

**Explorations of New Media in Investigative
Journalism Practice and Whistleblowing Among
Journalists in Selected South-West States, Nigeria
Dr. Ademolu I. Soyinka, Dr. Rasheed Buhari Olaoluwa, & Dr.
Vivian Ifeoma Onwuka**

ABSTRACT

The study explores the contributions of new media in investigative journalism and whistleblowing among journalists in selected states in Southwest, Nigeria. The study adopted the mixed methods research design to gather data from 84 journalists and 5 independent investigative journalists which were selected through multistage sampling technique, out of the 6,162 registered members of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) in two major Southwest States of Nigeria (Ogun and Lagos States). The quantitative aspect of the study adopted the face-to-face questionnaire as an instrument for data collection, while the qualitative aspect of the study utilized the interview guide as an instrument of data collection. Findings from the qualitative data gathered showed that majority of journalists in Ogun and Lagos States acknowledged the challenges of ownership and online media fake news as impediments to effective investigative journalistic practice however, some of them suggested that there is a need to set in motion frameworks that will reduce the perceived negativity in the mind of journalists and further entrench the benefits therein. Equally findings from the quantitative data generated showed a huge exposure to new media platforms, especially social media, by

journalists as it aided in their information sourcing, collaboration and expanded topical issues they report. Summarily, the findings from the study revealed that the new media contributes positively to data verification and information sharing.

Keywords: New media, Investigative journalism, Fact-checking, Fake news, Media ownership

INTRODUCTION

Good journalism practice in Nigeria has often suffered a backlash from the society who believes the traditional media (radio and television) is lacking in the discharge of their responsibilities as the fourth estate of the realm and has become an appendage of the state thus failing in its watchdog role. Therefore, to ensure that the voice of the masses is still heard so loudly, many relied on the new media as a veritable alternative to bridge the information and social responsibility gap which the traditional media has created (Brown, 2020).

Investigative Journalism is quite a topical issue (Brown, 2020) because many outside the media industry have always opined that the crux of good journalism should be crested on the ability of the mass media to unravel hidden secrets and bring issues that hitherto seem secretive to the fore. On a daily basis, the audience are constantly looking for information alternatives, notably from the internet, to satisfy their information needs (Frame & Brachotte, 2016) and to give them ‘hot’ and trending mysteries to discuss at their various fora. One of the ways through which the gratification would be met is known to be an acceptable journalism practice.

New media platforms have effectively captured the torrent of user-generated contents (UGC) and this penetrates through every sphere of human endeavor and has also caused or led to a paradigm shift in journalism and media practice through threats and opportunities to media organizations and making the publics to know the side of the divide story in which they belong (Emmanuel, 2020). New Media encompasses several technologies created, viewed, communicated, modified and preserved on digital electronic devices such as blogs, podcasts, websites, e-mail, vlogs, wikis, social media, digital images and e-books, to significantly impact the society, behaviour and lifestyle patterns (Abraham, 2020).

Scholars (Abraham, 2020; Mitra, 2011; Yujie et al., 2022) opined that new media has afforded the democratization of the communication space by making individuals to become active participants rather than passive participants. As the citizen's democratic consciousness became reawakened, they also became increasingly desirous of information about the government and its activities affects them. However, the traditional media that is expected to serve as the voice of the voiceless is seemingly incapacitated as it has become an appendage of the political class who are its major financiers in the African nation thus creating a vacuum that the new media strives to bridge.

Nigerian journalists struggle with observing the tenets of good news reportage. They also ensure the verification of facts before publishing or transmitting, citizens have already disseminated. It is therefore noticed that information without a recourse to the objectives of good reporting (Posetti, 2018) it looks seemingly unhealthy way of information dissemination which have sometimes been blamed on the 'chaos' created

by the new media. Scholars (Ufot et al., 2023) have argued that the traditional media should be blamed for failing to live up to expectation as watchdog of the society. This notion held by the Nigerian people has negatively impacted the credibility of the Nigerian press especially in the aspect of investigative journalism practice. While it may be argued in certain quarters that investigative journalism had been in existence in Nigeria before return to democratic rule in 1999 (Egwu & Wogu, 2019), the practice still seems like a daunting task that is not implementable in Nigeria despite the democracy the country operates.

Investigative Journalist is perceived as an avenue for reforms, reconstruction and development. Onyenakeya et al. (2017) stated that investigative journalism is a form of journalistic reporting that involves exposing some issues to the public. There are issues that are concealed either deliberately by someone in position of power, or accidentally, behind a chaotic mass of facts of circumstances that obscure understanding (Hunter, 2012). Scholars Guanah and Ojo, (2018); Onyenakeya and Salawu, (2020); Oyedokun, (2022) assert that investigative journalism is central to democratic entrenchment and growth. It is however noted that beyond the sloppy nature of the Nigerian press and the lackluster implementation of policy frameworks that could aid the Nigerian journalist's access to information such as the freedom of information (FOI) act, the effective practice of investigative journalism by the traditional media may still be a mirage in Nigeria. Similarly, in a nation like Nigeria where the safety of individuals and journalists is not guaranteed, the effective practice of investigative journalism may be difficult. More so, the cost of carrying out investigative journalism is quite

expensive in the West African nation, just as media proprietorship and commercialization is continued to negatively impact effective investigative journalism practice.

Whistleblowing via social media channels represents a very high risk to the media organization or investigative journalists can potentially lead to the litigation and final lose when they fail to verify that message especially when the message goes viral. The blowing of whistle alerted other law enforcement agencies and the general publics that a crime was been committed. The term whistleblowing originated from the practice of English policemen who blew their whistle when they observed the happening of some crime (The National Whistleblower Center, 2021).

The act of whistleblowing which receive most media attention fit with the existing news agenda and prevailing societal and economic trends, therefore, for whistle to be blown, there must be one who is blowing the whistle or the whistleblower, the complaint or the wrongdoing that is being reported, the society in general or an individual or a group of people working within the society who is or are committing the wrong and; the party who is receiving the complaint or wrong doing from the whistleblowers (Siddhantha & Ankit 2010)

There is fundamental question as to why Nigerians opted for the new media as alternative for venting their opinions. This efficiently call public office holders to action and unravel hidden truths in the polity. The search for alternatives to good information through the new media is gradually revolutionizing journalism practice in Nigeria as more journalists are beginning to use new media tools such as social media platforms, emails, i-witness situation which is an application that report an eyewitness

account on a particular issue of occurrence it is a report that aided by their online news platforms, websites among others to gather, investigate and disseminate information. The advantages of interactivity, flexibility and vast torrent of information flow that the new media possesses above the traditional media has continued to attract wide acceptability not only from journalists but also from the public. For instance, in year 2020, a new media platform Hum Angle in an investigative reportage covered a humanitarian crisis in northern Nigeria and through its platform residents as well as victims of the crisis were able to tell their stories and document their cases. Thus, showcasing the advantage of the new media in creating space for scoops and on-field reporting that gives a human face to news reportage especially at a time when media commercialization has taken over the traditional media space in Nigeria (VOA, 2023).

Furthermore, Ntibinyane, (2018) stated the challenges of fear, harassment, threats, victimization and intimidation that journalists suffer in the discharge of their investigative duties has drastically reduced and thus gradually establishing investigative practice in Nigeria. For instance, Samson Folarin - a Nigerian journalist in 2019 carried out investigations into a case of certificate forgery and plagiarism by a senior academic of a Nigerian University that subsequently led to the termination of the academic's appointment. Interestingly, the investigation which spanned several months was carried out with the aid of new media tools. In a report released on the scandal, the reporter disclosed how he used phone calls, Short Messaging Service (SMS) and WhatsApp to conduct interviews and acquire vital documents from persons within and beyond the academic's university. From the aforementioned, it can be deduced that the new media

has offered possibilities to investigative journalism practice in Nigeria part of which is creating networks and strengthening engagement. However, despite the possibilities provided by the new media, there seem to still be a dearth of investigative journalism practice among Nigerian journalists. A Premium Times Newspaper report shows that three out of every four journalists are unwilling to engage in investigative journalism (Premium Times, 2023) owing to inherent dangers associated with it and cost involved. To this end, as some journalists do want not to venture into the practice of Investigative Journalism despite the enormous value the practice pose on the new media, there is a need to examine Nigerian Journalists' knowledge of new media for investigative journalism practices. Therefore, our study has implications for the role of social media in information gathering and dissemination by investigative journalists and add to the literature of whistleblowing in Nigeria.

Therefore, the study Statement of the Problem stipulated that there was a ban on the usage of social media in Nigeria especially, "X", by the former president of Nigeria, President Muhammadu Buhari administration. In Nigeria between 2015 and 2023 suspended the ban from all forms of new media platforms especially social media, for its alleged role in fostering fake news and misinformation. In what could be regarded as a litmus test in regulating the social media, President Buhari administration officially banned the social media platform "Twitter" now known as "X" for about six months from 5th June 2021 to 13th January 2022.

The clampdown on the social networking platform which had hitherto been seen as a threat by the Buhari administration was aimed at silencing Nigerians particularly Journalists from reporting stories some section of

the administration want unreported and to further make good its threat, the government at that time through the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) on 7th June 2021 ordered radio and television stations in the West African Country to delete their X accounts, warning that the continued use would be regarded as “unpatriotic”

Prior to the clampdown, the interest of journalists in harnessing the opportunities the new media offers was below expectation as only a few journalists residing and practicing in the country uses the media for investigative practice. Premium Times Newspaper, (2023) reported that three of every four journalists in Nigeria are unwilling to engage in investigative journalism, because of the perceived hazardous nature of the practice despite the ease in information gathering and dissemination that the digital platforms have brought about into journalism practice. While it is noteworthy to state that scholars have not sufficiently investigated challenges encountered in the utilization of new media for journalism practice (Agbo & Chukwuma, 2017; Apuke, 2016; Emmanuel, 2020; Egwu et al., 2019; Guanah & Ojo, 2018;), just scanty studies (Igweze, 2019; Onyenankeya, 2020; Oyedokun, 2022) have investigated the utilization of new media for investigative journalism in Nigeria especially in the Southwest States on Nigeria that is known to have the highest number of internet subscribers in the West African Nation.

Furthermore, literature acknowledges that usage of the new media has enhanced journalists’ conventional journalism practice like data gathering (Parasie & Dagiral, 2013), news production (Hermida, 2012), networking (Gearing, 2014), crowdsourcing, and whistleblowing (Vehkoo, 2013). However, there are scanty studies that have examined the use of new

media for whistleblowing in Nigeria especially among journalists practicing in the Southwestern part of Nigeria, which hitherto has generally been regarded as the cradle of journalism in the country. Also, previous studies have solely limited their scope to the qualitative method with emphasis on interviews to gather data but this study employed the mixed method in eliciting responses from journalists working with government-owned media organizations and independent investigative journalists. The study is significant to both industry professionals and the government. It will help bridge some gaps in investigative journalism practice as professionals will leverage the findings to build a framework for the policy that will translate into improving their watchdog role. In this light, this study bridged the gap in knowledge and methodology by investigating the contributions of new media to investigative reporting and whistleblowing efforts among Journalists in Ogun and Lagos States of southwest, Nigeria.

Research Objectives

The objectives of the study are

- To ascertain the level of exposure to new media usage during investigative reporting on whistleblowing among journalists in selected southwest states, Nigeria
- To investigate the challenges encountered by journalists using new media for whistleblowing during investigative reporting among the journalists in selected southwest states, Nigeria.

Research Questions

RQ1: What is the level of new media exposure and usage during investigative reporting on whistleblowing among journalists in selected southwest states, Nigeria?

RQ2: What are the challenges encountered by journalists using new media for whistleblowing during investigative reporting in selected southwest states, Nigeria?

LITERATURE REVIEW

In Nigeria today, one of the ways the new media has been put into use is in the area of investigative journalism especially for whistleblowing purpose. The new media in Nigeria has become quite popular in Nigeria owing to the drastic reduction in the costs required to create and distribute content – which today has been regarded as an offshoot of citizen journalism. Many media production tools have become free and easy to use because of the unhindered interaction the new media has provided. It is rapidly permeating the society by breaking cultural boundaries and revolutionizing every aspect of human life and endeavor. The fluidity of the new media has been regarded as one of the major characteristics (Mitra, 2011) that makes it a powerful medium of communication as it can easily be used in any environment. Furthermore, the new media have bypassed the gatekeeping and agenda setting functions of the conventional mass media by providing access to millions of information resources via the usage of search engines and directories (Frame & Brachotte, 2016) thus implying that any individual with internet access and new media platforms can easily access and share information without waiting for any editorial approval (Kumpel et al., 2015). Similarly, the new media have

created room for easier evidence gathering (Brown, 2020) as individuals are now open to a wide range of digital information such as digital documents, emails, chat logs, and other digital records that enable them to build more robust and comprehensive cases. Also, as it pertains to amplified reach, the new media helps in reaching a global audience and exposes large corporations involved in fraudulent activities, as well as recognizing the efforts of whistleblowers.

In Nigeria, the whistleblowing policy was approved by the Federal Executive Council in December 2016 by the administration of Nigeria's former President Muhammadu Buhari. Although the policy does not provide protection for the whistleblowers, the policy however provides that the whistleblower is entitled to between 2.5 percent and 5.0 percent of the amount recovered from the whistleblower's information (Ojobo, 2023). Even though many thought the media would leverage on the dynamism and ubiquity of the new media to help develop the nation and rid it of every anomaly and illegality, there latter still persists. Although, there is no universally accepted definition of whistleblowing, the concept has been described as entailing a situation where an individual reveals information about activity within a private or public organization specifically if it relates to any act considered as illegal, immoral, illicit, unsafe or fraudulent. It also entails the disclosure by organization members of illegal, immoral or illegitimate practices under the control of their employers, to persons or organizations that may be able to effect action (Bosua et al., 2014).

Whistleblowers play an important role in revealing wrongdoing in contemporary organizations and even outside organizations such as during

the period of health emergency (Brown 2020). However, seven years down the line the policy is yet to see to take full effect in Nigeria. The federal government of Nigeria has overly lamented the reluctance of Nigerians to report incidences of corruption (Vanguard Newspaper, 2022). Many have disagreed with the government on this position noting that the environment is not suitable enough for such policy to thrive as few individuals who have initiated the policy have suffered grave consequences such as harassment, intimidation, job loss to receiving death threats and which subsequently forced them to quit (Premium Times Newspaper, 2023).

To support the above, Dyikuk, (2017) is of the opinion that many Nigerians opined that the policy is not adequate to protect whistleblowers, they also added that members of the fourth estate of the realm who hitherto are expected to be at the forefront of ensuring that the policy thrives have failed in this regard thus neglecting the core of their responsibilities – the watchdog role. It is pertinent to state that the Nigerian mass media have through couple of ways performed its duties to the society with respect to whistleblowing such as warning the society of a wrongdoing by disseminating the grievances of whistleblowers but the citizens believe the impact has not been the felt in the polity, hence the shift to the new media for alternatives. Beyond being a platform for effective whistleblowing effort, the new media has afforded connectivity, instant access to information and evidence, social networking and virtual collaboration. Nowadays, journalists are connected to intra and inter-organizational networks which have made their journalistic practice as well as the transmission of information quite easy (Bosua et al., 2014). The trend has

become even quite worrisome as some conventional media now rely on user-generated content for their news/current affairs programs. The implication of this on whistleblowing is that whistleblowers no longer need a third party (such as a journalist) to access and reveal an inside information. Similarly, the new media also provides some level of secrecy to the whistleblower and his information source while also helping the whistleblower connect with trusted recipients such as well-known investigative journalists regardless of the distance.

To clearly state how benefits of whistleblowing to the practice of journalism, Kaplan, (2013) and Kumar et al. (2021) declared that the relationship between journalism and whistleblowing in the country has been mutually beneficial with the help of the new media platforms such as social media, blogs and websites 'I-Witness' section. Investigative journalists have relied on information provided by individuals who have first-hand information about certain irregularities within and outside their organizations and oftentimes than not, the information provided by the whistleblower is sufficient to commence a journalistic investigation or to verify and compare with already available data (Posetti, 2018). Whistleblowers prefer to approach a trusted and sometimes independent journalist to give information rather than report to the authorities concerned. For instance, individuals rather than report to the police or editors of media houses have often times resulted to reporting, exclusively, certain anomaly to one of Nigeria's active investigative journalists – Fisayo Soyombo, because of the trust they have in him and his dedication to pursuing to a logical and positive end such case. However, this does not

exonerate whistleblowers who give information for their personal benefits but this is quite rare in the Nigerian context.

Empirical Review

There have been a handful of research efforts on the contribution of new media to whistleblowing efforts and a review of a few of them on the subject matter helps establish the significance of new media in a dynamic media environment. Lam and Harcourt (2019) investigated the motives and recommendations of whistleblowing in the digital era. The researchers, after an extensive literature review and analysis, found that the nature of wrongdoing (the seriousness and implications), available technological channels (whistle-blowing websites, social media, etc.), laws and organizational policies (level of protection and restrictions), and reporting channels (ease of use and effectiveness of internal and external avenues) can affect a potential whistle-blower's decision.

To know the viability of the social media usage for whistleblowing and how impactful to the development of journalism Xiao and Wong-On-Wing (2022) examined the effect of social media strategy and social media policy on employees' sensitivity to the high risk of whistleblowing via social media. The study probed the effect across employee gender and across two social media misconducts (information leaking and online venting). The results revealed that the impact of social media strategy and social media policy on employees' sensitivity differs between gender and across the two cases. In the information leaking case, social media strategy, social media policy and gender jointly influence employee sensitivity to the risk of whistleblowing via social media channels.

In the online venting case, gender has a main effect on that sensitivity. Also, Porlezza and Salvo (2020) examined the accountability and transparency of whistleblowing platforms issues of networked journalism and contested boundaries. Using the mixed method, the researcher content-analyzed online information on whistleblowing practices of four whistleblowing platforms and interviewed selected editors from each of the whistleblowing platforms. The study found that responsiveness does not appear to be a core practice, given that interaction with the audience is generally left to the news media partners, where the leaked material is published. It added that whistleblowing platforms have developed unevenly in terms of accountability and transparency.

Systematically, Perron et al., (2022) investigated Nurses' whistleblowing activities during the COVID-19 pandemic in the province of Quebec, Canada. The study aimed to analyze the reports made public through the Je dénonce platform and to determine its degree of usefulness in addressing critical pandemic-related concerns. The researchers content analyzed testimonials submitted by the Nurses between March 29th and May 31st, 2020 which was the period of the platform launch and peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Among others, the study found that the platform was useful for whistleblowing as it succeeded in capturing the attention of journalists writing about the effects of the crisis and the health care system's failures to manage it, despite that it was difficult to determine the extent to which it contributed to correcting objectionable organizational practices or policies. Latan et al. (2021) examined the effectiveness of social media as a form of virtual whistleblowing among Indonesian customers. The researchers purposively sampled 1069 online shopping

customers using online questionnaires between October 2018 and March 2019. The study among others found that whistleblowers are motivated by social pressure to make the decision to report wrongdoing. Furthermore, there is a positive and significant effect on the relationship between financial incentives and online whistleblowing intention. Inquisitively, Igweze (2020) examined the role of new media tools in strengthening investigative journalism in Nigeria. Employing a qualitative research method, the researcher purposively sampled the views of ten investigative journalists working in print, broadcast and online news organizations in Nigeria. The findings of the study revealed that beyond their adequate usage and exposure to new media tools, the journalists lack knowledge and expertise in using the new media platform for crowdsourcing and collaboration with colleagues as well as for shielding the identity of anonymous sources, encryption of conversations with sources, data organization, data analysis, and monitoring of the Internet for trending issues and developments. The study further reveals that factors like poor phone and internet networks, unsteady electricity supply, financial challenges among others hinder adequate utilization of new media tools for investigative journalism among journalists in Nigeria.

To throw more light on the visisbilty of whistleblowing, Asemah, (2016) examined journalists' perception of whistleblowing and the study sought to know Nigerian journalists' perceptions of whistleblowing and its relationship with the press, exploring their attitudes, motivations, and experiences regarding whistleblowing practices. The study employed the survey method and elicited responses from journalists through the use of structured questionnaires shared with journalists working in various media

organizations in Nigeria. It found that Nigerian journalists recognized the importance of whistleblowing in exposing corruption and promoting good governance but reported challenges such as intimidation, lack of legal protection for whistleblowers, and limited resources for investigative reporting. Similarly, Chilwa and Sambe (2016) examined the challenges and prospects of whistleblowing through new media technologies in Nigeria. The study employed a qualitative research design, utilizing in-depth interviews with whistleblowers, journalists, and representatives from civil society organizations involved in promoting transparency and accountability. The interview was conducted using semi-structured interview guides to gather detailed insights into the experiences, motivations, and challenges of whistleblowing via new media technologies. The study found that new media technologies have provided whistleblowers in Nigeria with platforms to expose corruption, misconduct, and abuses of power.

However, this study is anchored on Technology Determinism Theory (TDT). Theories exist to underpin the fundamental contribution of new media to investigative journalism practice for whistleblowing efforts. Access to the new media and understanding the dynamism of its culture are important in this regard. In this study, the Technology Determinism Theory (TDT), propounded by Marshal McLuhan in 1962, helps explain how useful the new media can be. The theory states that media technology shapes the thoughts, feelings and actions of individuals in a society (Da-Costa, 2021). It argues that individuals learn, feel and think the way they do because of the messages they receive through the current technology that is available adding that individuals are not free to do as they like but

must employ whatever means used by their society to communicate (Tilley, 2011). Critics of the theory believe that it overlooks the social, cultural, and political factors that shape technology adoption and use. It added that technology never forces itself on members of the society, rather the choice of using technology and experiencing its effects lies in the hand of the individual. This theory's bottom line is that the human thought or action can be influenced by technological factors. Concerning this study, journalists' disposition to new media usage will be influenced by their desire to break the boundaries of existing journalistic norms and practices to bring about efficiency in their practice. The import of this technology determinism theory assumption in this study is that while new media may be shaping modern journalism, certain factors peculiar to a country (such as Nigeria) might in turn determine the effect of new media on its journalism (Igweze, 2020). Similarly in this part of the world, development and efficiency is measured by trends, therefore for a journalist to be relevant, he must adopt innovative ways of doing things set by the society for easy dissemination of information – hence the new media. Journalists must adapt to using the new media like everyone else to stay relevant in the emerging media world.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed the mixed methods research design which combined both the quantitative and qualitative methods in a study.

For the quantitative method, the questionnaire was adopted as instrument to elicit data from a total of 84 investigative journalists who are registered and accredited members of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) in Lagos and Ogun states.

For the qualitative method, five (5) seasoned editors, were selected for the key in-depth interview (KII). Sampling method adopted was the stratified sampling which comprised Broadcast journalists with or without online presence, print media journalists with or without online presence and new media journalists that are strictly online base within the two Chapels (that is, NUJ Lagos state and NUJ Ogun State). Therefore, the selected media representatives within the Chapel were the Ogun State Television (OGTV), Radio Lagos, Eko FM, and Rhythms FM that represent both private and public sectors of journalism practices. Furthermore, the five (5) independent investigative reports editors were also selected purposefully based on their new media feasibility and proven records in investigative journalism practice within and outside Nigeria.

FINDINGS

Quantitative data

84 questionnaires were administered and retrieved while five investigative Journalists were interviewed.

Results of Exposure of Journalists in Lagos and Ogun States to New Media for Investigative Reporting/Whistleblowing

Table: 1. Exposure of journalists in Lagos and Ogun States to new media for investigative reporting/whistleblowing

How often do you rely on the aforementioned new media platforms for your journalistic practice?					
Media Platforms	Social media	News Websites	Blogs	Video sharing platforms	Total
	57 (67.9%)	19 (22.6%)	6 (7.1%)	2 (2.4%)	84 (100%)
How often do you rely on the aforementioned new media platforms for your journalistic practice?					
	Daily	Weekly	Seldom	Can't say	Total
	61 (72.6%)	11 (13.1%)	3 (3.6%)	9 (10.7%)	84 (100%)

Source: Field Study, 2025

SA=Strongly Agree; A=Agree; U=Undecided D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree

Table 1 reveals the exposure level of journalists in both states to new media platforms for investigative reporting/whistleblowing. Majority of the journalists (67.9%) rely on social media in getting and disseminating information. Also, majority of the journalists are exposed to the new media platforms on a daily basis. This result implies that social media serves journalists in no small measure as it relates to their journalistic practices

as it helps them in sourcing stories, collaborating with fellow journalists, following up on stories and expanding the range of issues to be covered and heard (Gearing, 2014) and also consistent with the findings of Ani (2023); Onyenankeya and Salawu (2020), and Emmanuel (2020), that majority of journalists are exposed to new media and rely on it for their daily journalistic practice.

Results of perceived consequences of new media on journalists' investigative reportage/whistleblowing

Table: 2. Strategies to mitigate professional polarization

Utilization of new media platforms has made information gathering safer and faster for investigative reporting/whistleblowing						
	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total
	27 (32.1%)	54 (64.3%)	3 (3.6%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	84 (100%)
Utilization of new media platforms has enhanced interviewing and information sharing with colleagues during investigative reporting/whistleblowing effort						
	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total
	33 (39.3%)	39 (46.4%)	7 (8.3%)	4 (4.8%)	1 (1.2%)	84 (100%)
Utilization of new media platforms has improved my data verification for investigative reporting/whistleblowing						
	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total

	6 (7.1%)	43 (51.2%)	27 (32.1%)	8 (9.5%)	0 (0.0%)	84 (100%)
Utilization of new media has provided a safe platform for eyewitness account in investigative reporting/whistleblowing						
	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total
	16 (19.0%)	39 (46.4%)	3 (3.6%)	22 (26.2%)	4 (4.8%)	84 (100%)
Utilization of new media platforms has improved my fact-checking skills in investigative reporting/whistleblowing effort						
	7 (8.3%)	29 (34.5%)	14 (16.7%)	24 (28.6%)	10 (11.9%)	84 (100%)
Reliance on my organization's news website has improved my investigative reporting/whistleblowing effort						
	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total
	8 (9.5%)	19 (22.6%)	12 (14.3%)	42 (50.0%)	3 (3.6%)	84 (100%)

Source: Field Study, 2025

SA=Strongly Agree; A=Agree; U=Undecided D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree

Table 2 shows the result of perceived consequences of new media on journalists' investigative reportage/whistleblowing. Most of the journalists (96.4%) said new media platforms has aided fast and safe information gathering despite a drop in the percentage of journalists (85.7%) who uses the platforms for interviewing sources and sharing information. This is consistent with the studies of Yujie et al. (2022) who

argued that the new media is safe and less risky for users when they communicate and interact because of its features that aids interactivity and seamless transfer of information. Also, 58.3% of the journalists deploy new media platforms for data verification, while there is an increase in the percentage of journalists (42.8%) who disagreed that the new media has helped their fact-checking skills during investigative journalism effort. This is in line with the views of Brandtzaeg et al. (2017) who stated that they would use the new media for data verification regardless of the outcome of works carried out by verification services. Similarly, the researchers stated that challenges that comes with new media may make fact-checking for investigative/whistleblowing effort a tedious task as journalists lack knowledge of new media tools that supports fact-checking. Lastly, majority of the journalists (53.6%) disagreed that reliance on their media organizations' news website has improved their investigative reporting/whistleblowing effort as majority of them agreed that new media platforms, due to its relative independence, has been a safe platform to drive eyewitness account during investigative reporting. This is consistent with the study of Kruisselbrink, 2022; Mpofu et al., 2023; Oyedokun, 2022 that argues new media users will opt for the new media to drive eyewitness account because it is less controlled compared to the news websites that may be digitally attacked or placed under surveillance, adding that the new media platforms provides a no-hold-barred style of reporting that has become a recognized alternative to professional journalism practice with its unique approach to news gathering, publishing and sharing. Results from the key informant interview align with the results from the survey.

**Table: 3. Challenges Encountered by Journalists Using New Media
for Investigative Reporting and Whistleblowing**

Poor network and data limits slow down investigation						
	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total
	8 (9.5%)	24 (28.6%)	17 (20.2%)	25 (29.8%)	10 (11.9%)	84 (100%)
Citizen journalism poses a threat to investigation						
	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total
	9 (10.7%)	27 (32.1%)	4 (4.8%)	26 (30.9%)	18 (21.4%)	84 (100%)
Fake news poses a threat to investigation						
	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total
	17 (20.2%)	29 (34.5%)	13 (15.5%)	18 (21.4%)	7 (8.3%)	84 (100%)
Legal frameworks threaten investigation						
	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total
	15 (17.9%)	39 (46.4%)	8 (9.5%)	18 (21.4%)	4 (4.8%)	84 (100%)
Media ownership hinders investigation						
	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total
	12 (14.3%)	33 (39.3%)	9 (10.7%)	17 (20.2%)	13 (15.5%)	84 (100%)

Field Survey 2025

Table 3 presents result on the challenges encountered by journalists in Ogun and Lagos States from new media use for investigative reporting/whistleblowing. While majority of the journalists' (41.7%) and (52.3%) investigative reporting and whistleblowing effort do not feel threatened by poor telecommunication network and prevalence of citizen journalism respectively, a large number of them (53.6%) and (54.7%) agreed that media ownership and the prevalence of fake news on new media platforms is actually a challenge.

Qualitative Data

Exposure to Social Media by Investigative Journalists

Informant 1 noted that the new media beyond fostering collaboration among journalists has further amplified information gathering safely, with less risk and at a relatively cheaper cost. He said:

In 2021, when I decided to carry out an investigation I to Chinese loan apps, my initial trove of victim testimonies and insider tips which eventually led me to get through to my 2-star whistleblowers, came about as a result of a #JournoRequest tweet I put out asking for that information. Without X formerly Twitter, it is fair to say that the story would not have come to be.

He added that:

I wrote in January 2020 about the illegal firing of over 2,000 UBA contract staff without payment of their entitlements. The reason I was able to get hold of the top-secret information and documents that established the story was that the whistleblowers reached out

to me using anonymous dummy accounts that could not be traced back to them. In doing so, they were able to pass across all the information I needed without risking their own safety or revealing their identities - something that would previously have been exponentially more difficult or expensive using the traditional media paradigm.

Challenges Experienced by the Investigative Journalists

While majority of the mainstream media journalists agreed to ownership as a challenge to their investigative journalism practice, some of the independent investigative journalists on the contrary argued that ownership is not a challenge as only lazy journalists would view ownership as challenging in this digital media world. Informant 4 added that:

An investigative journalist must be multidimensional and be able to connect with different platforms when you have challenges and one thing about new media is that you just need to have a good content if you post it on one website and that content is good, for sure people will read it and it will spread. The issue of ownership is a general thing and I do not see it has something that can be solved because every platform has their interest, they have their kind of stories, they have people they don't want to do stories against.

The result was further corroborated when another respondent (Informant 3) said:

As much as we like it, social media is still that platform that is very fast in the circulation of fake news and false information. There are times people deliberately misinform and just want to give you information that is not correct and it is important for an investigative journalist to know how to detect fake news. So, the issues have always been citizen reports and fake news and we cannot do away with it but continue to fight it as much as we can since everyone can now own blogs but we keep scaling through.

They suggested that the mainstream media should be devoid of the funds of the political class who in Nigeria are majorly the proprietors of media houses and more so a policy framework that protects journalists from the influence of their proprietors regarding their stories should also be worked out. Informant 5 added that:

Journalists who feel limited by their employers can pass the forbidden stories to the platforms they know will publish them, such as FIJ where there are no political leanings. They can also cross to the platforms they think would publish the kind of stories they like to cover, or they can devise a long-term plan towards starting their own media outfits.

Giving the expensive nature of investigative journalism in the West African Country, another independent investigative journalist (Informant 2) noted that: “The journalists can get funding through subscription like paywall, so the influence will not be much if the media is being financed by the people (masses).”

DISCUSSION

The findings agree with the view of scholars (Apuke, 2016; Habib & Akila, 2021; Ogunyombo & Ademosu, 2023; Osho, 2020) that practicing journalists believe fake news especially on social media makes journalism less credible. However, Obijiafor (2016) on the contrary felt fake news is prevalent because the mainstream media is below expectation in its responsibility of serving as the voice of the voiceless and to bridge this gap, the audience will create an avenue for their voices to be heard – hence the prevalence of fake news as there is no censorship of the social media like the traditional media. But Beckett (2017) and Habib and Akila (2021) views fake news on social media as less of a challenge stating that it is an avenue for mainstream quality journalism to show its value based on expertise, ethics, engagement and experience. The views of Chen, (2019) thus support the submission of an informant 5, who stated that social media fake news is not a challenge to his journalistic practice because he “uses the new media with discretion”.

Beyond the aforementioned, it was suggested that journalists should be subjected to adequate training on new media usage as well as creation of intellectual contents. However, in ensuring that the training yields good result for investigative journalism practice in the country, the independent investigative journalists noted that the challenge of plagiarism of stories should be checked. One of them said: “My recommendation is that a comprehensive legal framework for quickly, cheaply and efficiently dealing with intellectual property violation should be introduced across board.” (Informant 3)

The present result suggested that there should be policy framework to improve use of new media for investigative reporting. Despite findings showing that majority of journalists in Ogun and Lagos State acknowledged the challenges of ownership and online media fake news as an impediment to effective investigative journalistic practice in both states, but some of them however suggested that there is a need to set in motion frameworks that will reduce the perceived negativity in the mind of journalists and further entrench the benefits therein.

Generally, the informants believe that the new media investigative journalism will thrive in Nigeria when appropriate policies are devised coupled with good funding. This is consistent with extant studies (Clement et al., 2018; Lanosga & Martin, 2016; and Musa & Antwi-Boateng, 2023) which also agreed that there are several negative factors that plague effective investigative journalism practice in Nigeria but which can be change through good and independent policy sparks and adequate funding.

CONCLUSION

New media, no doubt, have contributed a lot to investigative journalism practice and whistleblowing. This is why it is worthy to note that with the view of some of the informants who believe that irrespective of new media's ease to interactivity, transfer and verification of information, there is still much more to be done in terms of its usage for fact-checking especially at a time when journalists both online and mainstream are confronted with the challenge of fake news. Moreover, the government gets the opportunity with the findings to make policies or decisions that will further drive media inclusion which will entrench a robust

whistleblowing policy in Nigeria, where citizens will be free to disclose information that will help the government. They believe that the challenge of fake news among others such as ownership influence and inadequate funding can be fully tackled if policies are put in place.

Recommendations

The followings are the recommendations:

1. The social media seem to be prominent among several new platforms available to the journalists hence, there is a need to strengthening other new media platforms to make them more engaging and interactive and which of course can be done to through viable and intelligent contents.
2. Journalists should make use of new media with discretion and should be armed with fact checking skills while utilizing new media platforms towards ensuring a no-hold-barred style of reporting that has become a recognized alternative over time.
3. A comprehensive legal framework to check plagiarism and intellectual property violation should be formulated by the government and/or various stakeholders in the media sector.
4. Journalists should not be lazy and must learn to embrace several new media as a viable alternative for publishing their stories when ownership interest serves as limitation.
5. Asides the training of journalists in the use of new media technology tools for the creation of intellectual contents, there should be proper legislation put in place to restrict the ownership of the media by the political class who often are at the receiving end of every investigative journalistic effort.

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