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Weak-kneed Media and Festering Corruption in Nigeria

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Abstract

Characteristic greed, kleptomaniac behavior, and the impunity of Nigerian elites have become enemies of democratic growth in Nigeria. Corruption in Nigeria has become an issue of concern to scholarship. All domestic and international institutions, as well as legal frameworks put in place to check corruption continue to fail to yield measurable results. Festering corruption brings to the forefront the roles of the media in combating the menace. Using Down's 'issue-attention cycle' as the theoretical lens, this paper undertakes an examination of critical discourse of Nigerian media handling of corruption cases. This discourse analysis is backed up with the scholarly interpretation of documented materials on crime. It is established in the paper that corruption is ubiquitous and festering in Nigerian public space and that the Nigerian media are relatively weak and do not seem to provide consistent coverage of or undertake serious investigation of corrupt practices. The media also fail to take enduring practical steps to wipe out this social ill. Some of the Nigerian press and electronic media practitioners are also guilty of corrupt practices. The thesis is that corruption can only be reduced through sustained media pressure on political bodies to muster enough political will in the fight against corruption. Thus, it is suggested that Nigerian change their approaches and be consistent in their pursuit of values, attitudes, and fight against corruption by prodding speedy trial and conclusion of cases through the promotion of investigative journalism.

Keywords: Corruption, institutions, legal frameworks, media campaign, public space, values, attitudes, investigative journalism

Introduction

Corruption in Nigeria has become commonplace. It is a social malady that is pursued by most people because it has become central to the individual socio-economic survival in a country faced with harsh economic reality. Corruption is so widespread that it has become difficult to change Nigerians' acceptance of corruption—though every citizen pays lip-service to its immorality and illegality. There are tempting conditions and competing motivations to be corrupt. The attractive conditions include inadequate remuneration for working professionals, the high cost of living, and the need for individuals to fund their own access to social amenities, all of which are characteristic of severe inequalities built into the social fabric. The complementing motivations are the readiness of people to give, weak media role in shaming offenders, the inefficient judicial system in prosecuting criminals, and the social accolades poured on the wealthy members of the society. Social complicity and collective apathy are a great impetus to corruptive behaviors of Nigerians.

In Nigeria today, it has become a norm, rather than an aberration, to come out of a public office stupendously wealthy, even if penniless upon entering office. Succinctly put, it is a situation linkable to indiscipline and impunity. Criminal acquisition of wealth by those in political positions has impacted not only the development and stability of the country but also the very peace of Nigerian society because most of the partners in the social contract see themselves being exploited, oppressed, or prevented from realizing their potentials as a result of the imbalance in wealth creation and distribution. Naturally, this situation illustrates the greed of those who have power and access to resources. Corruption is thus cancerous in Nigeria because the social practices of certain individuals or groups demean, impoverish, or exclude others from the opportunities and benefits available in the commonwealth.

Corruption constitutes a form of structural violence in Nigeria like in any society where it is allowed to fester and deprive people of basic necessities of life. Innocent citizens suffer psychological abuse when they see a privileged few live in opulence while they suffer many financial, social, and infrastructural hardships. This assertion is in line with Galtung's 1969 postulation, which sees structural violence as any case in which people can be barred not only by the actions of an identifiable person but by social practices that are factored into the social structure. Galtung also asserted that violence occurs "when actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realization" (1969, p. 168). Corruption is a form of violence unleashed on the people because funds meant to provide basic services such as electricity, good roads, pipe borne water, proper sanitation, and good hospitals and schools, all of which are necessary infrastructures for people to realize their potential, disappear into private pockets. People encounter a lot of suffering arising from deprivation of the basic necessities of life. They groan in silence until the situation becomes unbearable and they revolt. This is a stage of anomy where psychological violence is met with physical violence.

The media are expected to play a leading role in exposing corruption by mediating different positive and negative forces in a society. Ojo (2003, p. 828) asserts that in an under-developed democracy divided along ethnic and religious cleavages, as Nigeria is, "The mass media is perhaps even more necessary for a congruent political culture to evolve." The media must, therefore, "report the news, interpret the stories, influence citizen's opinions, set the agenda for government actions, and socialize citizens about politics" (Ojo, 2006, p. 13). However, in Nigeria, the bravery of those who provide media coverage is dismally low, as they are yet to utilize the safeguard in the Freedom of Information Act (2011).

The Nigerian media themselves are somewhat engaged in corruption. Onwumah (2013, p. 330) affirms that “the press, the watchdog of the society and the fourth estate of the realm is by no means free from corruption in Nigeria.” For instance, to get fair and favorable media coverage, “brown envelopes” (envelopes containing bribes) are given to journalists. Government ministries and agencies now include inducement in their budgets for public events and tag it “press public relations” or “business relations.” Invariably, this money is used to ‘grease the palm’ of journalists who cover beats in these establishments.

In the light of these conditions, this paper embarks on a critical discourse of corruption and traditional media handling of corruption cases as a sustainable means of fighting corrupt practices in Nigeria, which have become institutionalized since the start of the leadership of Nigeria’s most recent republican government—referred to as the fourth republic—in 1999. The paper achieves its objective through a look into traditional media performance between 1999 and 2016 to justify or reject Down’s “issue–attention cycle” theory. This discourse is concluded with analysis of the perception of the people and documented scholarly findings on Nigerian media.

Perspectives on Corruption

Many scholars and human rights activists have defined or described corruption in different ways. Corruption continues to have contested meanings because of cultural relativity, resulting in different perceptions of the concept. Lawal (2007) opines that “corruption can be described as the conscious attempt or deliberate diversion of resources from the satisfaction of the general interest to that of self (personal) interest” (p. 3). Corruption enables the beneficiaries to get what they do not deserve from public funds. Thus, in a society where corruption thrives, the entire public space becomes unjust, tyrannical, and discriminatory. Parochial and selfish interests determine decisions and actions of leaders and the led. Where corruption is not checked it exacerbates poverty, as funds meant for developmental projects instead line the pockets of individuals who are likely to channel such stolen funds into non-productive use. In this context, stealing of public funds is aptly described as structural violence, where individuals or groups are denied access or opportunity due to differential or unequal access to social resources. Adewale (2011) cited in Nageri, Gunu, and Abdul (2013) explain corruption as an “act of diverting the resources that should have been used for developmental purposes of the society to private or personal use” (p. 49). Adewale further states that “corruption has a crowding-out effect on the growth and development of the country (Op. cit. p. 50).

Corruption has damaging effects on the social fabrics. Ademowo and Ojo (2014) rightly posit that corruption leads to exclusion, poverty, and uneven processes that lead to inequalities including (1) marginalization and social and economic exclusion, which may lead to frustration; (2) exacerbated grievance/aggression, which may lead to violence; (3) the undermining of human rights by fueling social unrest and violence; and (4) the increasing precariousness of social economics and political rights of individuals.

Corruption manifests in different ways. Various forms of corruption in the global context include bribery, kickback, over-invoicing, an outright collection of money without evidence of job done, inflated contracts, money for a vote or just put monetization of the electoral processes, nepotism and favoritism, manipulation of figures, outright fraud, and legislative arm twisting.

The Mass Media

The mass media continue to grow and take different forms in contemporary world. Modern classifications of mass media genres include the print media, the audio-visual media, and the new media. Other thinkers classify them as print and electronic media. There are also traditional media and social media categories. However, in this paper focus is on the print media and electronic media, which are generally called “traditional” mass media by many contemporary scholars. Perspectives on the role, purpose, and definition of “mass media” cover nearly the entire spectrum of human communication. Chapman (2013) defines the mass media as those “agencies of communication that convey information, education, news, and entertainment to mass audiences” (p. 779). For instance, British Government outlined the functions of the British Broadcasting Corporation in 1999 as including (1) the provision of quality programming to the viewing public, (2) providing the audience access to the arts, (3) protecting vulnerable program types, (4) reporting news impartially and accurately, (5) educating the audience, (6) ensuring that programming is pluralistic and diverse and consequently caters to all segments of the society, and (7) protecting consumers, especially children from exposure to harmful materials (Chapman, 2013, p. 782). The media are thus seen as the fourth estate of the realm (ranking with the executive, legislature and the judiciary in governance of the state) performing a kind of surveillance on the political leadership as well as the economic class. These functions borrow largely from the social responsibility media theory.¹

The media, according to some scholars, are said to be an instrument used by the political and economic classes to propagate, install, and perpetuate their hegemony. For example, the Marxists think that the media directs or manipulates people to see the world from the perspectives of the ruling elites. Marxists, thus, posit that the media is the means by which the ruling class controls the minds of the ruled. As such, the role of the media as one of society’s “superstructures” is to transmit ruling class ideology and perpetuate capitalists’ ideological beliefs. It is in light of this manipulation that people are rarely informed about why some people continue to live in poverty and why the economic and political elites continue to enjoy abundant privileges.

The traditional mass media have become so powerful today that they order and structure events through allotment of greater or lesser air time, space, or primacy to socio-political happenings in a polity. They lift issues to the plane of public discourse, downplay issues, and exaggerate issues using their agenda-setting and news judgment powers. Thus, they play a vital role in the life cycle of public agenda. Byrant and Thompson (2002, p. 306) cited in Isola (2010, p. 8) identify eight important functions which the mass media perform in a democratic society, including “surveillance of contemporary events; identification of key socio-political issues; provision of platforms for advocacy; transmission of diverse contents across the various dimensions and functions; scrutiny of government officials, institutions and other agencies; giving of incentives and information to allow citizens; and provision of principled resistance to external forces attempting to subvert media autonomy.” Media providers typically have their own interests in determining which issues to promote in the public sphere. Issues that conform to the interests of the power structures of which they serve get better handling and prominence. While the media are expected to expose and criticize weak political structure, abuse of power, and unwholesome social practices, other considerations may relegate these roles to the background.

Down's 'Issue-Attention Cycle' Theory

Simply put, the Issue-Attention cycle is a theory that explains the cycle of public attention to and perception of any particular issue, which begins with heightened public interest in the issue, followed by decreased interest and, ultimately, after some time, boredom with the issue (despite little change in the relevance or severity of the issue itself). Down (1972, p. 282) affirms that "American public attention rarely remains focused on any one socio-political issue for very long; even if it is a matter of crucial importance to society." It is argued that attention and interest first surge and then fall as time and reality overtake issues. Down's issue-attention cycle is thus described as a situation in which issues rise and fall on the public agenda. In this cycle, "[a particular issue] suddenly leaps into prominence, remains there for a short while and then—though largely unresolved—gradually fades from the center of public attention." Down (1972) explains the issue-attention cycle as containing five stages: (1) the pre-problem stage, in which the problem exists, but commands little public attention; (2) the alarmed discovery and euphoric enthusiasm stage, in which the public suddenly becomes aware of the problem and demands that it be solved; (3) the "realization" phase, in which the public realizes the cost of significant progress, namely that solving the problem will require sacrifice from a large part of the population; (4) the gradually declining interest phase, in which the intense public interest in the issue wanes while other challenges find their way to the "alarmed discovery" stage and displace the older issue; and finally, and (5) the post-problem stage, in which the issue moves into a "twilight realm" of lesser attention or "spasmodic recurrences of interest." In Down's issue-attention cycle, the media play a significant role in making issues rise into prominence through emphasis, priming, and repetition of stories. They likewise contribute to the fading of issues from public attention by redirecting attention to new problems that will make the previous ones less attractive. This may be either inadvertent or deliberate. It is inadvertent when media attention shifts to a more important issue but deliberate when the story is given less prominence as a result of the intervention of the political and economic class. Motives for news judgment vary from one media establishment to another, and these are largely determined by ownership philosophy, social imperatives and practitioners' perspectives.

Nature of Corruption in Nigeria

Nigeria is a resource rich country. There are important mineral deposits across the country. There are crude oil, gold, uranium, iron ore, bitumen, gemstone, and a host of other resources, in commercial quantities, available for mining. There is also fertile soil for the cultivation of food and cash crops. In spite of these resources, lingering issues of mismanagement and corruption have denied Nigeria important developmental strides.

Corruption manifests in various forms and shapes in Nigeria. These include the stealing of public resources, inflation of contract sums, over-invoicing of procurement, disruption of public institutional procedures, setting aside of regulations, insensitive allocation of resources and projects, personalization of state powers, misappropriation and misapplication of voted funds, and uneven distribution of human and material resources. Others include election rigging, political patronage in the sharing of patrimony, and parochial or sectional interests overriding public interests.

Corruption is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria. Since the political leadership of the country's "first republic," political leadership and public service have been accused of corrupt

practices. This accusation was evident in the news broadcast announcing the first military coup in Nigeria in 1966, when Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwe referred to Nigerian leaders as “ten per centers who have made Nigeria a laughing stock in the comity of nations” (Onwumah, 2013, p. 332). Like a virus, corruption has continued to spread since return to civil rule in 1999, and it continues to manifest in different ways, making the legislature, the judiciary, and the executive, as well as the general public, active actors in the practice. The corruption index over a period of ten years is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Nigerian Corruption Index, 2003-2012

Year	Gross Domestic Product* (GDP)	Corruption Perception Index (CPI)	Corruption Rank (CR)	Relative Corruption Rank* (RCR)
2003	59.11	1.4	2	132
2004	67.65	1.6	3	144
2005	87.84	1.9	6	152
2006	112.24	2.2	14	142
2007	145.42	2.2	32	147
2008	165.92	2.7	49	121
2009	207.11	2.5	43	130
2010	168.59	2.4	37	134
2011	228.64	2.4	33	143
2012	243.98	2.7	34	139

*Gross Domestic Product is recorded in billions of dollars; the Relative Corruption Rank is calculated by reference to the number of countries involved in the survey.

“Nigeria is a country that is full of ironies in spite of her enormous natural and human resources.” There is wide spread poverty, unemployment, militancy, insurgency, and insecurity of all forms. This situation has been attributed to high level of corruption in the country’s economic and political endeavors. It is argued in some quarters that many people of different cadres are engaged in corrupt practices. Alliyu, Kalejaiye, and Ogunola (2014) list the eaters of corrupt proceeds to include traditional institutions, religious institutions, legal institutions, civil societies, and unions/associations. Others include professional bodies, media, ethnic nationalities, security agencies, political institutions, international organizations, the electorate, contractors, and people in business, schools, and family systems.

The situation of corruption has attracted wide attention. Human Rights Watch (2007) posits that Nigeria has one of the world’s highest rates of corruption. Between 1999 and 2007, the organization asserts that Nigeria lost between \$4 billion to \$8 billion yearly due to corruption. Human Rights Watch (2007) argues that in Nigeria’s case, the “accumulation of the nation’s economic resources for [the] personal benefits [of its leaders] . . . contributed to the leakage of capital from Nigeria for illegal deposits abroad.”

Effects of Corruption on Nigerians

Corruption has effects on many facets of Nigerian life. The effects include governments’ inability to pay salaries of workers and failure to execute developmental projects that are beneficial to the people. It has also destroyed the culture of hard work, as Nigerians now believe that to be rich, you must have been corrupt. Corruption also hinders economic growth because

foreign investment is not encouraged, capital flight becomes rampant, and relocation of industries to other countries becomes a norm because the cost of doing business surges. There is also poor service delivery because part of the funds meant for projects is stashed away in private pockets. Fabayo, Posu, and Obisanya (2011) use the annual corruption perception index between the period 1996 and 2010 in their study to reveal that the corruption Perception Index Ranking for Nigeria indicates a high level of corruption.² In 2014, according to the same Corruption Perceptions Index, the country received a corruption score of 27 out of 100, corresponding to a rank of 136 out of 175 countries, placing it within the 16th percentile for perceived corruption.³ This high level of corruption leads to little investment and thus weak economic growth.

Corruption invariably affects the material conditions of the people who are daily impoverished due to lack of basic amenities like pipe borne water, hospitals, good roads, good schools, and regular electricity supply. Effects of corruption can also be seen in the pervasive sense of guilt among the people. The people of Nigeria feel just as guilty as the perpetrators of corruption in Nigeria because the people have become complicit in the country's corruption not only as participants in various forms of corruption but also as "bystanders," helplessly witnessing this crime as it continues to take a deeper root in the polity. The kinds of guilt that apply to corruption in Nigerians include (1) the criminal guilt of those who committed fraud; (2) the political guilt of those who take monetary and material inducement to help corrupt people get to power and remain there; (3) the moral guilt of those who stand by doing nothing as corruption persists; and (4) the metaphysical guilt of the survivalist media, law enforcement agencies, and the judiciary, failing in their duties to curb corruption through appropriate deterrence. The multi-dimensionality of guilt in the preceding analysis of corruption in Nigeria is very apt in understanding its permeation of all facets of Nigerian society.

Efforts at Curbing Corruption in Nigeria

There are extant laws in Nigeria statute books of the federation and the other federating units aimed at fighting corruption. Many courts are also bombarded daily with corruption cases. The police are traditionally empowered to investigate and prosecute corruption cases. In addition, since the 1980s, successive administrations in Nigeria have added new techniques for fighting corruption in terms of campaign and institutional arrangements. The civilian administration of Shue Shagari launched the Ethical Revolution in 1981, but this turned out to be a charade, as looting of government treasury by politicians and public service cohorts marred the initiative. The military administration of Muhammadu Buhari/Tunde Idiagbon declared war against corruption through the War Against Indiscipline (WAI) in 1984. Military decrees were promulgated, and many public servants were subsequently detained or jailed for corrupt practices. In 1986, the National Orientation Agency was launched as a government parastatal agency under the regime of Ibrahim Babangida to monitor and sensitize the public on good conduct in public and private lives. The regime also launched Mass Mobilization for Social Justice. However, many commentators declared the Babangida administration as the one that institutionalized corruption in Nigeria public space. The new War Against Indiscipline in 1996 suffered in its acceptance by the people because of the legitimacy crisis and draconian rule of Sanni Abacha. The civilian administration of Olusegun Obasanjo later established the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). The Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB) and Code of Conduct Tribunal (CCT) were also empowered to function effectively. The Freedom of

Information Act (2011) was signed into law by the administration of Goodluck Jonathan to promote accountability and transparency in good governance. The Nigerian government has also taken steps to improve its dealings with the business sector and reduce corruption. Incomes accruing into the coffers of the three tiers of government are being published monthly—though these governments have not been publishing their expenditure profiles and other internally generated revenues and receipts. The Bureau of Public Procurement Act is also directed at ensuring accountability and fighting corruption.

The efforts of the Buhari civilian administration since 2015 have been geared towards the recovery of stolen wealth and media shaming of the culprits. There have also recently been several high profile cases prosecuted against high ranking members of the political and economic class including the senate president, judges of the Supreme Court, Appeals Court, and High Court, as well as bank executives. There has also been much emphasis on due process in the award of contracts. The Treasury Single Account (TSA) for government business is aimed at the monitoring of income and expenditure as means of blocking financial leakages.

Nigerian Media in Focus

The history of newspaper publication in Nigeria dates back to the establishment of Iwe Iroyin by Reverend Henry Townsend in 1859. Aro (2011) notes that other newspapers like Anglo-African, Lagos Times, and Gold Coast Advertiser, Lagos Observer, The Eagle and Lagos Critic, The Mirror, The Nigerian Chronicle, The Lagos Standard, Lagos Weekly Record, African Messenger, The West African Pilot, and Nigerian Tribune came on board before the country's independence. Since the introduction of self-rule and independence in Nigeria, many newspapers, magazines, and other periodicals have been on the news stand. Prominent among them are The Punch, The Guardian, Tribune, Daily Times, ThisDay, and The Sun. Magazines include the News, Newswatch, The Tell, and other business based publications.

Radio broadcasting started in 1932, when the British Empire Service introduced a relay station in Lagos. Later, the main cities and towns in Nigeria started enjoying broadcasting via wired-wireless called Radio-vision. In 1956, The Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation Ordinance gave birth to Radio Nigeria. In May 1959, the Western Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation was inaugurated, followed by the Western Nigeria Television in October of the same year. Eastern and Northern regions of Nigeria established their television stations around 1962. Many stations owned by state governments across the country are also available today. The Nigerian media have “played a pivotal role in promoting political awareness, sensitizing the populace and molding and directing opinion” (Omotosho, 2006, p. 232).

In 1992, Decree No. 38 liberalized the broadcast industry and allowed private participation. Thus, African Independent Television (AIT), Minaj Broadcast International (MBI), Channel TV, Television Continental (TCC), and a host of others came on board. Many privately owned radio stations like Raypower FM, Rhythm FM, Cool FM, Wazobia FM, Naija FM, and a host of others have also appeared. These independent broadcast stations have dominated the airspace almost surpassing the popularity of federal and state-owned radio outfits. The numbers of radio and television stations, as well as print media outlets in Nigeria may lead one to assume that Nigeria boast of a widely varied and vibrant media environment. However, the operational location of most media business outfits is the south-west of Nigeria (Oyovbaire, 2001, p. 8). As a result of this geographic focus, the media have often been accused of being too pro-southern. According to Olukotun (2000, p. 136), “The problem of partisan, biased, or ethnic reporting is a

deep one and goes back to the days of the anti-colonial press, when the nationalist press often turned against itself as it fractured along [racial] and party lines.” When one contrasts the media’s lack of interest in some corruption issues with its strident and selective attacks on some corrupt individuals, one may be tempted to conclude that this dichotomy along partisan lines still exists till today.

The Nigerian Media and the Fight against Corruption

The roles of Nigerian media in fighting corruption have been commended by some scholars. Afolayan (2012) commends the media for exposing and pursuing corrupt politicians and bureaucrats, many of whom have been forced to resign or have been impeached and prosecuted. In essence, the Nigerian media have tried to bring to public awareness to many corruption stories and have also been commended for publishing articles that condemn corruption. Many news stories exposing corruption released by anti-corruption agencies currently dot the pages of print media through banner headlines, and major headlines of electronic media have been on corruption stories in the recent past. Table 2 below shows frequency distribution of crime articles covered by some selected newspapers over a period of five years.

Table 2: Frequency and Distribution of Crime Articles

Year	Number of Crime Articles Appearing in <i>The Nation</i>	Number of Crime Articles Appearing in <i>The Tribune</i>	Number of Crime Articles Appearing in <i>The Guardian</i>	Total Number of Articles and Rank over Five Years
2006	30 (21.0)	76 (53.1)	37 (25.9)	143 (15.7) 4
2007	43 (30.3)	46 (32.4)	53 (37.3)	142 (15.6) 5
2008	35 (16.7)	93 (41.5)	81 (38.8)	209 (22.9) 2
2009	60 (29.6)	102 (50.2)	41 (20.2)	203 (22.2) 3
2010	99 (42.1)	64 (29.6)	53 (24.5)	216 (23.2) 1
Total	267 (29.2)	381 (41.7)	265 (29.0)	913 (100)

*Figures in parentheses are in percentages from the content analysis of the newspapers taken.

Source, p. Fadairo, Fadairo and Aminu (2014).

In the recent past, the media have also done well in few cases. The media followed up the forgery and perjury cases against former Speaker of the House of Representatives, Alhaji Salishu Buhari and investigated the questionable past of the old senate president, Evan Enwerem, Others cases have been brought against former senate president, Chuba Okadigbo (for financial recklessness) and against former national vice-chairman of the Peoples’ Democratic Party, Bode Goerge (for contract splitting). These personalities were either convicted or removed from offices as result of the relentless interest and follow-up generated by the stories and pressure mounted by the media on the executive and the judiciary to bring them to justice. These events suggest that the Nigerian media seem to be covering corruption stories efficiently; however, a critique of the contents of these stories exposes laziness and insufficient information about fraud. For example, the stories only relay or repeat news releases of allegations by anti-corruption agencies and contained incomplete investigative activities of these organizations with sensational headlines. The stories also contained court proceedings and public vituperation on the crimes.

Unfortunately, the Nigerian media practitioners rarely follow up crime stories for a long time. This is why the Nigerian media are often accused of complicity with the political class in sweeping under the carpet issues that require aggressive and sustained media attention and prominence (Isola, 2010; Oso & Pate, 2010; Akinfeleye, 2003). The foregoing position of scholars suggests that agenda-setting role of the press is used to create a sort of cultural hegemony with basic principles of capitalism, which emphasize exploitation by the economic and political ruling classes. In some instances, media go silent immediately after the publication of serious corruption allegation without necessary follow-up. This tendency denies the audience critical information that may otherwise have prompted judicial action and set positive deterrence in the country. The case of bribery of the National Assembly members for the third term agenda is apt in illustrating this laxity. The third term bribery scandal remained a rumor for more than ten years only to be validated by those involved years after the exit of the Obasanjo regime. The media's disposition toward some issues of corruption has called to question the commitment of the media in the fight against corruption. Baran & Davies (2003) aver that if viewpoints about an issue are ignored, marginalized, or trivialized by media reportage, people become reluctant to talk about it again and in time, those views cease to be heard in the public domain. In Nigeria, the issue of corruption is often abandoned shortly after it is brought to public knowledge by the media. In this instance, the media play a vital role in Down's issue-attention cycle.

Nigerian media have not lived up to expectation in sustaining the campaign and public interest in many of the cases involving corruption. At times, they even shift public interest away from such cases. In critiquing this practice of the media, Ojo (2006, p. 13) posits that "the mass media may mislead the people by (1) engaging in deliberate distortion of the information they disseminate to their audience (i.e., the citizen), (2) knowingly excluding some vital information, or simply remaining quiet over some important issues where the people deserve further clarification, or (3) seeking to divert the people's attention from very important issues by crowding the people's mind with trivialities. In the recent past, some of the corruption cases that have been swept under the carpet for different reasons best known to practitioners by the Nigerian media include the country's pension fund scam⁴; the "eight all" African Games Scam (COJA)⁵; the Farouk Lawan bribery scandal⁶; the petroleum subsidy scam of 2012⁷; the scandal involving Allison Madueke, Minister of Aviation and the hiring of a 10 billion naira private jet⁸; the scam involving the purchase of two "bullet proof cars" for N\$225 million by the former Minister of Aviation, Stella Odua⁹; the seizure of 96.1 million dollars in South Africa in a cash for arms deal¹⁰; and the Halliburton bribery scam¹¹;. In the particular case of Halliburton scam, while the foreigners who paid bribes to Nigerian officials have since been punished and penalized by the United States of America and German authorities, the beneficiaries from Nigeria have yet to be fished out through investigative journalism to compel the justice system to do its work. The preceding list of scams and scandals validates Down's issue attention cycle, in which issues rise and fall on the public agenda, leaping to prominence when they first arise and remaining there for a short while before gradually fading from public attention despite remaining largely unresolved.

Scholars have accused the Nigerian media of publishing sponsored "advertorials" and stories without concern for the ethical standards to which they should adhere (i.e. that they should report only objective stories and refrain from presenting their own perspective or bias). There have been cases in which advertorials and news contents have been found to be sponsored to ridicule the opposition or rival elements. For example, many newspapers and African

Independent Television published many advertorials in 2015 that were considered to be hate speeches during electioneering.

The Nigerian media celebrates hierarchy, wealth, fashion, and social standing. They rarely depict elites in critical light that might draw attention to or question the source of the elites' money or investigate the road to their assumption of prominence. The media fail to promote a meritocratic society, in which the emphasis would be on intelligence, talent, and hard-work. On the contrary, the media support celebrity, money, and popular cultures and ignore the corrupt practices that contribute to the wealth and popularity of celebrities and public figures. Cohen (2009, p. 925) observes the same trend in the United Kingdom mass media by stating that they engage in "trumpeting the good fortune of British capitalism and pay less attention to its casualties." The victimized members of the society who are cheated by the capitalist class do not get enough attention. The poor are painted as being the architects of their own misfortune, while the rich are eulogized.

Nigerian media have also been accused of distorting information in the corruption stories they disseminate to their audiences through deliberately sensationalized headlines but shallow content. Some vital pieces of information are not thoroughly investigated before publication, only for the individual concerned to deny the story and ask the publisher to retract the story and apologize. The media in some cases retract and apologize for "wrong" publications. There have been instances when the anti-corruption agencies will also refute or discredit the source of stories on corruption. Media trial of corruption allegation is equally commonplace. The media is hasty in pronouncing guilt in their reporting of stories. Such media trials tend to harden the minds of corrupt people, who see corruption as a general norm rather than an aberration.

The Nigerian media also engage in abusing, insulting, and haranguing security agencies, legal staff, the Attorney General, and the executive for detaining certain high profile corrupt individuals without emphasis on the depravity, gravity, or criminality of their actions. For example, one would expect the Nigerian media to have done a critical analysis of the havoc wreaked on Northeast Nigerian communities by the diversion of funds appropriated to fight Boko Haram Insurgents (rather than on what the media did, which was to debate the legality or illegality of the detention of the individual responsible for the leaked funds). The time has come for the media to assist the populace in understanding the victimization of the populace as result of corruption.

The managers and workers of the state-owned media are the most pliant of puppets, who take it as a matter of duty to relegate to the background corruption stories involving their principals and their allies. For example, no Ekiti State-owned media outfit failed to highlight or review news stories relating to the allegation of money laundering running into billions of naira against Governor Ayodele Fayose. Rather, the emphasis of media coverage was on the legality or illegality of the freezing of his account by EFCC. In the same vein, PDP-controlled, state-owned media de-emphasized the plausibility of money laundering allegation against the former first lady, Dame Patient Jonathan, whose aides have owned up to laundering over \$3.5 million dollars on her behalf. The Nigerian media's present orientation could be summed up by the Marxists contention that the media is not divorced from the ruling capitalist class. Marxists contend that media outlets are "happy to transmit ruling class ideology through television, radio and newspapers because media owners are part of the ruling capitalist class, who have vested interest in not being criticized or dismantled" (Chapman, 2013, p. 783).

In most parts of the world, the media continue to lean towards the ideological dictates of the economic and political drivers. Ideology as well as the politics of the proprietor has always

determined media-bias or slant in the reportage of corruption stories in Nigeria, even before independence. Considerations of the interests of the pioneer media owners, whose political ambitions necessitated the establishment of printing press pervaded every newspaper. For example, during the travails of Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe in the African Continental Bank corruption scandal, and Chief Obafemi Awolowo's Dideolu in his "estate saga," *The Pilot* and *The Tribune* supported their respective proprietors. Also, the Concord media group did not partake in the media outrage over an allegation of fraud against the International Telegraph and Telecommunication (ITT) because Chief M. K.O. Abiola was the proprietor of the company as well as the person at the head of the alleged corruption.

This scenario has also played out in the way private media outfits handle trials involving their owners in contemporary Nigeria. For example, the proprietor of African Independent Television, Raymond Dokpesi's N2.1 billion money laundering scheme, and publisher of *This Day*, Ogbaiqbena's, illegal collection of N670 million from Dasukigate's 2.1 billion-dollar arms-purchase scam were glossed over by their respective media outfits. The Punch (2016) reports of the 2.1 billion-dollar scandal reported simply that *This Day* publisher, Obaigbena, had "returned" N350 million and, thereafter reported nothing in the dailies about the remaining balance.

The Nigerian media is seen to be hesitant to expose corruption cases of incumbent administrations. They have always waited until the regimes leave office. This retroactive reporting of corruption cases is probably out of fear of retribution or incorrigibility. Retroactive reporting suggests cover-up or naivety on the part of media practitioners, as they often later come up with indicting stories that reveal pre-knowledge of the crime. Belated media coverage of the ownership of a multi-billion naira hotel edifice by the wife of the former president in 2016 came only after money laundering allegation against her aides was exposed by the EFCC. This amounts to "protocol journalism," in which the positive aspects of public office holders are reported while the negative acts are hidden for a later date. A vibrant and courageous media ought to have made the owner of the building known to the public at the inauguration of the hotel. This could not be done because at such event, members of the media usually quietly accept "brown envelopes" containing bribe money not to reveal such details. Adewale (2008) notes that the beneficiaries at such events are usually in fact the journalists, who go home with all forms of brown envelopes, junkets, free trips, and patronage from those holding public offices and owners of private companies. These inducements are to the detriment of media profession and ethical standards.

The media at times harp on extraneous issues that will whittle down the veracity of corruption cases. For instance, in the ongoing trial of Dasukigate, the media do not agree on the mode of handling the case. While some media portray the case as vengeance in retaliation for the role played by Colonel Dasuki in the 1985 coup d'état that ousted General Buhari from power, others rightly emphasize the enormity of the impunity involved in the management of security votes while thousands are being killed and maimed or displaced by Boko Haram insurgents.

As we have discussed earlier, journalists owe a duty to the public since they are seen as the mouthpiece of the people they profess to serve. But when reporters perform their duties in the interest of a select few for personal gains, it is regarded as irresponsible, and the credibility of the profession becomes doubtful (Ekeanyanwu & Obianigwe, 2010).

Why the Media Attention on and Fight against Corruption in Nigeria are Weak

The prolonged judicial trials in Nigerian court make some corruption cases unpopular for media emphasis as the public becomes disinterested in the issues. There is a widely believed notion that once corruption offender is bailed out of court, the case is dead. According to Danladi (2008, p. 2), Nigerian journalists are the poorly paid. They earn as little as \$100 a month, and some journalists resort to unethical practices to eke out a living. The nation's harsh economic climate also leaves media owners and producers at the mercy of advertisers, who are either captains of industries, government functionaries, business juggernauts, or political heavyweights. These groups of people have been found to be the most corrupt elements, judging by EFCC, ICPC and DSS arrests and prosecution in the last one year. However, few stories of their malpractices have been printed in the print media or aired in the electronic media, as little attention is paid to the corruption going on in the private sector. It is even apt to argue that it would be difficult for the public sector to execute fraud projects without the connivance of the private enterprises.

In summary, inhibition in the way of media performance in the war against corruption in Nigeria includes sensationalism, flippancy, proprietorial influence, regional chauvinism, and the emergence of junk journalism (Ojo, 2006, p. 16). Yellow journalism syndrome also has plagued media practice and news judgment. Thus, attempts to enforce the ethics of the profession in the fight against corruption have been somewhat shallow and superficial. Intimidation, harassment, and threats are the precursor to the spiral of silence theory. Expulsion from official spaces, beating, incarceration, abduction, and prosecution in the court of law, and seizure are often used by corrupt persons to suppress the press and to grandstand their innocence before the public. Reports on the beating of journalists, the smashing of their cameras, and total denial of their entry into government offices abound in the daily newspapers.

In a nutshell, ownership, commercial and political interests; pressure to survive economic hardship or recession; corporate and personal security of staff; regulatory agencies; public relations consultants; and legal matters are factors that inhibit adherence to media ethics in the war against corruption.

Concluding Remarks on Ways of Transforming Corruption Situation in Nigeria

It is established in the paper that corruption is ubiquitous and festering in Nigerian public space and that the Nigerian media are weak and do not seem to sustain exposure and investigation of corrupt practices. Corruption cases disappear in the news media within a short period without their resolution to the benefit of anti-corruption war. Investigative journalism to a very great extent has also been undervalued and played down in Nigeria. Tenable pieces of evidence to support corruption cases are rarely unearthed by the Nigerian media to assist the judiciary. The Nigerian media practitioners only attend court sessions as reporters and merely regurgitate judicial proceedings in their next editions. This type of professional approach to journalism has sadly enhanced the issue-attention cycle as proposed by Down. The Nigerian media are perceived by social commentators and scholars as lame ducks whose knees are too weak to sustain a long battle in the fight against corruption.

In order to curb corruption, there is the need to ensure justice in the management of the nation's patrimony (Brunk, 2012). In transforming the present state of corruption, we need to change perceptions, attitudes, and dispositions to conform to national ethics and values. We need

to have recourse back to African traditional values as noted by Onwumah (2013, p. 337) that “the original values in the Nigerian traditional setting are accountability, honesty, love, respect, hard work, the value of a good name and integrity.”

In their bid to fight corruption and install accountability in conducting public business in Nigeria, the media must ensure corruption is thoroughly investigated and exposed and that the guilty are punished through persistent and vigorous campaigns. Investigative and articulate journalism is critical in achieving better reporting and handling of corruption cases. Fearless, unbiased, and patriotic media practitioners are needed for the war against corruption to achieve its desired goals. The Nigerian media should uphold professional standards of accuracy, objectivity, and responsibility. Adequate sensitization and mobilization of the citizenry by the media are necessary to ensure high depth of the attitudinal and perceptual change needed especially in Nigeria where corruption has become endemic. The people, as whistle blowers, should also make information on corrupt practices available to the media. It is through a collective approach that the fight against corruption will be won. The media practitioner should also embark on self-regulation, shun bribes or “brown envelopes,” and stop engaging with corrupt people. More importantly, media practitioners should take advantage of the provisions made by the Freedom of Information Act 2011, which guarantee media and public access to information about day to day activities of government. They can have recourse to court injunctions if public officers fail to disclose vital information to the public. The media should be the vanguard for demanding accountability and transparency in governance.

Notes

¹ Social responsibility theorists posit that the media has some obligations to society, through self-regulation and state regulation, as well as an obligation to display high professional standards. Proponents of this theory were Wilbur Schramm, Siebert, and Theodore Paterson in their book *Four Theories of Press* (1956).

² This ranking is relative to the situation in other countries included in the survey.

³ Although the 16th percentile would normally be considered low, due to the inverse relationship noted above, this percentile reflects a high level of corruption.

⁴ Billions of Naira were reported stolen by the Pension Transition Management Committee. The ringleader, Rasheed Maina, has since fled the country, while other culprits are yet to be indicted by the court.

⁵ Several billions of naira were said to have been unaccounted for by members of the Commite d’organization des jeux Africaine (COJA), which organized the Eighth All African Games hosted by Nigeria in 2003.

⁶ Farouk Lawan took bribes from Femi Otedola while he was the chairman probing oil subsidy in 2012.

⁷ An excess fund of about 1.2 trillion naira was claimed by dubious businessmen to be a “subsidy fund” from the federation account. Some are still being tried in the courts of law.

⁸ Private jets were hired for up to 10 billion naira over the course of a year by the minister. This was reported as lack of prudence in the management of state resources.

⁹ Two bullet proof cars were purchased under suspicious circumstances by the minister without reference to budgetary provisions for the purchase for the year 2014.

¹⁰ A total of \$96.1 million was discovered in a jet belonging to the president of the Christian Association of Nigeria in South Africa. The amount was said to be meant for the purchase of arms to fight Boko Haram; however, there was no document to back the transaction.

¹¹ The Halliburton scandal is a case involving bribery to secure contracts with multinational companies, and it has dragged on for over a decade, and no culprit has ever been tried in Nigeria.

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