

## Contextual Issues Surrounding Investigative Journalism in Nigeria

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### Abstract

*Investigative journalism in Nigeria faces numerous contextual issues that influence its effectiveness and the quality of reporting. These challenges can be categorized into political, economic, social, and professional dimensions. Investigative journalists often face intimidation, harassment, and arbitrary arrests by government authorities. Nigeria's laws, such as the Cybercrime Act, are sometimes used to suppress critical reporting. Despite constitutional guarantees, press freedom is often undermined by restrictive regulations and informal pressures. Investigative journalists working on issues related to corruption, terrorism, or organized crime may face direct threats to their safety. The rise of terrorist groups like Boko Haram in the north and violent criminal groups like bandits has made certain regions particularly dangerous for journalists. Attacks on journalists, kidnappings, and assassinations have become increasingly common, with little accountability for perpetrators. Journalism in Nigeria often faces financial constraints, which limit investigative reporting. Media outlets are frequently underfunded, and journalists may lack the resources to conduct thorough investigations, travel to relevant locations, or access key information. Moreover, media owners may have their own political or economic interests, which may affect editorial independence and discourage deep investigative work. The paper also argues that many media organizations are owned by political elites or business moguls, which can lead to biased reporting and self-censorship to protect the owners' interests. Similarly, journalists working online are vulnerable to hacking, surveillance, and digital harassment.*

### Keywords

Contextual, Investigative, Issues, Journalism, Nigeria and Surrounding



## I. Introduction

The basic functions of the mass media are information, education and entertainment. Over time, these functions have expanded in scope under differing circumstances. The emergence of electronic media is one of such circumstances. The growing level of sophistication in the mass media technology and education of the people are other reasons. That is why broadcast media organizations have also gone into news segmentation in line with the demands of changing realities in the industry. Specialised areas like sports, education, economics, health, etc are now regular features in the broadcast media. The impost of this situation is that journalists require specialized training to acquire the skills for effective

discharge of their duties in different specialised areas. One of the areas requiring specialized skill is investigative journalism (Vitalis et al., 2024).

Investigative journalism as practiced in Nigeria is constrained by several problems despite its bright prospects (Aondover & Akin-Odukoya, 2024). Coddington (2015) also observed that journalists are publishing half-truth, distorted stories and outright falsehood without in-depth investigation, thereby making rumours, unsubstantiated claims and emotions the bedrock of information gathering. Duodu in Aondover et al., (2024) pointed out that a host of challenges have so far limited the success of developing investigative reporting. He argued that investigative reporters face among the toughest obstacles of any journalism, others face criminal and libel cases, government intimidation and other local interest challenges.

Investigative reporting connotes reporting on matters of importance which some persons or organizations wish to keep secret (World Bank in Onyejelem, 2023). According to the Center of Investigative Reporting of the USA “these are the hard stories, hard to assemble and hard to get”. These include going an extra mile to present the behind-the-scenes intrigue, burrowing into hidden facts (pry open), unearthing/revealing secrets, exposing skeletons in cupboards, etc (Nwabueze, 2005). The rationale for more investigative journalists is that, society has become more complex, governments and corporate organizations have become more astute in hiding information and technological advances make more complex and sophisticated the operations of many institutions including governments (Onyejelem, 2020).

According to Agba (2000) investigative journalists are those that unearth significant information about matters of public importance through the use of non-routine information gathering method. He explained further that most day-to-day reporting involves investigation but the true investigation requires an extra-ordinary expenditure of time and resources. This could be the reason why Ullman in Chinedu-Okeke et al., (2021) established that this specialised type of reporting (or journalism) also has the additional element of exposing wrong-doing, of uncovering violations of law, regulations, codes of standards or even decency. The focus is not only on institutional wrongs but also on the persons who commit the wrongs. Thus, it must start with a reason to believe that something is wrong.

It is on record that investigative reporting gained ground in October 1972, when the duo of Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward of the *Washington Post* blew the lid on Watergate burglary, wire-tapping and President Richard Nixon’s re-election campaign malpractices that later became the famous Watergate scandal. The tenacity of the two reporters in sustaining and exposing series of other irregularities related to the scandal, despite official denials, led to the dismissal of several White House officials and resignation of Richard Nixon as the U.S President in 1974 (Onwuka, 2000). The outcome of this investigative report on the Watergate marked the triumph of the press and the victory of the masses over the uncanny knack of the U.S government for explaining the wrong or shielding its officials in the name of national security (Aondover et al., 2022).

In Nigeria, investigative reporting has remained, over the years, more dominant within the magazine sector of the print industry than it has been in the broadcast media. *News watch* magazine, for example, played a crucial role in the institutionalization and repositioning of the investigative and interpretative practice. The broadcasting media entry in the field of investigative came only of recent, with *Channels Television* still playing a mentoring role circle (Aondover et al., 2023).

A turning point in the history of Nigeria's investigative practice came in the 80s and 90s when the political climate was very tense under General Ibrahim Babangida and later, General Sani Abacha. The ethically conscious investigative journalists, such as Dele Giwa, Ray Ekpu, Dan Agbese, Yakubu Mohammed and others, for example, did not speak high-hitting languages in criticising and exposing threats to national development. Their styles of writing were highly pungent. Together, these reporters introduced an aggressive dimension to investigative reporting, blazing the trail for a new approach to journalism in Nigeria. Giwa's eventual death during the military rule of Ibrahim Babaginda has long been attributed to his unflinching commitment and adversarial methodology in exposing the hidden corruption in government circles.

One of the major duties of a journalist is to be a civic watchdog and achieving this often demands investigation and in-depth work. Thus, in a way, all stories are investigative stories because they require research, digging, interviewing and writing. All reporters are investigators who are trained to ask questions, uncover information and write the most complete stories possible. Nevertheless, some reporters concentrate solely on investigations of wrongdoings (Aondover et al., 2023). They deal with reporter adversary relationships that are usually not found in beat reporting or other in-depth coverage. Their aim is to ferret out well-guarded information from often hostile sources. This gives them chance to be creative, to become part of their reader's emotional lives and sometimes to uncover an injustice and correct it.

Investigative journalism like any other form of journalistic reporting demands research. However, the investigative journalist has more work to do in ensuring that an in-depth reporting of an issue is presented to the public. Adequate time and information are needed in the compilation of an investigative report thus meeting the information demands of the public in a different way from the hard news reporting which concentrates on sensationalism as its major attraction. The fact that it is more in-depth also poses a problem for the journalist and this often presents itself as major limitations faced by the journalist especially in Africa but Nigeria in particular (Garba & Msughter, 2023).

Investigative journalism involves exposing to the public matters what 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 (Garba & Msughter, 2023). Investigative journalism is widely held to be necessary for healthy democracy for a number of reasons. Investigative journalism ranges from the routine investigation of documented or witnessed evidence in order to hold government, business and prominent individuals to account in a given community, to the revelation of government and corporate corruption, institutional abuse and cover-up.

Over the years, the broadcast media in Nigeria have been at the forefront of engineering change and development. They have remained an energetic instrument for change and reconstruction as well as reformation since no society can function effectively without information (Hajara et al., 2018). Kuewumi (2009) sees broadcasting as the planned provision of information, education and entertainment to a large and heterogeneous audience through the two major media of mass communication of radio and television. Broadcast audiences are able to access broadcast messages on the radio and television through their receivers which help in decoding such information (Onabanjo, 2000). Without the media, which according to Okunna in Hile et al., (2023) maintain a constant flow of vital information for economic

progress, national development, societal problems are bound to be stagnated or at best, retarded.

Interestingly, the Nigerian broadcast industry has witnessed tremendous progress in terms of expansion, coverage, technology, personnel and managerial capability. This could be the reason why Ukonu in Idris and Msughter (2022) observes that the electronic press era is witnessing breath-taking improvements in the mode of message gathering, investigative stories, retrieval, packaging and dissemination. What began as mere rudimentary, experimental monitoring media in Nigeria have over the years spread their tentacles beyond the local airwaves, sending broadcast messages to international audiences through direct satellite broadcasting (Onabanjo, 2000 p.69).

The 1999 constitution of Nigeria in section 39, titled Right to freedom of expression and the press provided (subsection 2) that “every person shall be entitled to own, establish and operate any medium for the dissemination of information, ideas and opinions; provided that no person other than government of the Federation or of a State or any other person or body authorized by the President on the fulfillment of conditions laid down by an Act of the National assembly shall own, establish or operate a radio or wireless broadcasting station for any purpose whatsoever. The above provision shows a rigorous approach which does not expedite the principles of participation. It therefore restricts the entire process because in the bid to victimize certain communities (that probably did not vote in elections) the government in power could deny licenses. Also, the constitution withdraws the right of expression through provision section 39 (3) which states that: “Nothing in this section shall invalidate any other law that is reasonably justifiable in a democratic society”. The implication is that even licensed stations can be stripped of their licenses by government at will (Maikaba & Msughter, 2019; Kurfi et al., 2023).

## **II. Review of Literature**

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study is anchored on Business and Watchdog Models as theoretical grounding. On one hand, the business model has gained predominance among the academic and business communities (Casadesus & Ricart, 2010). The business model is proposed in this study as a theoretical grounding which is focused on understanding the practical nature of the business model and the conditions in which the business model terminology is appropriate in this study. Any theoretical grounding should be able to explain both the observed trends receiving scholarly attention as well as establish a clear distinction among existing terms within the literature. Common ground for business model research is necessary due to the current disparity of approaches in terms of the concepts used and phenomena explained.

Unspecified theoretical expectations or a lack of theoretical knowledge may otherwise lead researchers to replicate pre-existing findings, adding little to existing theoretical knowledge, or to produce massive amounts of data without any clarity with respect to how that data can lead to novel insights (Andersen & Kragh, 2010). The Resource-Based View and Transaction Cost Economics Perspective. While the resource-based view (RBV) has permeated much of the research on business models, most articles published on the topic framed within the RBV do not delineate how the business model terminology differs from other popular terms such as strategy. Models of any kind (including business models) implicitly or explicitly address the internal competencies that underlie an organization’s competitive advantage. This line of thought is consistent with the RBV where an organization

is viewed as a bundle of resources and capabilities just like the way media organizations handle investigative stories.

While relevant, the RBV alone cannot explain the complexity of business models or its prominence in recent years. Resources *per se* do not bring any value to customers; value is generated through the transactions made with the use of resources. For example, a technology (resource) alone has little to no value. Organizations are required to deploy such technology through transactions in order to create value. We thus agree with McIvor (2009) who emphasized the importance of combining the RBV and the transaction cost economics (TCE) theories. As business value is created from unique combinations of resources, TCE identifies transaction efficiency as a source of value (Morris et al., 2005). Supporting these findings, the study argued that business models represent a specific combination of resources which through transactions generate value for both the public and the organization. Similarly, previous research has revealed that the theoretical underpinning of the RBV is common among practitioners for the purpose of creating a business model. This theoretical grounding provides the study with a strong background for assessing how investigative journalism can be practice among broadcast journalists in Kano State.

On the other hand, Watchdog Journalism (WJ) is here understood as what is elsewhere referred to as investigative journalism, although it is merely one of the types of journalism encompassed by the latter (Coronel, 2009). Investigative journalism or what is here understood as WJ, has been conceptualized indifferent ways. For example, characterize it through its methodological approach to newsgathering, while Protes in Msughter et al., (2021) see the distinctiveness of investigative journalism in its consequences. Both approaches are flawed, as information for muckraking need not necessarily be doggedly dug out and ineffective exposure journalism can nevertheless be seen as watchdog. Kurfi et al., (2023) articulate that the watchdogs not only provide information but particularly focus on malfeasance, which is closer to the researcher's focus. The conception of the media as a fourth estate is closely linked to the famous arguments of Stuart (2005) for the freedom of expression and the philosophy of press freedom, without which media watchdogs could barely bark. The watchdog theory is applied to this study since the study set to examine investigative journalism using knowledge and practice among broadcast journalists in Kano State.

### **III. Results and Discussion**

#### **3.1 The Context**

Investigative journalism is an integral part of the broader journalistic profession. There are multiple definitions available, perhaps due to the long-term alignment of the practice with a number of content forms – commercialized, sensationalized and populist forms (Maradun et al., 2021). However, the common characteristics running across most definitions are that investigative journalism is a non-profit, evidence-based, aggressive and adversarial journalistic practice. It is a special reporting that is more thorough than conventional news reporting; it uncovers information not before gathered in order to inform the public of events that might affect their lives. Burgh (2008, p. 3) describes it as a distinct genre of journalism and a vital means of accountability. Brooks in Moropefoluwa et al., (2024) view it as the “most glamorous” and important form of journalism whereby the practitioners can even become heroes to their peers.

According to Unesco (2011) established that investigative journalism can be viewed thus:

The unveiling of 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 the analysis and exposure of all relevant facts to the public. It requires using both secret and open sources and documents (p. 17).

Based on Unesco's definition, it may be taken that "the credo of investigative journalism is uncovering information that is in the public interest to know" (Harcup, 2009, p. 75). In this way, investigative journalism is seen as capable of playing a crucial role towards the promotion of freedom of expression and freedom of information, as well as the promotion of democracy and national development. Bromley in Msughter (2019) is of the view that investigative journalism has been idealized in contradictory ways that are sometimes complementary and sometimes antagonistic, all of which are indicative of "a broader contestation around the meaning and purpose of journalism". He argues that most debates about the broader field of journalism have often been framed from a binary perspective information or entertainment; serious or trivial; objective or subjective; facts or comment; accuracy or misinformation; freedom of expression or censorship; democracy or demagoguery. For Bromley, issues about the glamour of investigative journalism goes beyond this binary approach, to the question of how investigative journalism functions to salvage the deficits inherent in the mainstream media practices, to set agendas for public conducts and to frame information in reaction form to meet up with public expectations.

Additionally, its glamour should not be seen in terms of its occasional alignments with the demands for marketable, sensationalist and populist content but rather in terms of its ability to dig out facts, toothcomb through documents, trail slippery persons, advance democratic rights and function to provide journalists with a rallying-point, around which to measure and position the ideology and authority of journalism. Bromley (2005) submits that investigative journalism should, thus, be seen to represent a confrontation between the "culture of journalism and the culture of money and profit" inherent in the media.

Investigative reporting varies among professional journalism groups there is broad agreement of its major components: systematic, in-depth and original research and reporting, often involving the unearthing of secrets. For Hollings (2010) it is the kind of journalism epitomized by Watergate; bringing down a corrupt government. The flood of Watergate and post- Watergate materials entered practitioner's consciousness that investigative journalism often depends on the help of a well-placed source. Others like (Msughter et al., 2022) note that its practice often involves heavy use of public records and computer-assisted reporting and a focus on social justice and accountability. Investigative journalism involves exposing to the public matters what 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.

Contrary to what some professionals like to say, investigative journalism is not just good, old-fashioned journalism that is well done. "True, both forms of journalism are focused on the elements of who, what, where, and when. But the fifth element of conventional reporting, the "why", becomes the "how" in investigation. The other elements are developed not only in terms of quantity but also in terms of quality. The "who" is not just a name and a title, it is a personality, with character traits and a style. The "when" is not the present of the news; it is a historical continuum of a narrative. The "what" is not merely an event but a phenomenon with causes and consequences. The "where" is not just an address; it is a setting, in which certain things become more or less possible. These elements and details give

investigative journalism, at its best, a powerful aesthetic quality that reinforces its emotional impact” (Hunter, 2011, p10). An investigative reporter and a routine reporter do daily reporting, their routine, style, work habits are entirely different (Msughter, 2023).

One of the major duties of a journalist is to be a civic watchdog and achieving this often demands investigation and in-depth work. Thus, in a way, all stories are investigative stories because they require research, digging, interviewing and writing. All reporters are investigators who are trained to ask questions, uncover information and write the most complete stories possible. Nevertheless, some reporters concentrate solely on investigations of wrongdoings (Msughter et al., 2021). Investigative journalism like any other form of journalistic reporting demands research. However, the investigative journalist has more work to do in ensuring that an in-depth reporting of an issue is presented to the public. Adequate time and information are needed in the compilation of an investigative report thus meeting the information seeking demands of the public in a different way from the hard news reporting which concentrates on sensationalism as its major attraction. The fact that it is more in-depth also poses a problem for the journalist and this is often presents itself as major limitations faced by the journalist especially in Africa but Nigeria in particular.

Understanding the role of investigative journalism in nation-building is, therefore, not far removed from understanding the importance of the broader field of journalism as a professional practice in national development. The basic requirements are that, outside the core roles of educating and entertaining citizens, investigative journalism should function as exemplary organ for informing the citizens about controversial issues, for coordinating information flow between government and the public, for shaping societal norms and values, for the resolution of social problems, for promoting national integration, and for upward mobility. Through it adopted in-depth research and storytelling approaches, the investigative practice, more than any other genre of the journalistic profession, is expected to help in the creation of awareness and the formation of public opinions with regard to the dysfunctional national structures and/or individual or organizational actions (or inactions) that could constitute sources of harm to the Nigerian citizenry (Msughter et al., 2021).

As a form of “crusading journalism”, investigative journalism can also provide the needed mechanism, pragmatic platforms and infrastructures for campaigning for socioeconomic and political reforms within Nigeria. However, the exercise of the powers of investigative journalism in nation-building must go beyond the simple creation of awareness or shaping of public opinion to getting the citizens, government’s agencies and NGOs to rise up and act on the basis of the information provided for the good of the nation and justice for the citizens (Harcup, 2009).

### **3.2 Investigative Journalism in Nigeria**

The emergence of investigative journalism in Nigeria can be associated with the veteran journalist Dele Giwa and his fellow journalists; Ray Ekpu, Dan Agbese and Yakubu Mohammed. These veteran journalists founded *News Watch* in 1984. The paper initially seemed compromising but it craves its own creative and journalist niche via investigative journalism, including business practices and numerous interviews. Jeter in Obasi and Msughter (2023) said: it changed the format of print journalism in Nigeria and introduced bold, investigative formats to news reporting in Nigeria. The press in Nigeria is vested with the responsibility of scrutinizing the public officials through their watch dog role. This is provided in the section 22 of the Nigerian constitution that paved a way for journalists to serve as a

fourth Estate of the Realm. With this responsibility, journalists carry out investigative reporting in order to expose what is been hidden away from the public interest.

For the press to carry out this responsibility of investigative journalism, the press must exercise its freedom to the highest level. John Momoh, the chief executive of privately owned Channels Television, also believes that the press should be allowed to practice more interpretative and investigative journalism (Onyejelem & Aondover, 2024a). He noted that the press can find its role by applying the key tenet of social responsibility theory. All the above are in tandem with the 1999 provision of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on the obligation of the mass media. Chapter two, section 22 of the constitution states that “the press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all-time be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this chapter and uphold the responsibility and accountable of the government to the people”. This provision confers on the Nigerian press, as in Britain, the status of Fourth Estate of the Realm. The idea of making the government accountable and responsible to the people exceeds the mere relaying of daily intelligence to the mass media audience. It is the watch dog of the press to carry out extensive investigation and public policy projects.

Williams in Onyejelem & Aondover (2024b) points out that without a strong and worthy press, people would have no way to keep their government and big institutions honest. Epstein (1975, p. 100), holds a similar view that the duty of an investigative reporter is the same as that of the historian, to seek out the truth above all things, so as to present it too his reader not as the statecraft would wish them to be known, but the truth as near as he can attain it”. Ladan (2019) in Nigeria we are not yet there, we should not pretend about the practicing of investigative journalism. Journalists need to work hard and collaborate with academicians to develop investigative journalism. These two bodies most come together to aggregate the views, actions and plan for investigative journalism in order to take investigative journalism to the next level.

According to Ufuohu (2008) journalists in Nigeria do not suffer from poverty of intellectualism in journalism profession. Rather, they suffer from three major illnesses namely fear, laziness and a complex of high inferiority proportion. He noted that is major illness hinder the practice of investigative journalism in Nigeria. It is discovered that journalists have fair understanding of investigative journalism in Nigeria. This has attracted interest from a number of scholars such as Yusha’u (2007) who had an extensive interview with Nigerian journalists who indicated their understanding on the concept of investigative journalism, but unsure about the extent to which it is currently being practiced. It indicates that Nigerian journalists have a fair understanding of the practice.

Nigeria in particular has had a fair share of solid investigative journalists. Top on the list is Dele Giwa who died by letter bomb on October 19, 1986. Taiye Solarin was arrested on October 11, 1974 for his published article, “the beginning of the end”. In the same year, Chris Okolie, *News Breed Magazine*, was obtained over an article titled “the war on corruption: who will bell the cat” , and Mineiri Amakiri, a Port-Harcourt correspondent with *Nigerian Observer*, had his head shaved with “ an old rusty blade , stripped naked and given twenty-four strokes of cane on his back (dairy of the media junkie). Thus, these journalists involve themselves in investigative reporting in Nigeria. They paid the price in one way or another. *The Guardian’s* experience in 1994 on August 14 of that year, they published a front-page story on the inner workings of the Abacha regime within the context of how the administration was managing the then June 12, 1993 crisis that in fact brought the administration to power (Saint et al., 2024).

*Inside Aso Rock: the raging battle for the soul of the nation as a rider...The Sunday newspaper's scoop, which must have been some weeks of painstaking research and extensive inquiries detailed the bruising battle between what it called "the hawks" and "the doves" inside the State House, Presidential Villa. The exclusive written by the Editor of the Sunday newspaper then, Mr. Kingsley Osadolor, the man anchoring Good Morning Nigeria on NTA, angered the military regime then to the extent that they closed the newspaper that Sunday – for 11 months. Some of the newspaper's best hands never returned. In fact, The Chairman of the newspaper's Editorial Board, then Dr. Olatunji Dare, a famous and significant (Tuesday) columnist did not return. He refused because he didn't believe in an apology offered to the despotic regime after 11 months as a condition for re-opening the newspaper. Consider the recent Jones Abiri's Weekly Source's short story that landed him in DSS detention two years ago - in a democracy (Oloja 2018).*

In the later days of government of Olusegun Obasanjo, the press exposed many alleged and substantiated fraudulent practices in the political realm. Some of the celebrated cases involved Alamiyeseigha Diepreye, Ayodele Fasoye and Joshua Dariye. In 2008, the journalists were querying the supply of standard vehicles to national assembly. The Channels TV was on hand to celebrate this issue in the public arena (Okeke 2007, p 117-18). Also, Tribune, July 10, 2009 reported governor (Bode George, Orji Uzo-Kalu, Ladoja) and other alleged to have carted away 52 billion naira. Tell, October 28, 2013 p. 36 has a caption "Angst over Ministerial car". The magazine stated: "with aviation agencies claiming to be under financial burden, which has impaired their regulatory functions, Nigerians were shocked last week that the NCAA recently splashed 255 million naira on two exotic cars for the minister of aviation". The publication was a major precursor to the removal of Stella Oduah as Minister (Okeke, 2007).

In the same vein, the Federal Government must have been feeling after a Premium Times recent investigative report of how the former Minister of Finance, Mrs. Kemi Adeosun allegedly forged her NYSC certificate. There has been no word from either the presidency nor from the alleged forger. The only feedback we got was her resignation. Recall all the remarkable investigated stories Next newspaper did on the almighty sacred cow, the NNPC and the emerging telecom power, the Globacom during the Goodluck Jonathan administration too. The Dele Olojede's account of how the newspaper could not survive the aftermath of the newspaper's refusal to spike some stories and how the companies withdrew huge advert support pronto. In recent times, investigative journalism in Nigeria is regaining more recognition among media practitioners. This can be attributed to the emergence of modern online news platform such as Sahara reporter and Premium Time. Some independent institution such as Wole Soyinka Centre for Investigative Journalism are also strengthening investigative journalism in Nigeria through conferences, training and awards to media organizations and reporter.

### **3.3 Ethics of Investigative Journalism**

Generally speaking, ethics refers to the values that guide the conduct of a person, organization or society in interactions with others. According to Kantumoya (2004) ethics stands on the dividing line between perceptions of right and wrong, fairness and unfairness, good and bad, honesty and dishonesty. One's conduct is, therefore, measured not only against one's own conscience but also against some standard of acceptability that has been determined by one's society, profession or organization. In other words, the individual's or organization's ethics boils down to the standards that are followed in relationships with

others. This is what constitutes the integrity of the individual or organization from the standpoint of others, what complicates the issue of ethics is that what seems right or wrong.

According to NOUN in Vitalis et al., (2025) ethics is a system of standards principles and values defining what are right or wrong in terms of professional conduct. It has to do with self-litigation and self-enforcement. Ethical standard in journalism is necessary because unlike other professionals whose roles are more clearly defined journalist have been left on their own to workout roles and determine ethics. Good investigative journalism requires skills, critical thinking and ethical decision making. Every team of investigative reporters pursues a story under different circumstances, so creating an all-purpose ethical rule book is problematic though certain standards have become generally acceptable. Vitalis et al., (2025) records that the legal implications of reporters' actions are, by far, more clear-cut than ethical issues. Any decision can be judged ethically, depending on what ethical framework is used to justify it and what values are prioritized. What journalists and editors need to determine is who will benefit from the investigative reports. Whose interest does investigative journalism serve by publishing a given story? Does the press fulfill its social responsibility in revealing wrongdoing? Whose interests are being affected? Whose rights are being invaded? Is the issue at stake a matter of legitimate public interest? Or is individual privacy invaded when no crucial public issue is at stake.

Therefore, the journalist needs to be compassionate when he/she reports the truth, people may be hurt, in those cases, try to minimize harm. According to Hunter (2011) an investigative journalist could be the best thing that happens to someone and might also be the worst thing that happens to someone. Yar'Adua and Msughter (2023) complimented this, they believe the attitude of let the chips fall as they may, is sometimes an acceptable response, depending on the story. But the attitude must be tempered with responsibility. Rooting out the truth is done not only to get a story but to ensure that you are not unjustifiably ruining a person's reputation. Unfair and unfounded stories can damage a person's job, his entire career or home life.

Classical examples of investigative journalism that resulted in official public investigations include the *Washington Post's* Watergate scandal investigation that forced the resignation of US President Richard Nixon in 1974 (Ongowo, 2011). This reporting was only possible through the protection of a source whose identity was kept secret for 30 years. Due to its nature of "comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable." Spark in Yar'Adua et al., (2023) investigative journalism often places news workers in conflict with the power elites, the rich and the corrupt who seek to conceal information. Scholars who have written on ethics of journalism agree that in some situations where the flow of information is suppressed by the power elites, journalists are left with no option but to engage in questionable tactics like hide identity, deceit, invade privacy of individuals and even buy information from whistle-blowers so as to expose wrongdoing against the society.

Yar'Adua et al., (2023) said among ethics of investigative reporter is conflict of interest a reporter sometimes may find himself in a situation where his own bank account or reputation stand to gain or suffer. The most common category of such situations involves the freebie, could a reporter who wears a freebie brand of cosmetics easily write an expose of how that company's other products are a health hazard? Can the business editor smoke cartons of free cigarettes and then truthfully explore the shady side of the manufacturer's bookkeeping practices? The authors further said some gifts are more harmless, those are the gifts innocently offered and spontaneously and innocently received. But the query is just where to draw the

line? That is up to the individual reporter and he would best judge the source of the gifts, its motivation, its worth and what an enemy could make of the situation. Things are often not illegal or immoral but may nevertheless suggest impropriety. Although, many news organizations have stringent rules against these gratuities.

Journalists, in the course of their duty, deal with the choice between what is moral or immoral if published. They even have to deal with moral and legal issues regarding how they obtain information. The information that investigative journalists seek, that which touch on corruption, immoral behaviour and other vices are always private or hidden by the power elite and as such journalists are forced to dig deep to obtain information (Ongowo, 2011). The method used by many online media to obtain stories and the journalists' secrecy over its source of information reinforces claims that "it is only through illicit means that scandalous corruption can be exposed" (Ongowo, 2011, p. 16) but this leaves serious ethical and moral dilemma to investigative journalists. Whereas Bolch & Miller (1978) put it more succinctly, a reporter ought to ask himself; is what he is doing really justifying his violating the law or some ethical principle? It should not be done casually. It should be done soberly, advisedly and in the fear of God.

Thus, according to in Saint et al., (2024) our immediate battle which we should be concerned with is not and should not always be a battle with public officers but, to a large extent, a battle with ourselves with adherence to our code of ethics. He is of the opinion that journalists, especially in Nigeria, need a new sociology, a new psychology and a new philosophy that has inclination towards developmental journalism, journalism of conscience and not cook-tail journalism. For instance, snooping may produce results that are only harmless and merely sophomoric; however, it can lead to graduated steps to actually breaking the law. According to Bolch and Miller in Saint et al., (2024) some of those things is reading a letter upside down or over someone's shoulder. Such antics are hardly reprehensible although they do violate the gentleman's concept of honour. Depending on the investigative piece, reporters have to weigh the risks of their actions. In these days of internet, it is inevitable, that the investigative reporter is faced with the option of going a step further in his snooping.

Ufuophu (2008, p. 127) is of the opinion that "investigative journalism goes beyond mere reporting of plain and visible facts. It involves digging deep to uncover that which has been hitherto hidden." The distinguishing element according to Ohaja (2011) is that the report which must be of public importance should stem from the finding of a reporter; not a report of an investigation made by someone else. It must also be issues which those involved are attempting to hide from the public. This form of journalism has long standing in the press. It was first identified in the early twentieth century in America (Muckraking era) when magazine journalists took the lead in exposing political corruption, social problems and economic exploration through investigation. According to Ocholi (2010) in a typical Nigeria setting, exposing corrupt practices by government officials can be a very herculean task for the media. Officials use the police, thugs and security operative to harass, intimidate, abuse and even assault journalists. A lot of journalists have lost their lives while investigating very delicate scandalous stories.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Investigative journalism in Nigeria faces several contextual issues that influence its practice and effectiveness. These challenges stem from political, economic, social, and cultural factors that shape the media environment. The paper argued that journalists often face

censorship or intimidation from authorities. Laws like the Cybercrimes Act and other regulations are sometimes used to suppress critical reporting. The paper argues that the public's trust in media institutions is often low, as many Nigerians view the media as being either too aligned with political parties or driven by sensationalism. As a result, investigative journalism may not always have the support it needs to spark systemic changes. In addition, when stories expose government misdeeds or powerful elites, the government or influential individuals may use media campaigns to discredit the journalists or their findings. The paper concludes that journalists are sometimes constrained by stringent defamation laws, which make it risky to publish investigative reports that challenge powerful figures or institutions. Lawsuits for libel or defamation are frequently used to silence investigative reporters, particularly in politically sensitive stories.

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