property rights of authors, journalists, and media outlets by properly citing all materials used in the study. No confidential information was obtained, and there were no interactions with human participants, which negated the need for informed consent. However, the research acknowledged potential bias in media ownership and the ethical responsibility of journalists in reporting corruption.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This chapter presents a discussion of the findings derived from both quantitative and qualitative analyses of corruption reportage in five selected Nigerian newspapers: *The Punch*, *Premium Times*, *ThisDay*, *Vanguard*, and *The Guardian*. The quantitative analysis involved counting the frequency of corruption-related articles, categorising types of corruption, and measuring the prominence of these stories in terms of headline placement, word count, and page location. Qualitative analysis focused on examining the themes and framing of corruption stories, particularly how corruption was portrayed and the narratives surrounding it. The results are discussed in line with the study's objectives and related literature.

Frequency and Prominence of Corruption Reporting

The quantitative analysis revealed that corruption was frequently reported across all five newspapers, with political corruption being the most reported form. Table 1 shows the number of corruption-related articles published by each newspaper from January 2018 to June 2024.

Table 1: Frequency of Corruption-Related Articles by Newspaper (2018 - 2024)

Newspaper	Number of Corruption Articles	Percentage of Total News Coverage
The Punch	243	30%
Premium Times	230	28%
ThisDay	200	25%
Vanguard	215	27%
The Guardian	195	24%

The Punch published the highest number of corruption-related articles, accounting for 30% of its total coverage. *Premium Times* followed closely, with 28% of its content focusing on corruption. The analysis also revealed that most corruption-related articles were placed prominently in the newspapers. Table 2 illustrates the prominence of corruption stories based on headline placement, word count, and page location.

Table 2: Prominence of Corruption Stories (2018 - 2024)

Newspaper	Headline Stories (%)	Above-the-Fold Placement (%)	Average Word Count
The Punch	45%	60%	800 words
Premium Times	50%	65%	750 words
ThisDay	40%	55%	700 words
Vanguard	43%	58%	720 words
The Guardian	38%	50%	690 words

The data show that corruption stories were often given prominent placement, with *Premium Times* and *The Punch* featuring more than 50% of their corruption reports as headline stories. This highlights the importance of corruption as a subject of national interest in Nigeria.

Types of Corruption Reported

The newspapers covered various forms of corruption, but political corruption was the most reported. Other types included corporate corruption, public sector embezzlement, and electoral fraud. Table 3 categorises the different types of corruption reported in each newspaper.

Table 3: Types of Corruption Reported (2018 - 2024)

Type of Corruption	The Punch	Premium Times	ThisDay	Vanguard	The Guardian
Political Corruption	140	130	110	120	105
Corporate Corruption	50	45	60	55	45
Public Sector Embezzlement	30	35	20	25	30
Electoral Fraud	23	20	15	20	15

Political corruption dominated the reportage, with *The Punch* and *Premium Times* focusing heavily on cases involving public officials and political elites. For instance, *Premium Times* (24th March 2022) reported extensively on a former governor implicated in a corruption scandal. However, cases of petty corruption and bureaucratic corruption were under-reported, suggesting a media focus on high-profile cases.

Themes and Framing in Corruption Reporting

Qualitative analysis through thematic coding identified several recurring themes in corruption reportage, including political corruption, corporate malfeasance, and systemic corruption in public institutions. Table 4 outlines the major themes that emerged from the analysis.

Table 4: Major Themes in Corruption Reporting

Theme	The Punch	Premium Times	ThisDay	Vanguard	The Guardian
Political Corruption	140	125	110	115	100
Corporate Corruption	50	45	55	60	45
Public Sector Embezzlement	30	35	20	25	30
Electoral Fraud	23	25	15	15	10

The newspapers generally framed corruption as a systemic issue threatening national development. *The Guardian* (5th June 2021) published an editorial linking corruption to Nigeria's poor economic performance, while *Vanguard* (10th May 2023) highlighted the detrimental impact of corruption on public services, particularly in health and education.

Role of Investigative Journalism

Investigative journalism emerged as a crucial factor in exposing corruption. Newspapers like *Premium Times* and *The Punch* demonstrated a strong commitment to in-depth investigations. For instance, *Premium Times* (19th July 2020) uncovered a major scandal in the oil industry, revealing illegal deals involving government officials and oil magnates. Table 5 provides an overview of key investigative reports.

Table 5: Investigative Journalism and Corruption Reporting

Newspaper	Number of Investigative Reports	Major Scandals Exposed	Challenges Faced
Premium Times	50	Oil sector corruption (July 2020)	Threats, lack of access to data
The Punch	45	Ghost worker scandal in public sector (Feb 2023)	Financial constraints, self-censorship
ThisDay	30	Corporate tax evasion (November 2021)	Political pressure

Investigative journalism was instrumental in exposing corruption but faced significant challenges. Journalists frequently encountered threats, limited access to information, and financial constraints, which inhibited the depth and scope of their investigations. For instance, *The Punch* (10th June 2023) reported that many journalists operate under the threat of violence, which often leads to self-censorship.

Impact of Media Ownership

The study found that media ownership played a significant role in determining how corruption was reported. Politically affiliated newspapers were less likely to report on corruption cases involving

their owners' political allies. For example, *ThisDay* avoided in-depth coverage of scandals involving politicians linked to the newspaper's ownership. In contrast, independent outlets such as *Premium Times* and *The Punch* provided more comprehensive coverage. Table 6 illustrates how media ownership influenced reporting.

Table 6: Influence of Media Ownership on Corruption Reporting

Newspaper	Political Affiliation	Frequency of Reporting on Politically Sensitive Corruption Cases
The Punch	Independent	High
Premium Times	Independent	High
ThisDay	Politically Affiliated	Low
Vanguard	Politically Affiliated	Moderate
The Guardian	Independent	Moderate

Newspapers with political affiliations, such as *ThisDay*, often downplayed corruption cases that involved individuals connected to the ownership. This confirms the findings of previous studies (Oberiri, 2016; Komolafe, Nkereuwem & Kalu-Amah, 2019), which argue that media ownership affects editorial independence.

Online Media Platforms and Corruption Reporting

Online media platforms, particularly *Premium Times*, provided a significant alternative to traditional newspapers by offering more diverse perspectives on corruption. *Premium Times* frequently published stories on corruption that traditional newspapers did not, particularly those involving high-profile political figures. However, some online platforms raised concerns regarding their credibility and reliability, as they often lack the editorial oversight present in traditional media. Table 7 summarises the contribution of online platforms to corruption reporting.

Table 7: Role of Online Media in Corruption Reporting

Platform	Major Corruption Cases Reported	Challenges
Premium Times	Political corruption (July 2020)	Threats, editorial constraints
Sahara Reporters	Electoral fraud (May 2021)	Lack of editorial oversight, credibility concerns

While online platforms are valuable for diversifying corruption reportage, the credibility of some outlets remains a concern. Nevertheless, *Premium Times* maintained rigorous editorial standards, making it a key player in corruption reportage in Nigeria.

Discussion

The quantitative analysis of corruption reportage revealed that political corruption was overwhelmingly the most reported type across all five newspapers. As seen in Table 3, *The Punch* and *Premium Times* reported 140 and 130 articles on political corruption, respectively, constituting a significant portion of their coverage of corruption. This focus on political corruption is consistent with the findings of a study by Olayinka (2020), which emphasised that political corruption remains the most discussed form due to its prominence in national discourse and its impact on governance. Political corruption, often involving high-ranking public officials, attracts public attention due to the potential implications on national development and governance, a trend reflected in the data from this study. For instance, *Premium Times* (24th March 2022) extensively covered a former governor implicated in a corruption scandal, showcasing the media's priority in exposing cases of elite political figures.

Other forms of corruption, such as corporate corruption and public sector embezzlement, were also reported but to a lesser extent. Corporate corruption articles ranged between 45 to 60 per newspaper, with *ThisDay* recording the highest number of 60 articles. However, these figures remain lower than those for political corruption, suggesting a media focus on high-profile political cases rather than corporate misdeeds. This trend aligns with the work of Komolafe, Nkereuwem, and Kalu-Amah (2019), who noted that media organizations often devote less coverage to corporate scandals due to the intricate relationships between corporate interests and the political elite. The under-reporting of corporate and public sector corruption may thus be a reflection of the complex power dynamics within Nigerian society, where business and politics often intersect.

While political corruption dominated the reportage, there was a notable gap in the coverage of petty corruption and bureaucratic inefficiencies, which are pervasive at lower levels of government. The limited reporting on electoral fraud (with *ThisDay* covering only 15 articles) raises concerns about the media's role in addressing the full spectrum of corruption. Scholars such as Uche (2017) have argued that focusing solely on high-profile cases might obscure the more endemic forms of corruption that affect everyday citizens. One possible explanation for this gap is resource constraints—investigating petty corruption requires significant on-the-ground reporting, which many news organizations may lack the funding or manpower to sustain. Additionally, editorial bias may contribute to this trend, as petty corruption lacks the sensational appeal of elite scandals, making it less likely to drive readership and advertising revenue.

The agenda-setting theory provides a useful lens through which to understand this pattern of corruption reportage. By prioritizing high-profile cases, Nigerian newspapers shape public discourse and influence which forms of corruption receive the most attention. The consistent focus on political corruption reinforces the perception that corruption is primarily an issue among the elite, potentially downplaying its systemic nature. This selective emphasis suggests that the media not only reflects public concerns but actively constructs narratives that define the boundaries of corruption discourse. Expanding media coverage to include bureaucratic inefficiencies and everyday corruption would provide a more comprehensive understanding of corruption's impact on Nigerian society, fostering more informed public discourse and policy responses.

Summary

This study examined the role of investigative journalism in exposing corruption, the impact of media ownership on corruption reporting, and the challenges faced by Nigerian newspapers in reporting corruption cases. The findings reveal that independent media outlets, such as *Premium Times* and *The Punch*, play a critical role in uncovering corruption scandals through investigative journalism. However, media ownership significantly influences how corruption is reported, with politically affiliated newspapers showing bias in coverage and often avoiding reports that implicate their proprietors or political allies. Additionally, journalists and media organisations face numerous challenges, including threats, intimidation, limited access to official documents, and financial constraints, all of which hinder objective and in-depth corruption reporting.

Conclusion

The study concludes that investigative journalism remains a powerful tool in exposing corruption in Nigeria, but its effectiveness is constrained by external pressures, particularly from political and economic interests. Findings revealed that media ownership significantly influences the frequency and framing of corruption stories, often leading to selective reporting. While independent newspapers such as *Premium Times* have played a crucial role in anti-corruption efforts, political affiliations of media proprietors have limited press freedom and objectivity in coverage. Additionally, threats to journalists, restricted access to official records, and financial difficulties continue to undermine effective corruption reportage. These findings address the research question on how media ownership bias affects corruption reportage and highlight the broader systemic challenges faced by Nigerian journalism. Strengthening legal frameworks, ensuring editorial independence, and improving journalists' security are essential for fostering a free and robust press that can hold power to account.

Recommendations

1. **Strengthening Investigative Journalism:** Media organizations should prioritize investigative journalism by providing adequate funding, continuous training, and legal support for journalists. Collaborative journalism initiatives between independent and mainstream media outlets should be encouraged to enhance investigative depth and reduce editorial bias. Establishing independent investigative funds, similar to international models like the *International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ)*, could provide financial backing for corruption reporting.
2. **Regulating Media Ownership Influence:** The Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and other regulatory bodies should enforce policies that promote editorial independence. A mandatory public disclosure of media ownership structures through Nigeria's Broadcasting Code should be implemented to increase transparency and reduce politically motivated bias in corruption reportage. Additionally, anti-monopoly regulations should be strengthened to prevent excessive media control by political figures and business elites.
3. **Enhancing Journalists' Safety and Access to Information:** Stronger legal protections should be enacted to safeguard journalists from threats, intimidation, and harassment.

Security protocols should be developed, including emergency response mechanisms for journalists reporting on high-risk corruption cases. Furthermore, the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act should be more effectively enforced, ensuring government agencies comply with disclosure requirements. Establishing an independent media ombudsman to oversee FOI compliance and address press freedom violations would further enhance accountability.

By implementing these recommendations, the Nigerian media can more effectively expose corruption, promote transparency, and strengthen democratic accountability.

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