

## **Investigative Journalism Practice: A Case of Abuja Journalists and Media Organizations**

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### **ABSTRACT**

A significant percentage on investigative journalism practice has drastically diminished among journalists and media organizations in Nigeria. It is important to analyze this dimension. Therefore, the study examined whether FCT journalists practise investigative journalism, and what is the extent of investigative journalism practice among journalists based on their media genres in Abuja. The study adopts in-depth interview design and multi stage sampling technique (stratified and purposive sample) in selecting 21 participants. Data collected were presented in tables and analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed among others that FCT journalists practise investigative journalism. Also, the study further revealed that online media journalists were more at home with investigative journalism practice. In view of the findings, this study recommends that there should be regular motivation and reward for investigative journalism practice. More so, the print and electronic media journalists should be encouraged to practise investigative journalism like the online media journalists.

**Keywords:** Investigative journalism, Media genre, Journalism practice, media organisations

### **INTRODUCTION**

Investigative journalism practice begun with the need to combat social maladies such as: corruption, terrorism, drug abuse and among other social vices (Kaplan, 2008; DeBurgh, 2008). At this initial stage, investigative journalism practice was notably more of the print media. Carson (2013) explains that the use of print

media for investigative journalism date as far back as the late 1700s in America's first English-language newspaper *Publick Occurrences*. The painstaking skills and talents of Benjamin Harris and James Franklin of *Publick Occurrences* newspaper led to the exposure of Boston officials in the late 1950s (Aucoin, 2006). Like the Boston official's exposure, there were Philip Knightley -Thalidomide scandal in 1972, Watergate scandal by Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward in 1974 and others (Tong, 2011; Global Investigative Journalist Network, 2019).

Similar to the United States of America antecedent, Nigeria over the years has witnessed investigative journalism practice predominantly in print media organizations. History has it that investigative journalism practice in Nigeria began around the late twentieth century (Maringues, 2001; Dyikuk, 2012; Okon 2017; Njedaka, 2019). The practice began with the *Newswatch* magazine around 1984 (Okon, 2017). The *magazine* was established and owned by four veteran journalists: Dele Giwa, Ray Ekpu, Dan Agbese and Yakubu Mohammed (Dyikuk, 2012). Afterwards, there were other magazines namely; *Tell*, *Next*, *The NEWS*, among others (Ntibinyane, 2018; Okereke, 2000).

By the wake of the fourth republic, there have been records on the entrance of other media genres into investigative journalism practice. Okon (2017) affirms the inclusion of the electronic media organizations. The inclusion of electronic media organizations into investigative journalism practice came of recent with *Channels Television*, *African Independent Television* and *Television Continental* as the frontrunner (Okon, 2017). Radio stations are also not left out, there is a record of *Iri Aye* Radio programme by Kola Olawuyi on Reverend King; the *Human right* radio by Ahmed among others. Soon afterwards, there was a surge in online media organizations into investigative journalism practice (Imam, 2019). Notable among the online media outlets are: *Premium Times* (online newspaper media), *Saharareporter* (online newspaper media), *Daily Nigeria* (online newspaper media), *PR Nigeria news* (online media), *Arise TV* (online television media) among others (Edmond & Wilson, 2018; Imam, 2019).

However, overtime the practice of investigative journalism became a subject of concern to many pundits around the world (Protess cited in Abdul Hamid, Ishak & Maharan, 2015). For instance, International Consortium of Investigative Journalists laments, that they are losing their eyes and ears around the world as broadcast networks and major newspapers are closing their foreign bureaus, cutting travel budgets and suspending investigative teams precisely when they need them most (Amanda, 2016). Corroborating, Anyadike (2013), Okereke (2000) and Yushau (2009) also argue that the practice of investigative journalism has considerably diminished.

Nevertheless, despite the decline in investigative journalism practice, Imam (2019) argues that the low ebb is only limited to the traditional media outlets with

the exception of the online media organizations. Could this be accurate? It is based on this aforementioned disposition that the study formulates the following objectives;

1. To determine whether journalists in Abuja (Federal Capital Territory) practise investigative journalism.
2. To ascertain the extent of investigative journalism practice among journalists based on media genre in Abuja (Federal Capital Territory).

Based on the problem and objectives of the study, the following questions have been designed to guide the study.

1. Do journalists in Abuja (Federal Capital Territory) practise investigative journalism?
2. What is the extent of investigative journalism practice among journalists based on media genre in Abuja (Federal Capital Territory)?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Concept of Investigative Journalism**

The concept of investigative journalism differs from one author to another. According to Carson (cited in Amanda, 2016) renowned Investigative Journalism scholars-Hugh de Burgh, Tiffen and Schudson have all attempted to define investigative journalism, though their conceptualization of investigative journalism differ, but they all agreed that investigative journalism is to ‘expose injury and injustice; reveal information in the public interest; and where necessary, promote legislative reform to correct a wrong legal or administrative loophole. UNESCO (2011) argues that 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. Also, Marsh (2013) sees investigative journalism as a report that aims to clear the rights and wrongs in the society which targets are not limited and achieves its effects through publicity.

In addition, Yushau (2009) refers to investigative journalism as the mirror of the society that uses its conscience in uncovering wrongdoing that would likely remain hidden to the public. Dyikuk (2001) argues that investigative journalism is a form of journalism in which reporters deeply investigate a single topic of interest often involving crime, politics, corruption and corporate wrongdoing. Therefore, investigative report is a type of journalism that is produced over time, outside day-to-day deadline crunch, and includes diverse sources (Hansen cited in Broussard, 2014).

### **Investigative Journalism Practice: A Review**

An x-ray on investigative journalism practice across centuries, indicates that investigative journalism has spread worldwide and even in repressive countries

(Kaplan, 2013). This was as a result of the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Accordingly, the practice considerably grew in areas other than Europe and United States to every nook and cranny of the universe (Ahmad, Cheema, Waheed, Zulfiqar, Ahmad, Saleem & Anjaria, 2012). Commenting in the same mood, Chambers (2000) argues that at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, investigative journalism was highly prevalent. In fact, there has never been more space for making noise, digging, examining and exploring issues that are critical to a working democracy than now (Donal, 2011). In summary, Kaplan (2013, p.6) writes:

There have been global and regional collaborative investigative journalism. An explosion in data and communication technology, second to known strategic investments into investigative journalism programs, including Africa, Asia and Middle East. And the nonprofit investigative reporting organization now numbering 106 in 47 countries, plus, reporting centers, global investigative conference, training institutes, professional associations, grants making groups and online networks.

On the contrary, others scholars argue otherwise. Hanna (2000) as well as Anyadike (2013) argues that from the last three decades onward the practice of investigative journalism around the world is declining. Investigative journalism enjoyed a brief attention in the seventies, barely practised in the eighties and is now effectively dying (Dorril cited in Anyadike, 2013). This is consistent with (Just, Levine & Regan, 2002) that claimed investigative journalism has deteriorated over the years. For instance, in 1998, one of every 60 stories involved a station-initiated investigation, but by 2002, only one in 150 stories was station-initiated (Just, Levine & Regan, 2002). Also, the quantity of investigative stories on local TV news stations, have declined in the past five years (Aucoin, 2005). Prominent media organizations ( *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Boston Globe*, *Newsday*, *CBS News* & the *Baltimore Sun*) that have produced inspiring international coverage in the past, have closed their remaining overseas agencies (Lewis cited in Kaplan, 2008). Even, *CBS News* that used to have 24 foreign bureaus and stringers in 44 countries, today, has only six bureaus around the world and none of them in Africa or Latin America (Kaplan, 2008). Also, in Hungary and China, the quality of investigative journalism falls short of that of those in the Anglo-Saxon countries (Bajomi-lazar & Lampe, 2016; Cook & Henochowicz, 2018).

In other study within Nigeria, Yushau (2010) reiterates that Nigerian journalists do not fully practise investigative journalism. This is consistent with Anyadike (2013) that investigative journalism is practised in Nigeria but the level of practice is abysmally low. Likewise, Okereke (2000) observes that investigative journalism is not practised well in Nigeria. In the same vein, Okon (2017)

confirms that investigative journalism is no longer being practised by reporters in Nigeria.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study is anchored on Innovation Diffusion theory propounded by Everett Rogers in 1960. Innovation diffusion theory has been widely used by psychologists, applied scientists, political scientists, communication scientists among others because of its apparent usefulness in understanding how people adopt a new process/ information (Brosius & Peter, 2017; Asemah & Yaroson, 2008; Anaeto, Onabajo & Osifeso, 2012). The theory propounds that audience often adopts new innovational idea(s) and make the decision towards it (Communication Theory, 2016). In other words, a new idea, product or practice will be adopted by the target audience and media have a crucial role to play in the process of diffusion of innovation, because they create awareness among a larger number of audiences at the same time (Daramola, 2007). Thus, the theory outlines the following assumptions:

1. A new idea, product or practice will be adopted by the target audience.
2. The media and interpersonal communication provide information and influences opinion and judgment.
3. Opinion leaders, change agents, change aids (gatekeepers) exert influence on audience behavior.
4. Information flows through many networks. Although, the nature of network and roles of opinion leaders determines the adoption of information. (Anaeto, Onabajo & Osifeso, 2008).

At this juncture, the innovation diffusion theory is reviewed on the assumption that investigative journalism is an innovation to the field of journalism in Nigeria, most especially to FCT journalists other than the regular daily journalism practice. Similarly, in one of the tenets of the theory, it is argued that ‘a new idea, product or practice will be adopted by the target audience.’ This assumption indicates that Abuja Journalists might adopt or reject investigative journalism practice. Considering this argument, this theory was used to evaluate journalists in FCT in tandem with investigative journalism practice.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This paper adopts in-depth interview method (qualitative). This is because interview elicits deeper insight at building a robust understanding of a topic in complex relationships of our social world (Wotanis, 2011; Maxwell, 2012; Patricia, 2017). The population of this study is made up of 3,050 journalists in the Federal Capital Territory- Abuja (Nigerian Union of Journalists, 2019). The sample size for the study was determined through saturation and sufficiency. Although, attaining saturation and sufficiency could be quite difficult for some researchers

(Seidman, 2006; Bacon-shone, 2020). Hence, Boyd (2001) suggests that saturation can often be reached after interviewing 2 to 10 persons. But when 2 to 10 is often too few to meet the sufficiency standard depending on the study, Luborsky and Rubinstein (cited in Boyd, 2001), recommend between 12 – 26 respondents in other to achieve saturation and sufficiency. Considering, Luborsky and Rubinstein’s recommendation, the study interviewed 21 news editors.

These 21 interviewees were selected through mixed method sample. This method is adopted because it is a kind of sample that precedes another and influences the proceeding sample using probability and non-probability sample namely: stratified and purposive sample (Louis, Lawrence, & Keith, 2018). Thus, stratified sample was used to group media houses into 3 strata namely: print media (newspaper and magazine), Electronic media (radio and television) and online media.

Then, the researcher selected 21 interviewees (7 for each media genre) using purposive sample. Thereafter, data were collected with the aid of interview guide. The data were further presented on tables and analyzed with the aid of thematic analysis using Atlas.Ti software application.

## DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

**Research question 1:** Do journalists in Abuja (Federal Capital Territory) practise investigative journalism?

**Table 1:** Participants response on investigative journalism practice

Themes	Quotation Contents	Sources
Practice	Yes. A couple of them...	P4
	Yes. I have. I have let’s say 5...	P8
	I have done so many...	P6
	Yes...I have done so many.	P9
	Yes...There is one I did on youth Corp member.	P16
	Yes, I have a few.	P18
	Yes...I was once assigned to Blaze hotel were people dance naked.	P19
	Yes. I did two.	P20
	Yes. I have done many.	P21
	Yeah. I have countless.	P17
	Yes. I have been involved in many.	P15
	I have many reports.	P14
	Yes. I have done like five.	P11
	Yes. I have done many.	P10
	Yes. I have like one	P7
	Yes...They are in dozen	P3
Yes...I can’t remember the number. But there are much.	P2	

	Yes, I have done quite a number.	P1
	Yes. I have more than 10.	P12
Don't practice	Hmmm! No. like I said before it is not my thing	P5
	No. I tried but I couldn't finish it.	P13

The response from the interviewees as indicated in Table 1 shows that there are two themes 'practice investigative journalism and do not practice investigative journalism'. The dominant theme on the Table is practice investigative journalism (P4, P8, P6, P9, P16, P18, P19, P20, P21, P17, P15, P14, P11, P10, P7, P3, P2, P1 and P12). Therefore, this result implies that most of the respondents practice investigative journalism.

The aforementioned result agrees with Anyadike (2013) study that investigative journalism is practised in Nigeria. This further corroborates Ahmad et al (2012) claim that after the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the practice of investigative journalism considerably grew in areas other than Europe and United States to all nooks and crannies of the universe.

**Research question 2:** What is the extent of investigative journalism practice among journalists?

**Table 2:** Participants response based on Media Genre

Themes		Quotation Contents	Sources
Electronic	Television station	...i can't be too certain about the number. But have done quite a number.	P1
		Yes...They are in dozen	P3
	Radio	...i started going more into investigative journalism. And making people my subject of reportage	P12
		At 2013, I did a report on a filling station who adjusted their meter and they were handed over to DPR	P4
	...Report on Kogi State youth restiveness.	P10	

		I remember a report I did on oil in the North	P18
Print	Newspaper	The one that readily comes to mind is the one I unravel the purchase of a dilapidated building by the ministry of agriculture.	P9
		I have been involved in many.	P14
		...we are doing an investigation, on the extent to which the federal has worked on the promised made by Boss Mustafa in establishing intensive health care in all senatorial district of the federation	P15
		Yes...I can't remember the number. But there are much.	P2
	Magazine	Yes. I have like one	P7
		I did one with Wole Center for investigative journalism.	20
Online media	Online Radio	In 2015, I investigated Al-majari school in Zaria, I went there with a hidden camera.	P8
		I also remembered the one I did during staff riot.	P21
	Online newspaper	Annually our organization publish Annual State Viability Index. ASVI is investigating/ doing a research actually about states that cannot survive without ... money from federation account.	P6
		I recently did an investigation on how poverty led people to sell their children	P19
		Yes. I have done, like five.	P11
	Online Tv	There is one I did on youth Corp member...That was brought by Abuja Environment protection	P16
	Yeah. I have countless.	P17	

As shown in Table 2; print media (Newspaper and Magazine), electronic media (Radio and Television) and as well as online media (online radio/tv/newspapers) are the potential media genres in Abuja (FCT). The report indicates that participants' dominant view suggest online media/new media (P6, P8, P11, P16, P17, P19 and P21). Similarly, of this number, online newspapers had the most occurrences (P19, P6 and P11). This implies that online journalists engage most in investigative journalism practice in FCT. This result corroborates Carson's (2014) assertion that traditional media are noticeably absent in their investigative role.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The first finding from the study reveals that majority of FCT journalists practise investigative journalism. This result supports the assumption of innovation diffusion theory, that new practice (investigative journalism) will be adopted by a target audience (i.e. journalists) (Anaeto et al, 2008). It also corroborates Suleiman (2017) that investigative journalism coverage with regards to exposing corruption is positively served, rather than hampered. This is consistent with Anyadike (2013) that investigative journalism is practised in Nigeria.

The second finding of the study shows that journalists in online media/new media have the most investigative journalism practice. Corroborating, Carson (2014) points out, that online media are reporting investigative journalism than any existing medium at the present. Khattak and Nasir (2012) explain that it is as a result of the explosion of online publishing on worldwide web. As more potential audience gain access to the web, more newspapers are transforming themselves into a hybrid of print and web, and publishers are determined to reach out to the audience (Lewis, 2007; Khattak & Nasir, 2012). Reminiscing, Carson (2014) states that this kind of proportional quantum of online investigative stories was similar to the amount of print media investigative reporting recorded in the 1970s. Although, the change in trend was only made possible in the absence of investigative journalism practice among the traditional media due to censorship, insecurity, threat to live and property among other challenges (Imam, 2019).

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

Based on the findings of this study, it is inferred that FCT journalists practise investigative journalism. Also, the study revealed that online media journalists engaged predominantly in investigative journalism practice. The findings of the study contribute to the existing fountain of knowledge by assessing investigative journalism practice among journalists and media genres. The researcher therefore makes recommendations as follows:

1. FCT Journalists should be regularly motivated and rewarded (financially, security wise, government feedback on investigative journalism report among others) in order not to stifle investigative journalism practice.

2. Likewise, the print and electronic journalists should be encouraged to practise investigative journalism like the online media.

In addition, the study recommend further studies on other salient issues in investigative journalism like: finance, time, patience, stress, unwilling sources, insecurity, threat to live and property, loss of job, outcome of report and how investigative journalism has helped to solve problems or rectify abnormally.

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