



Tackling Institutional Corruption through Investigative Journalism

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Abstract

Corruption has become the bane of national growth and international business transactions. It has permeated both the developed and developing nations and Nigeria is not exempt. In Nigeria specifically, corruption has permeated virtually every sector of the economy - from the public to private sectors, from religious leaders to the congregation. So, devastating is the effect of corruption that it has assumed the metaphor a hydra-headed "cancer worm" that has ravaged the fabrics of our societal institutions and the psyche of stakeholders of various sectors. This situation has generated great concern among the citizenry and motivated this write up. The purpose is to explore the subject and proffer ways by which corruption could be effectively tackled. Adopting content analysis (corpus) as an instrument for generating and analyzing conceptual and empirical data, and using Social Responsibility theory as a framework, the writer has come up with the view that investigative journalism, if properly deployed could serve as arsenal to mitigate corruption if not stifle it completely. The paper suggests among other things that, where a matter that necessitates investigation is expedient or crucial, but accessing vicarious data proves critical, daunting or hazardous, an investigative, the journalist could resort to syndicating with security agents to elicit cover, but never divulge his scoop.

Keywords: Corruption; Investigation; Syndicating; Brown envelope syndrome

Introduction

Corruption has over the years become a subject of concern in media studies and other fields such as the economy, political science among others. It is obvious that there are several reasons that fuel this mounting research interest. The first reason is to understand the nature and causes of corruption because it is impossible to investigate and combat corruption without the full knowledge of how it operates. The second

reason is to strategize how to minimize or, if possible, totally eradicate corrupt practices.

The word "corruption" is, more often than not, associated with third world countries where nepotism, bribery and misappropriation of funds are gradually becoming an acceptable culture in both public and private sectors. However, no country can be said to be corruption immune because the phenomenon is ubiquitous. It is a fact that the bureaucratic bottle-necks in institutions of African countries (Nigeria inclusive) have immensely contributed to the underdevelopment of these countries; thereby leaving their populace vulnerable. Corruption is one phenomenon that is currently pervasive in the Nigerian financial system; and virtually all other sectors.

Nigeria, which is one of Africa's most populated and productive countries, is strategically located in an advantageous position to exploit its potentials. Therefore, the fight against corruption must be one of the topmost priorities of the Government at all levels and investigative journalism has a crucial role to play in this fight [1].

Theoretical Framework

Amidst the theories that abound in the communication corpus, the researcher considers the social responsibility theory and the agenda-setting theory as the appropriate or suitable framework for this study. The social responsibility theory which was propounded by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm in the mid-19th century rests on the notion that media outfits and journalists should accept and fulfil certain obligations to society. This automatically mandates journalists to investigate corrupt practices and also to ensure accuracy, objectivity and balance in discharging their duties. To put it in another way, suffice it to say that investigating social ills such as institutional corruption among others is a social obligation to every responsible journalist. Therefore, it is axiomatic to say that there is a nexus between the selected theory and this study since corruption is the bane of social growth and social responsibility theory imposes on a crusading journalist the task of a garrison. Also, the watchdog function that the media is saddled with is subsumed under social responsibility.

Conversely, Asemah [2] notes that the agenda theory was propounded by Maxwell McCombs and Donald L. The theory says the media (especially the news media) are not always successful at telling us what to think but are quite successful at telling us what to think about. The theory argues that the media are saddled with the responsibility of monitoring events happening in the society and reporting such events to the members of the society. This simply connotes that the media are the watchdogs of the society. To put another way, the mass media are responsible for drawing our attention to salient issues in the society via news and other informative programmes. In drawing our attention to these issues balance, objectivity and fairness must be considered on the side of the media.

The nexus between this study and the agenda-setting theory is that investigative journalism has a propensity to unravel salient issues which form part of public agenda.

Conceptual Explication of Corruption

There is no single and clear definition of corruption because it is multifaceted [3]. Notwithstanding, this work recommends that corruption can be defined as any form of a deliberate effort by officials in public or private sector to illegitimately acquire unmerited riches through abusing their official authority. This doesn't mean that corruption is only limited to officials in public and private sectors because even an unemployed individual could be corrupt. In that context, therefore, corruption is any insincere behaviour that undermines the ethical standard of a society.

Asemah and Asogwa [1] describe a corrupt system as a system characterized by infrastructural decay, lack of patriotism, subjugation of collective interests, improper implementation of policies and programmes and a disconnect between vision and its realization. However, World Bank in Begovic [4] sees corruption as the "abuse of public office for private gain." From this definition, it would be erroneous for one to assume that corruption doesn't exist in the private sector because it does exist, more especially in large private enterprises [5].

Transparency International, cited in Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development Glossary, maintains that "Corruption involves behaviour in which officials in the public sector, whether politicians or civil servants, improperly and unlawfully enrich themselves, or those close to them, by the misuse of the public power entrusted to them. "Corruption in modern societies usually surfaces in two different dimensions which could be individual or institutional. These two facets of corruption have an enormous adverse effect on the development of a democratic society, hence exploring these two areas is of utmost significance to a country like Nigeria that is bedevilled with serious cases of corrupt practice.

According to Thompson [6] "Individual corruption occurs when an institution or its officials receive a benefit that does not serve the institution and provides a service through relationships external to the institution under conditions that

reveal a quid pro quo" motive. Thompson further notes that individual corruption has to do with personal gain or benefit by a public official in exchange for promoting private interests. Perpetrators of individual corruption always have a motive of abusing their official power so as to make personal profits via stealing. Individual corruption is the most common and renowned facet of corruption that is given priority in Nigeria.

Institutional corruption is one facet of corruption that is enormously hazardous to a democratic society but yet often jettisoned by journalists and anti-corruption agencies. The reason for that is that priority attention is often given to individual corruption as though it were the only facet of corruption in existence. The term "Institutional corruption" was first coined as a theory by Dennis F Thompson in order to explain a phenomenon that he believed the Congressional ethics rules failed to address. Thompson believed that the congress diverged from its proper purpose not as a result of the lawmakers' wrongdoing but due to the influence of general systemic failures of the legislative process [7].

Dennis Thompson's theory is principally tilted towards differentiating individual corruption from institutional corruption. Newhouse [7] states that Institutional corruption does not necessarily involve individuals who engage in illegal or unethical conduct. Instead, "institutional corruption" in the context of legislative ethics refers to the state of affairs in which political benefits such as campaign contributions, endorsements, organizational support, or media exposure are made available to lawmakers under conditions that, in general, tend to promote private interests at the expense of the legislature's public purpose. Thompson [6] confirms that institutional corruption occurs when an institution or its officials receive a benefit that is directly useful to performing an institutional purpose and systematically provides a service to the benefactor under conditions that tend to undermine procedures that support the primary purposes of the institution.

Thompson's description of institutional corruption can be rephrased thus; institutional corruption is a situation where an institution (private or public) deliberately deviates from the sole aim at which it was established, thereby, betraying the public trust. For instance, if a university was established for the purpose of research and learning and it happens that, that university ended up making a profit its priority, and neglecting the sole purpose for which it was established then that university is institutionally corrupt.

The simplest way to identify institutional corruption is to know the purpose of an institution and to ascertain whether the institution is working towards accomplishing that purpose or not. Newhouse notes that the differences between individual and institutional corruption are:

- The nature of the incentives that cause the institution to deviate from its purpose, and
- Whether the deviation is the result of individual choice or institutional tendency.

It is paramount to note that an institution such as the media, ministry of health or any other organization could be

institutionally corrupt but yet some of its employees might not be corrupt. Investigating institutional corruption, as earlier stated, is often jettisoned by investigative journalists and anti-corruption agencies. Thompson [6] corroborates that:

institutional corruption does not receive the attention it deserves partly because it is so closely (and often unavoidable) related to conduct that is part of the job of a responsible official, the perpetrators are often seen as (and are) respectable officials just trying to do their job, and the legal system and public opinion are more comfortable with condemning wrongdoing that has a corrupt motive. Yet institutional corruption, which is usually built into the routines and practices of organizations, is usually more damaging to the institution and society than individual corruption, which in advanced societies typically consists of isolated acts of misconduct with effects limited in time and scope.

It is obvious that the present state of public institutions in Nigeria is deplorable considering the fact that most of these institutions have deviated from their main purpose of the establishment. Therefore, there is the urgent need to combat this endemic disease called institutional corruption.

Manifestations of corruption

As earlier discussed, corruption is multifaceted; hence it often appears in different forms in an organization. Suntai [8] outlines the following as forms of corruption.

Bribery: This form of corrupt act entails exchange between corrupt parties with the sole aim of gratifying each other's needs.

Fraud: This has to do with the use of deceitful or tricky tactics to cheat others

Embezzlement: It has to do with misappropriation of funds. Here the perpetrator steals from the public treasury with the aim of accumulating riches.

Extortion: This form of corruption is commonly obtainable in the educational sector. Here the perpetrators use coercive means to extract resources from others.

Electoral corruption: This has to do with manipulation in the electoral process. Here election results are rigged while unlucky ones get killed during the process.

Favouritism: This has to do with bias in the distribution of government resources. However, many see it as a natural tendency to favour friends, family, anybody close and trusted [8].

Causes of corruption

There are many causes of corruption in modern societies of which lack of motivation of employees can be considered as one, although Mills argues that "a well-paid public-sector manager will have different personal pressures than a counter clerk or a politician and may still be susceptible to corruption. Notwithstanding, Enste and Heldman [3] maintain that "In investigating the causes of corruption, salaries of public

officials can also play an important role". Supporting the above assertion Van Veldhuizen [9] affirms that higher wages might seem fairer to the bureaucrats, making it morally harder for them to hurt their employer, or the government, by accepting bribes.

Another factor that encourages corruption is lack of free press that would checkmate the excesses of public office holders and politicians. "A high quality, uncensored press sheds light on misuse of power and makes it more difficult to engage in it undetected" [3]. According to Transparency International [10], an independent media is "a vital pillar of national integrity and good governance".

In his view David [11], sees greed as a catalyst that fuels the menace called corruption. Onongha [12] describes greed as an inappropriate mind-set that is linked with a self-centered attitude of acquiring wealth. However, No claims that "Greed based corruption emanates from the insatiable desire to have more than is needed for survival". Noor further notes that actors involved in such corruption, mostly have sufficient means, for areas on able living, but insufficient moral character.

In précis, Afolabi, cited in David [11], outlines the following as the causes of employee theft:

Motivation: Certain habits which predispose individuals to steal include high personal debts, gambling, peer group pressures, excessive use of alcohol or drugs and living far beyond one's means.

Equity: Employees who are exploited by way of poor wage/remuneration are likely to steal. It can be argued however, that corruption cuts across remuneration barriers since among those who started being corrupt early in life, are some who still find it convenient to subsidize their living through fraudulent practices, when they attain higher socioeconomic positions in life.

It is also sad to note that some of the most corrupt individuals in Nigeria are actually the very top public officers who are indeed very well remunerated.

Management attitude: If management encourages god fatherism in the work place, or does not respond to crimes promptly and decisively, corruption will thrive in the organization.

Societal value system: Nigerians accord a lot of respect to material wealth regardless of how it has been acquired. Little attention is paid to morals, and it is often said that if you cannot beat them, join them", it is generally believed that the end justifies the means. Getting a job this days is not the question of merit but of connections. The few among the citizenry who get themselves enriched through foul means are also always under pressure from their friends, and relatives to share out the loot, thereby perpetuating the vicious circles.

Effects of Corruption

Corruption has adverse effect on governance, democracy and the economy of a nation. International Monetary Fund [5]

argues that “corruption reduces public revenue and increases spending; it thus contributes to larger fiscal deficits, making it more difficult for the government to run a sound fiscal policy.

According to Maduegbuna, quoted in Sowunmi et al. [13], the effects of corruption in Nigeria include loss of government revenue, negative national image, poor governance, brain drain, electoral malpractices, poor investment climate, business failure, unemployment and poverty. Judging from the above, it is therefore, sufficient to say that corruption is a contributing factor to the current dwindling nature of Nigeria’s economy which is characterized by high rate of unemployment, inflation, fluctuation of workers’ wages, and continual depression in the value of the naira and the attendant increase in the cost of living which affects the communication industry [2].

Other effects of corruption are:

Insecurity

The lingering inhuman activities by terrorist groups in Nigeria are caused by corrupt actors. This scenario has ignited incessant fear in many Nigerians. Suntai [8] corroborates that corruption causes insecurity of lives and property of the citizens as evident in several Boko Haram attacks.

Frightens investors

Naturally no reasonable investor would like to spend in an environment that has prevalent cases of corrupt practices. In support of the above, Stoppel, cited in Sowunmi et al. [13], avers that corruption worsens the investment climate, and undermines competitiveness of national economies. Corruption’s impact on foreign investment is considered to be particularly harmful for a developing economy.

Conceptualizing Investigative Reporting

It is axiomatic to say that investigative journalism became renowned in 1972, when two reporters from the Washington Post, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, alongside their mysterious informant, Deep Throat filled the pages of the Washington post with facts of the Watergate Burglary, which led to the resignation of Richard Nixon who was one time the president of the United States of America. Although, Nwabueze [14] argues that the investigative journalists exist since the muckraking era in the late 19th and 20th century.

Investigative reporting is a type of specialized reporting that deals with methodical process of fact-finding. This kind of reporting is tilted towards unraveling hidden facts that are of enormous significance to society. To this backdrop Asemah and Asogwa [1] aver that “investigative journalism is key to democratic governance and national development for developing countries”.

According to Story-based Inquiry, an Investigative Journalism Handbook published by UNESCO, “Investigative journalism involves exposing to the public matters that are

concealed—either deliberately by someone in a position of power, or accidentally, behind a chaotic mass of facts and circumstances that obscure understanding. It requires using both secret and open sources and documents.”

Investigative reporting has to do with exposing wrongdoing, uncovering violations of law, regulations, codes of standards, or even common sense or decency. The focus is not only on institutional wrongs but also on the persons who commit the wrongs. In their view Dogari and Shem describe an investigative journalist thus:

An investigative journalist is a security officer in disguise; he/she can be compared to an officer of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in Nigeria who tolerantly, coherently, logically and systematically gathers information about crime that is hidden from the people but is of benefit to society because such information could bring about social change, thereby changing the course of history.

Therefore, it will be sufficient to say investigative reporting is a herculean task that requires expertise.

Elements of Investigative Reporting

There are some basic elements, that make investigative reporting outstanding and distinct from other forms of specialized reporting. These elements, according to Aretha and Ben, are:

- It is about digging deep into an issue or topic: investigative journalism has to do with in-depth investigating.
- The issue or topic has to be of public interest: “Public interest” means that either a community will be disadvantaged by not knowing this information or will benefit (either materially or through informed decision-making) by knowing it. Sometimes what benefits one community may be of disadvantage to another. Forest dwellers can demand better prices if they know the world market value of trees that logging companies want to fell. However, the logging industry may not want this information spread, as logging will then cost it more. Reporters need a clear sense of what their mission is and whom they serve, and this can involve heated newsroom debates. “Public interest” means the interest of the community affected. It does not have to be the whole country, and, indeed ‘public interest’ may be different from ‘national interest’. That term is sometimes used by governments to justify illegal, dangerous or unethical acts on the excuse of “my country, right or wrong, “– or, indeed, to discourage journalists from reporting on a real problem.
- It is a process, not an event: Investigative journalism never provides an instant story. It goes through rigorous stages of planning and reporting and has to work to accepted standards of accuracy and evidence.
- It is original and proactive: Investigative stories have to be based on the work of the journalist and (where resources permit) his or her team. Although an investigative story can start with a tip, simply reporting the tip, or printing the secret document that is anonymously faxed to you, is not

investigative journalism. In fact, doing such a thing may be both lazy and careless. It carries huge risks, since you have not investigated the identity, bona fides or motives of your source or the authenticity of the evidence. You may end up defaming someone, printing lies or being framed by somebody's agents. Instead, you must develop hypotheses about what the tip means and plan additional research, decide on the relevant questions, and go out to ask them. You must see evidence, and hear and analyze answers for yourself, and go beyond simply verifying the tip.

- It should produce new information or put together previously available information in a new way to reveal its significance: If the information or the understanding of its importance is not new, then, what exactly are you investigating?
- It should be multi-sourced: A single source can provide fascinating revelations and (depending on who the source is) access to insights and information that would otherwise be hidden. However, until the story from that source is crosschecked against other sources – experiential, documentary and human – and its meaning is explored, no real investigation has happened.

Characteristics of a Good Investigative Reporter

Investigative reporting is not a haphazard task; hence it requires competent and outstanding journalists who possess terrific qualities. Nwabueze [14] says one of the qualities of a good investigative reporter is for him/her to be computer literate. It is obvious that journalism practice, in the digital age becomes easier with the advent of the new communication technologies. With sound knowledge of computer an investigative journalist would be able to surf the internet for relevant information correlated to a topic under investigation. Furthermore, computer knowledge would enable an investigative reporter to store, process and retrieve data thereby, making his report confidential until it is published. Nwabueze further notes that an investigative journalist must be objective, analytical, courageous and friendly in the course of discharging his duty because no one knows which source could be most useful.

Forbes, cited in Dogari and Shem [15], outlines the following as some of the qualities a good investigative reporter should have:

Patience

In-depth investigations take time, especially when following dead ends; be prepared to follow all leads, regardless of how insignificant they may appear.

Flexibility

Keep an open mind. You should be able to shift your focus and, if necessary, change the direction of an investigation.

The art of persuasion

Investigative reporting requires a certain approach to ensure that sources reveal information. Over and above general reporting skills, the ability to probe deeply without upsetting or distressing the source is paramount.

Watchdog's guide to investigative reporting

When buttons are pressed too hard investigative journalists have been known to suffer harsh attacks that could potentially ruin their careers. Dealing with politicians, in particular, requires the ability to handle public criticism.

Courage

Threats of physical violence, litigation, sanction and even death are used to deter further investigations. Journalists' families and their acquaintances may be intimidated, and it is not unheard of for women investigative journalists to be threatened with rape. You will need guts to deal with hostile people and situations, as well as the ability to remain calm under fire.

There are basically three forms or types of investigative reporting. These are:

Institutional investigation

This kind of investigative reporting involves probing an institution more especially when such an institution deviates from its purpose thereby betraying public trust.

Bureaucrat investigation

Here the investigative journalist investigates the activities of public servants or politicians more especially when they perceive that they've misused their official authority for personal gain.

Societal Investigation: this form of investigative reporting has to do with the reporter investigating other societal ills such as stealing, burglary, public health, communal clashes, etc.

Techniques to Use in Investigative Journalism

Investigative reporting is not carried out haphazardly hence there are methodical techniques that a reporter needs to adhere to in order to be successful. Coronel (nd) identifies the following as techniques of investigative reporting:

Getting documents or following the paper trail

Documents are at the heart of investigative reporting. Often, they provide proof or clues on the wrongdoing that journalists wish to expose. Documents can corroborate – or disprove – the information that is given by human sources.

Investigative reporters analyze the documents they obtain and use the information they find there to piece their stories

together. It is difficult, although not impossible, to do investigations without some sort of paper trail.

Many journalists begin by unearthing documents even before they do their interviews. This is because documents provide them the background, the context and the detailed information they need so they can ask more probing questions from their sources.

Interviewing sources or following the people's trail

People are as important as papers in a journalistic investigation. They can talk, answer questions – things that documents cannot do. They can provide history, background, colour and anecdotes that spice up a story and give it depth. They also lead to other documents and to other people who may be vital to an investigation.

Journalists talk to a range of sources in the course of their investigations. These could be official sources, such as government or corporate officials or representatives. They could be private individuals involved in the case the journalist is probing.

They could be victims of crime or disaster, human traffickers, drug dealers or arms sellers. Sometimes they are eyewitnesses to a crime, an accident or a calamity.

They could be classmates, neighbours, relatives or friends of a politician who has amassed wealth that cannot be explained by what he earns. Journalistic sources are often also experts – scientists, lawyers, accountants – who can explain the technical issues and make an impartial or disinterested appraisal of available facts.

In short, journalists interview just about anyone who can give information on the subject they are investigating.

Using computers and the internet or following the electronic trail

Increasingly, investigative journalists are using the Internet to do research on just about any topic they are investigating. The Internet, with its vast resources, is a mine of information. Familiarity with online research techniques is now a requisite for investigators, even for those working in countries where computer and Internet access is minimal.

In addition, journalists have used email to correspond with sources in government or the private sector. They have also used electronic or digital communications (including SMS or Skype or Google Talk) to receive information from sources who wish to remain anonymous or who find it dangerous to meet with journalists face to face.

Computer databases that contain a lot of information are also now part of the investigative journalists' take. Reporters have analyzed trends and patterns from available databases from companies or from government and used these as building blocks for their stories. Sometimes journalists

construct those databases themselves, based on information obtained from documents.

Doing fieldwork

Often there is no substitute for the journalist getting her hands dirty and going to the field to do research. Investigative journalists have gone to the scenes of disaster, whether it is to examine an area that has been destroyed by fire or devastated by a toxic waste spill from a mining company.

They have visited or even lived for a time in communities to do reports on victims of various forms of exploitation – such as poor villages where women are forced to find jobs in the cities and end up as sex workers, factories where poorly paid immigrant workers are forced to labour, or underground mine tunnels where workers risk their lives.

Using Investigative Journalism to Combat Institutional Corruption: An Agenda for Journalist

Syndicating strategies are an effective instrument in investigating institutional corruption more especially with the current advancement in Information Communication Technologies. To syndicate is to network with other relevant information sources whether physically or electronically with the sole aim of generating credible and authentic information.

There are situations when accessing certain information becomes a nightmare for an investigative journalist more especially when investigating an institution. In such scenario, a reporter depends on people who are in the position to support him/her with relevant information.

With the recent advancement in Information Communication Technologies, it has now become easier for journalists within and outside Nigeria to interconnect, thereby helping each other with relevant information concerning a subject under investigation.

For instance, when a journalist from Taraba State wants to investigate the health sector in the state, by merely connecting to the internet he/she would source preliminary information from websites or blogs own and managed by other investigative or citizen journalists.

The Wole Soyinka Centre for Investigative Journalism is one renowned nonprofit investigative organization (network) in Nigeria which has its own website (The Organization's Website: <http://www.wscij.org>). According to David [11], the primary mission of such nonprofits investigative organizations includes support of investigative journalism and reporting organizations.

The diagram below was purposefully designed to illustrate how an investigative journalist networks with other sources in order to generate authentic information about an institution he perceived to be institutionally corrupt (**Figure 1**).

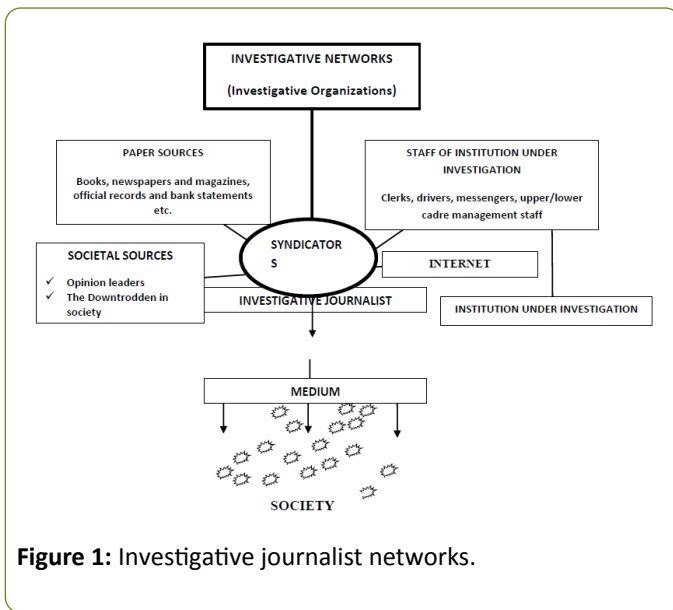


Figure 1: Investigative journalist networks.

The development of investigative journalism overseas owes much to a growing network of nonprofit centres, according to veteran trainers and reporters active in the field. The centres are a diverse group that includes reporting organizations, training institutes, small grant-making bodies, and regional networks that link journalists in person and online. Some centres combine several of these roles [16].

For institutional corruption to be combated effectively in Nigeria there is the need for non-profit investigative networks that would aid investigative journalists in the course of investigation. Notwithstanding, the absence of this networks should not be an excuse not to effectively investigate an institution because an investigative journalist can use other sources as illustrated in the diagram above.

Dangers of Investigative Journalism and Caution

Investigative reporting is the most hazardous type of specialized reporting, more especially in the third world countries where bribery, fraud, embezzlement of funds is the order of the day. Nwabueze [14] identifies the following as stumbling blocks to investigative reporting:

Risk of reporter's life

Investigative journalists around the world are also faced with threat to life. The reason is simple, an individual or institution under investigation would always want to suppress the story and the only way to do that is to get rid of the investigative reporter. The murder of Dele Giwa in 1986 is one of the most renowned experiences in the history of Nigerian investigative journalism. However, Nwabueze [14] states that one of the notable cases at the international scene is the murder of Anna Politkovskaya, a Russian award-winning journalist, on October 7, 2017. She was shot dead by a gunman in a lift of her block of flats.

Risk of media house

There are situations where media houses have either been invaded by security operatives for publishing some revealing reports or simply closed down. The suicide bomb by Boko Haram sect on the 26th of April, 2012 is an example of the risk being discussed [14].

Other constraints of investigative journalism highlighted by Aretha and Ben, cited in Dogari and Shem [15] are:

Political interference

The government of the day (especially during military regimes) may feel the need to close down media houses that employ probing investigative journalists. In extreme situations, the license of a media house may be withdrawn by the government of the day, thus making several journalists jobless.

Economic constraints

Many media houses do not pay their journalists well and this may encourage the journalists to manipulate facts behind the activities of dubious people or organizations within the society who offer handsome monetary rewards for favorable media coverage.

Limited access to information

The Nigerian investigative journalist has limited access to official archives and records. Sometimes, official archives are incomplete, poorly maintained and subject to tough official secrets or privacy laws, which are often left over from the colonial era. The Nigerian investigative journalists like their counterparts in many African countries have to be more creative and flexible to find alternative routes to the evidence they need.

Dearth of qualified journalists

A good number of the people that are into investigative journalism in Nigeria are not qualified to practice this noble profession. Hence, they can easily bargain vital information for just a few thousands of naira. Despite the afore stated dangers or constraints associated with the practice of investigative journalism, there are techniques or measures that would help minimize these dangers. Some of these measures are:

Collaboration with security personnel

Media organisations are expected to work in partnership with the police, civil defence and other security personnel. Nwabueze [14] asserts that a reporter, about setting out to investigate a potentially dangerous or risky story, should seek assistance from the police where necessary. He further notes that the above assertion does not suggest that an exclusive story be disclosed to the police, but the reporter should know when the police should be involved. Collaborating with security personnel is of topmost significance, more especially when investigating a hazardous story because it minimizes the chances of assault and other forms of danger.

Team work

There is an axiom that says “together everyone achieves more”. This is also applicable to investigative reporting. The rapport between Bob Woodward, Carl Bernstein and their mysterious informant, Deep Throat, served as a catalyst that made investigating the Watergate scandal a success. Nwabueze [14] posits that it is wise to consider investigating a story with colleagues more especially when the story under investigation is potentially hazardous. Nwabueze supports the above by saying that it will be difficult to single out one reporter for assault since the story is not exclusive to one person. Hence group investigative is a viable safety measure in investigating potentially dangerous stories.

Fortify the investigative reporter

Fortification in this context means equipping the investigative reporter financially and technically. There are certain investigative stories that require spending heavily in order to source certain information; here the media organisation is expected to shoulder all the financial implications. Furthermore, the reporter should be appropriately remunerated by the media organisation. Remuneration may not necessarily be an increment in the reporter’s salary; instead it could also be in form of buying him/her a car or giving him an award so as to encourage the reporter. Technical wise, a reporter should be provided with necessary gadgets such as a camera, laptop/Smartphone, modem, recorder, etc. This would facilitate the investigation.

Conclusion

There no doubt that Investigative journalism has the potency of combating corrupt practises in Nigeria, but it is also tragic that this facet of journalism as discussed in this paper is bedevilled with myriad of challenges ranging from finance and other hazards associate with its practice. This makes investigative journalism relegated to the background in Nigeria journalism practise. Hence, there is the need for a rethink where journalist, government and stakeholders would encourage and sustain the practice of this facet of reporting in order to minimize and if possible eliminate corrupt practises in the Nigerian society.

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