

## **Influence of Freedom of Information Act on Print Media Coverage of Anti-Corruption Campaign in Nigeria**

*Garba, Kabir Alabi, Ibraheem, Adegboyega Ismail (PhD) & Tejumaiye, Joseph Adepoju (PhD)*

### **Abstract**

*This study examined the influence of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) on the print media coverage of anti-corruption campaign in Nigeria. Its objective is motivated by the gap between FOIA's proposition of strengthening the capacity of journalists in the coverage of corruption issues and the application of the Act ten years after its enactment in 2011. Questions of interest to this study are: How much do print media journalists know of the provisions of the information law? How do journalists use the FOIA in their reporting of anti-corruption campaign? What are the challenges of application of the FOIA in reportage of corruption issues in Nigeria? To what extent do public institutions respond to FOI requests by journalists? Anchored on the Social Responsibility, Development Media and Agenda Setting theories of the press, the mixed methods of quantitative and qualitative research were adopted. Specifically, survey and in-depth interviews were used as instruments for data gathering. The in-depth interview was used to aggregate the views of 20 editors (daily) and editors-in-chief selected from ten (10) randomly selected print media organisations. Findings show that print media journalists have fair knowledge of the provisions of the Act and they rarely use the legislation to seek information to uncover corruption. Findings also show that public institutions respond poorly to requests for information made by journalists. Challenges inhibiting effective application of the Act as revealed by the study include: lack of investment in investigative journalism; use of Official Secrets Act by the public institutions to deny access of journalists to information; absence of sanction for defaulting public institutions; unwillingness of state governments to domesticate the Information Act; poor remuneration and welfare package for journalists; as well as lack of safety measures and programmes for investigative journalists among others. The study concludes that the FOI Act has not impacted coverage of anti-corruption campaign in Nigeria by the print media journalists. The study recommends a comprehensive reform not only to stamp out legal, professional and socio-economic encumbrances in the media industry, but also to strengthen the capacity of the media as strategic agency in the quest for national development similar to contribution made by the media in the struggle leading to Nigeria's Independence in 1960 and termination of the military dictatorship in 1999.*

*Keywords:* anti-corruption campaign, freedom, influence, FOI Act, print media coverage

## **Introduction**

One major proposition that drove the campaign for the enactment of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) which lasted for 12 years (1999 – 2011) is the understanding that the legislation would strengthen the anti-graft crusade by enhancing the capacity of journalists to embrace investigative reporting strongly. Indeed, the advocates for the passage of the law capitalised on this proposition as they explored, in 1999, the possibility of getting the Freedom of Information Bill (FOIB) passed into law as an Executive Document. As a result, the core group comprising, mainly, the representatives of the Media Rights Agenda (MRA); Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Lagos State chapter; and Civil Liberty Organisation (CLO) did approach the then President Olusegun Obasanjo, who, on assumption of office on May 29, 1999 as president of Federal Republic of Nigeria, had identified corruption as one of the anti-development issues that would be tackled by the new civilian administration.

Obasanjo (1999), in his inaugural address, fingered corruption as the greatest single bane of Nigerian society, thus, the promise that under his administration, all rules and regulations designed to help honesty and transparency in dealing with government would be restored and enforced. The promise would later manifest in the creation of two anti-corruption agencies – Independent Corrupt Practices (and other related matters) Commission (ICPC) in 2000 and Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in 2004 through the parliamentary processes.

Coincidentally, it was about this time the Freedom of Information Bill (FOIB) was introduced to the National Assembly. Although efforts to secure Obasanjo's consent for the Bill's presentation as Executive Document did not yield result, the argument then was that accountability and transparency in government were crucial to any meaningful anti-corruption crusade. It was stressed that such accountability and transparency could only be possible if citizens had right of access to information held by the State or its agencies or there was a mechanism to give practical effect to the right to freedom of information.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Despite the wide agitation for a legal backing that would foster press freedom in Nigeria, which dovetailed into the 12 years aggressive campaign (1999 – 2011) for a freedom of information legislation in the country, i.e. the Freedom of Information Act, its application by journalists in the last ten years of its existence remains, arguably, below expectations.

One major expectation was that investigative journalism would be strengthened which would subsequently give bite to the anti-graft campaign, thereby promoting public accountability and good governance pursuant to section 22 of the 1999 Constitution as amended.

However, the perception within the media industry is that the media which led the campaign for the enactment of the legislation have not taken advantage of the law to seek information with a view to discharging the duty of promoting public accountability through the consistent interrogation of public policy and highlighting of blocks to development such as corruption, human right abuses or inefficient governance.

More worrisome is the rising profile of the country in the corruption perception index in the last ten years of the existence of the Act while the anti-corruption campaign seems to have also lost bite.

Therefore, this study focused on establishing the level of knowledge of the Act among the print media journalists in Nigeria, frequency of usage, responsiveness of public institutions to FOI requests by print media journalists and challenges of implementation of the FOIA in print media coverage of corruption issues in Nigeria. The aggregate of knowledge, application, responsiveness and appreciation of challenges of FOIA implementation should provide the basis to establish the influence of the information law on print media coverage of anti-corruption campaign.

### **Research Questions**

1. How much do print media journalists know of the provisions of Freedom of information Act?
2. How do print media journalists use the FOIA in their reporting of anti-corruption campaign?
3. What are the challenges of application of the FOIA in the reportage of corruption issues in Nigeria?
4. To what extent do public institutions respond to FOI requests by journalists?

### **Nigerian media, logics of information law and anti-corruption campaign**

The enactment, in 2011, of the Freedom of Information (FoI) Act complements the strength of the constitutional obligation of the media in Nigeria to uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people as enshrined in Section 22 of 1999 Constitution. The information law essentially empowers anyone to request information – written or unwritten –

held by a public official, institution or agency without such a person having to show their “specific interest in the information being applied for” and with the additional right to a recourse to the courts to guarantee such access.

The logic behind the legislative framework is the universal acknowledgment that freedom of information, apart from being a fundamental human right established under international law, serves to promote transparent and accountable leadership, thereby fostering a less corrupt society that upholds the tenets of human rights and values of democratic practices. Indeed, the information law drives its strength from the understanding of the media as a watchdog of government in all its forms, promoting transparency in public life and public scrutiny of those with power through exposing corruption, maladministration and corporate wrongdoing (UNESCO, 2008).

The expectation that the FOI Act will make an impact in the fight against corruption is justified by some of its provisions that compel public institutions to disclose details of their expenditures including contracts executed, salaries and emoluments of employees (Ojebode, 2011). Before the Act was enacted in May 2011, Nigerian media had existed for over 150 years and the roles they played in socio-political lives of Nigerians are tangible (Tejumaiye, 2019). Particularly in the fight against corruption, Nigerian media have earned public commendation for deploying their editorial resources (news stories, features, editorials, cartoon, opinion articles) to exposing and pursuing corrupt politicians and bureaucrats, many of whom have been forced to resign or have been impeached and prosecuted (Oyebode, 2017). The media focus on corruption through stories and articles has also increased public awareness about the social scourge and why it must be tamed. According to Oyebode, many news stories exposing corruption released by anti-corruption agencies have continued to dot the pages of print media through banner headlines, and major headlines of electronic media have been on corruption stories as well.

Idowu (2018) posits that the media have discharged themselves fairly on issues of (public) corruption, especially since 1999 when Nigeria returned to civil rule. Instances cited include, the forgery and perjury cases against former Speaker of the House of Representatives, Alhaji Salishu Buhari; investigation of the questionable past of the former senate president, Evan(s) Enwerem; cases of (financial recklessness) and (contract splitting) brought against another former senate president, Chuba Okadigbo and former national vice-chairman of the Peoples’ Democratic Party, 9Bode George respectively. Oyebode (2017) submits that 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. To Idowu (2018, p. 103), “the media campaign in 2014 that culminated in the resignation of the then Aviation Minister Stella Oduah over questionable expenditure on bullet proof cars also stands out to the credit of the media.”

While the outcome of media coverage of these events would suggest that the Nigerian media seem to be covering corruption stories efficiently, Oye-bode (2017, p.42) argues that a critique of the contents of these media stories on corruption “exposes laziness and insufficient information about fraud.” He posits further that the stories only relay or repeat news releases of allegations by anti-corruption agencies and contain incomplete investigative activities of these organizations with sensational headlines. The stories also contained court proceedings and public vituperation on the crimes. The accusation of sordid treatment of stories on corruption by the Nigerian media practitioners is premised on a number of factors, which, according to Oye-bode, include the rarity in following up crime stories for a long time.

The inference from the scenario is that agenda-setting role of the press is used to create a sort of cultural hegemony with basic principles of capitalism, which emphasise exploitation by the economic and political ruling classes. Instance in this case is when the media go silent immediately after the publication of serious corruption allegation without necessary follow-up as the tendency denies the audience critical information that may otherwise have prompted judicial action and set positive deterrence in the country.

This laxity manifested in the reported case of bribery of the National Assembly members for the third term agenda to extend Obasanjo administration beyond 2007 as the bribery scandal remained a rumour for more than ten years only to be validated by those involved years after the exit of the Obasanjo regime. In the estimation of Oye-bode, it is this kind of media’s disposition towards some issues of corruption that calls to question the commitment of the media in the fight against corruption.

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 scam; the “eight all” African Games Scam (COJA); the Farouk Lawan bribery scandal; the petroleum subsidy scam of 2012; the scandal involving former Minister of Petroleum Resources Allison Madueke and the hiring of a 10 billion naira private jet; the scam involving the purchase of two “bullet proof cars” for N\$225 million by the former Minister of Aviation, Stella Oduah; the seizure of 96.1 million dollars in

South Africa in a cash for arms deal; and the Halliburton bribery scam. What is intriguing about the case of Halliburton scam is the fact that the foreigners who paid bribes to Nigerian officials have since been punished and penalised by the United States of America and German authorities, but the beneficiaries from Nigeria have yet to be fished out through investigative journalism to compel the justice system to do its work (Oyebode, 2017).

### **Investigative Reporting and FOI Act 2011 as anti-corruption tool**

The enactment of FOIA, 2011 came with the promise that the investigative reporting capacity of media professionals to uncover corruption would be strengthened. Paradoxically, corruption has become endemic in Nigeria. From the first Nigerian military coup of January 15, 1966, when the democratically elected government of Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa was toppled, every successive administration had seized power on the promise of eradicating corruption in Nigeria. So, the number of administrations ever since tallied invariably with the number of anti-corruption initiatives.

Among several others were the Jaji Declaration of General Olusegun Obasanjo in 1977; the Ethical Revolution of President Shehu Shagari in 1981 and 1983; the War Against Indiscipline of General Muhammadu Buhari in 1984-85; the National Orientation Movement of General Babangida in 1986 which gave birth to the Mass Mobilisation for Social Justice and Economic Reconstruction (MAMSER) in 1987; the War Against Indiscipline and Corruption of General Sani Abacha in 1996; the anti-corruption enactments (ICPC, EFCC) of the President Olusegun Obasanjo civilian administration of 1999-2007; the Due Process philosophy of President Umaru Shehu Musa Yar'Adua of 2007-2010; the Rebranding of Nigeria project of President Goodluck Jonathan of 2010-2015; and lately, the 'Change' promise of the President Muhammadu Buhari civilian government of 2015 to date.

Although the enactment of the FOI Act reinforces the constitutional obligation of the media holding the government accountable to the Nigerian people, this social function is better delivered through the adoption of a special approach to journalism practice. That approach is often referred to as investigative reporting. To Akpasubi Jackson (2010), investigative reporting is a "specialized, deliberate inquiry and revelation that border on the general good of society which someone wished otherwise." Citing UNESCO (2011), Okon (2017) views investigative journalism as "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

- and the analysis and exposure of all relevant facts to the public. It requires using both secret and open sources and documents.”

The logic in UNESCO's definition of investigative journalism as explained by Okon (2017), citing Harcup (2004) is the understanding that “the credo of investigative journalism is uncovering information that is in the public interest to know.” In this way, Okon argues, investigative journalism is seen as capable of playing a crucial contributing role towards the promotion of freedom of expression and freedom of information, as well as the promotion of democracy and national development.

### **Responsible Media: Driver of Development, Setter of Agenda**

Studies (Tejumaiye, 2019; Ibraheem, 2019; Ibraheem, 2020) have established that the media obligation of information, education, surveillance, mobilisation and cultural promotion (Ogwezzy, 2008) to the society is better enhanced through the application of the information law. This point is in sync with the assumptions of the Social Responsibility Media theory (SRMT) propounded by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm in 1963. The major premise of the theory is that freedom carries concomitant obligations (Sanda, 2017).

Citing Anaeto, Onabajo and Osifeso (2009), Sanda (2017) argues that the privileged position the media enjoy under the government presupposes that they should be responsible to society for carrying out certain essential functions of mass communication. These include serving the political system by making information, discussion and consideration of public affairs generally accessible; fostering citizen participation in the decision making process while creating platform for the public to take self-determined action; protecting the rights of the individuals by acting as watchdog over the government; serving the economic system by bringing together buyers and sellers through the medium of advertising; and preserving financial autonomy in order not to become dependent on special interest and influences (Sanda, 2017).

Closely associated with the social responsibility media theory is development media theory which derives its essence from the consistent interaction between the political system and media system as cardinal characteristics of a modern democratic society. Under this theory, the media are seen as agents of development collaborating with the government to foster political, social, cultural, economic emancipation of the people (Awodiya, 2012). The nexus between this theory and the social responsibility media is located in the assumption that both government and media can work in partnership to ensure that

media assist in the planned beneficial development of the country (Baran & Davies, 2009, cited in Okon, 2017) typified by the anti-corruption campaign.

For the Agenda setting theory developed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972), the basic assumption is the capacity of the media to stimulate cognitive change among media audience by changing what is ordinarily considered as media agenda to public agenda. What illustrates this point is the 1972 break-in into the National Headquarters of the Democratic National Committee, which was initially considered as an issue of seemingly low importance, but with repeated mention in the *Washington Post* did not only become a gigantic story labelled as The Watergate Scandal, but also led to the resignation of the U.S President Richard Nixon in the Spring of 1974. Coincidentally, McCombs and Shaw (1994) as cited by Awodiya (2012, p.556), use the scandal to explain that “the mass media have the ability to transfer the salience items on their news agenda to the public agenda.”

Although, the agenda-setting function of the media does not presuppose that the media have a deliberate ideology of influencing their audience in predetermined ways, however, the relevance of the theory to this study is located in the existence of a patronizing relationship between the media and their audience (Awodiya, 2012), in the sense that the audience tend to judge as important what the media judge as important. The essential ingredient for sustaining this attention is for the media to avoid what Oyebode (2017) termed complicity with the political class in sweeping under the carpet issues that require aggressive and sustained media attention and prominence such as the anti-corruption campaign in Nigeria.

The signification of the (three) theories to this study is reflected in the integrative functions of the media in society which McQuail (2005), citing Hanno Hardt (1979) sums up to include: binding society together; giving leadership to the public; helping to establish the ‘public sphere’; providing for the exchange of ideas between leaders and masses; satisfying needs for information; providing society with a mirror of itself; and acting as the conscience of society.

### **Method of Study**

The mixed methods of quantitative and qualitative approaches were used for this study. Survey and in-depth interview were adopted as techniques for data gathering. The survey was adopted as a technique because it allows gathering information about a sample that is representative of a larger group. The in-depth interview was considered most effective in getting more accurate re-



sponses on sensitive issues from a small number of respondents (20) since the intention of the researcher was also to gather insights and knowledge through disclosure of respondents' experience. This is what Wimmer and Dominick (2011) described as "wealth of detail."

For the secondary data, membership register of the professional associations, industry publications, journal articles and conference papers on media performance and freedom of information Act were consulted.

The population of this study comprises journalists who are registered members of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ). The choice of the NUJ is informed by the fact that the body has an updated register of financial members, the figure of which is put at 5320 members (as at August, 2019) on its website: [www.nuj.org.ng](http://www.nuj.org.ng). This is in addition to having the most significant platforms that assemble the highest number of practicing journalists regularly such as at monthly meetings, annual conferences and other professional engagements.

For the in-depth interview, title editors (daily) and editor-in-chief/managing director - were selected from the ten print media organisations selected for the study. The criteria for selection of the survey participants and in-depth interview respondents include their status as financial members of the NUJ, their long years of practice as journalists in national dailies (newspapers) as well as attainment of executive cadre of editorship and editor-in-chief.

The cluster sampling technique was adopted as sampling technique because it allows the target population to be subdivided into clusters (based on the region of the owners of the newspaper organisations) and then randomly select from the clusters. Since the target population of this study was print media journalists working mainly in newspaper organisations that have national spread in terms of circulation and readership, four clusters of southwest, Southeast, south-south and the north are formed based on the region of the owners of the newspaper organisations and from each cluster, a simple random sampling of two newspapers each is taken. They are: The PUNCH and Nigerian Tribune (southwest); Daily Sun and New Telegraph (southeast); The Guardian and Vanguard (south-south); as well as Daily Trust and Blueprint (north).

Additionally, the study reflected the digital orientation of the contemporary newspaper industry in Nigeria with the random selection of Premium Times and The Cable that are mainly online newspapers. For the sample frame, the researcher relied on the register of the Newspaper Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN) and the website of the Nigerian Press Council

(NPC, 2019). The two platforms reveal that the ten selected newspapers are among the top 20 Nigerian national newspapers. Also, they are members of the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC).

Meanwhile, to derive the sample size (for the survey participants), the researcher relied on the list of registered and financial members of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ). The list which is hosted on NUJ website: [www.nuj.org.ng](http://www.nuj.org.ng) and accessed in August 2019 served as the sample frame.

Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula for determining sample size was used. The formula provided that if the population is 5000, the sample size is 357. But if the population is 6000, the sample size is 361. And since the population of journalists as revealed by the register of the NUJ is 5320 members (as at August, 2019), the researcher settled for 360 sample size. Therefore, the sample size for this study based on Krejcie and Morgan formula is 360. Similarly, the simple random sampling method was used to select all the 360 respondents (after the cluster sampling) for the survey with each newspaper outlet given equal opportunity to participate in the study, meaning that 36 persons were selected per media organisation.

Also, the purposive sampling technique was adopted to select twenty (20) interviewees from the ten print media organisations for the in-depth interview. The criteria for selection of the survey participants and in-depth interview respondents include their status as financial members of the NUJ, their long years of practice as journalists in national dailies (newspapers) as well as attainment of executive cadre, thus, title editors (daily) and editor-in-chief were selected.

The questionnaire (for the survey) and the interview guide (for the in-depth interview) were the research instruments used for this study. For the questionnaire, 44-items instrument was developed for the study. The questionnaire has three sections. The first section captured personal information relating to the study, while the second section focused on questions relating to the study. The third part comprised items used to gather demographics and socio-economic details of the respondents. Also, the interview questions dwelled on the contribution of the information legislation to anti-graft campaign in Nigeria.

## Results

Data gathered through the survey and in-depth interviews are presented and analysed below:

**Table 1: Questionnaire administered and return rate**

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Number Administered	360	100
Returned	349	96.9
Usable	341	94.7

Source: Fieldwork, October 2020

As shown in Table 1 above, 360 questionnaires were printed and distributed, 349 (96.9%) of the questionnaires were returned while 341 (94.7%) of the returned questionnaires were properly filled and usable (valid) for this study. Therefore, the retrieval rate for this study is 341 (94.7%) and this number constitutes the respondents for this study.

- RQ1: How much do print media journalists know of the provisions of Freedom of Information Act?

**Table 2: Respondents rating their knowledge of the major provisions of the FOI Act**

Variables	Frequency (N)	%
Very High	5	1.5
High	108	31.7
Fair	128	37.5
Low	90	26.4
Very Low	10	2.9
Total	341	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, October 2020

Table 2 above shows respondents' knowledge of the major provisions of the Freedom of Information Act. 1.5% (n=5) of the respondents said that their knowledge of the major provisions of the Freedom of Information Act is Very High while 31.7% (n=108) of the respondents said their knowledge of the major provisions of the Act is High. Contrary to this, 26.4% (n=90) of the respondents said that their knowledge of the major provisions of the Act is Low while 2.9% (n=10) of the respondents said that their knowledge of the major provisions of the Act is Very Low. However, 37.5% (n=128) of the respondents

said that they have fair knowledge of the major provisions of the Freedom of Information Act.

The implication of this table is that most of the respondents have an average knowledge of the major provisions of the Freedom of Information Act because the high responses were shared between High with 31.7% (n=108) and Fair with 37.5% (n=128). Therefore, this study concludes that journalists in Nigeria have a 'very' fair knowledge of the major provisions of the Freedom of Information Act.

**Table 3: Respondents' knowledge of the objectives of the FOI Act, 2011**

Variables	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Making public records and information more freely available	118	34.6
Providing for public access to public records and information	28	8.2
Protecting public records and information to the extent consistent with public interest and protection	14	4.1
Protecting serving public officers from adverse consequence	23	6.7
All of the above	158	46.3
Total	341	100.0

*Source: Fieldwork, October 2020*

This table shows the knowledge of the objectives of the Freedom of Information Act by the respondents of this study. 34.6% (n=118) of the respondents highlighted the objectives of the Freedom of Information Act, 2011 to be "Making public records and information more freely available". Also, 8.2% (n=28) of the respondents believed that "Providing for public access to public records and information" is the objective of the Freedom of Information Act, 2011. In addition to this, 4.1% (n=14) of the respondents decided that the objective of the Freedom of Information Act, 2011 is "Protecting public records and information to the extent consistent with public interest and protection". Similarly, 6.7% (n=23) of the respondents asserted that "Protecting serving public officers from adverse consequence" is the objective of Freedom of Information Act, 2011. However, 46.3% (n=158) of the respondents highlighted that all stated objectives stated above are the objectives of the Freedom of Information Act, 2011.

Table 3 confirms the findings of Table 2. Table 3 shows that majority of the respondents who are print media journalists in Nigeria only have a fair knowledge about the objectives of the Freedom of Information Act, 2011. All listed statements in table 3 are objectives of the Freedom of Information Act, 2011 and the best option to choose should have been “All of the above” but only 46.3% (n=158) or slightly half of the respondents pick the right answer. This further proved that Nigerian journalists in the print media industry have fair knowledge of the objectives of the Freedom of Information Act, 2011.

Tables 2 and 3 answered the RQ1: How much do print media journalists know of the provisions of Freedom of Information Act? The result of these two tables revealed that print media journalists in Nigeria only have fair knowledge of the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act.

The finding is in tandem with the views expressed by the interview participants who are mainly title (daily) editors and editors-in-chief as they noted most of their junior colleagues have a “poor knowledge of the Freedom of Information Act.” There were in agreement that the poor knowledge of the provisions of the Act constitutes a major impediment to the effective implementation of the Act 10 years after its enactment.

- RQ2: How do journalists use the FOI Act in their reporting of anti-corruption campaign?

**Table 4: Respondents’ usage of FOI Act to access public record and information**

Variables	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Yes	146	42.8
No	195	57.2
Total	341	100.0

*Source: Fieldwork, October 2020*

This table shows that 42.8% (n=146) of the respondents have used the Freedom of Information Act to access public record and information while 57.2% (n=195) of the respondents have never used the Freedom of Information Act to access public record and information. The implication of this table is that most of the print media journalists in Nigeria don’t use the Freedom of Information Act to access public record and information.

**Table 5: The frequency in which Nigerian journalists used the FOI Act to access information held by public institutions**

Variables	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Regularly	3	0.9
Occasionally	97	28.4
Periodically	30	8.8
Rarely	16	4.7
Not at all	195	57.2
Total	341	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, October 2020

In this table, the frequency with which print media journalists used the Freedom of Information Act to access information held by public institutions was measured. 0.9% (n=3) of the respondents said they used the Freedom of Information Act regularly to access information held by public institution while 28.4% (n=97) of the respondents said they occasionally used the Act to access information held by public institution. Also, 8.8% (n=30) of the respondents said they used the Act to access information held by public institution periodically while 4.7% (n=16) of the respondents said they rarely used the Freedom of Information Act to get access to information held by public institution. Moreover, 57.2% (n=195) of the respondents said they have never (Not at all) used the Freedom of Information Act to access information held by public institutions.

The implication of this table is that a higher percentage of print media journalists in Nigeria don't use the Freedom of Information Act to access information held by public institutions. This is in addition to tallying with the finding of Table 4 (i.e. 57.2 % of the respondents have never used the Act).

**Table 6: Factors that motivate respondents to use FOI Act, 2011 to seek information**

Variables	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
To uncover corruption	36	10.5
To expose abuse of power	30	8.8

Variables	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
To fact-check records and information	50	14.7
To unearth violation and human rights	30	8.8
Others	195	57.2
Total	341	100.0

Source: *Fieldwork*, October 2020

Responses as shown in Table 6 above indicate that 10.5% (n=36) of the respondents used the Freedom of Information Act, 2011 “To uncover corruption”, while 8.8% (n=30) of the respondents used the Freedom of Information Act, 2011 “To expose abuse of power”. Furthermore, 14.7% (n=50) of the respondents used the Freedom of Information Act, 2011 “To fact-check records and information”, while 8.8% (n=30) of the respondents used the Freedom of Information Act, 2011 “to unearth violation and human rights”. However, 57.2% (n=195) of the respondents did not use the Freedom of Information Act, 2011 at all.

This table showed that most print media journalists usually use the Freedom of Information Act, 2011 to seek information that will help them to fact-check records and information. As seen in table 6, only 10.5% (n=36) use it to uncover corruption.

Conclusively, tables 4, 5 and 6 provided answer to the question: How do print media journalists use the FOI Act in their reporting of anti-corruption campaign? These three tables revealed that print media journalists rarely used the Freedom of Information Act, 2011 to seek information to uncover corruption but to fact-check records and information.

Similarly, a significant majority of the interview participants affirm that print media journalists rarely use the Act to access information related to exposing corruption and abuse of privilege.

One of the interview participants had remarked thus:

The print media coverage of anti-corruption campaign in Nigeria is not impressive. Media practitioners have not shown seriousness in the anti-corruption campaign coverage. We do not dig deep into the roots of corruption. We have not seen good report of uncovering corruption. The application of the Act has not helped anything not because it is not useful but reporters generally are not serious about using it. We always talk about frustration with the system, but we haven't tried enough. After you see a few media development organizations

and some NGOs that have tried and have recorded some successes but we, practitioners, have not been serious with invoking the powers in the law.

In the submission of another interview participant, the process of invoking the act is decried as this is not helping the aim of the Act:

Despite FOIA, you don't just walk in to a government agency and get the information you seek. You have to write and wait for the response of the agency involved and by that time, more often than not, as they say in law, "the res (subject matter) is already destroyed." News doesn't wait for anybody and if you don't get it, then it goes. The authorities have to understand the peculiarity of the media industry. I remember, there was a time I tried to use it. That was how I got to know about it. I found out that if you're doing a long-time investigation, it may be worth your while. But if you want what you can give to your readers the following day, FOIA can't really be of help to you.

The conclusion is that journalists have not shown seriousness about using the Act to report corruption in Nigeria.

- RQ3: What are the challenges of application of the FOIA in the reportage of corruption issues in Nigeria?

**Table 7: Factors that may negatively impact the application of the FOI Act in the reportage of anti-corruption campaign**

Statement	N	Min.	Max.	Mean		Std. Dev.
	Stat.	Stat.	Stat.	Stat.	Std. Er	Stat.
Anti-media laws such as Official Secrets Act in the statute books are hampering print media journalists' access to public record and information.	341	1.00	5.00	3.8152	.06550	1.20947
Absence of sanction for defaulting public institutions discourages effective implementation.	341	1.00	5.00	3.8534	.07126	1.31582
Record keeping practice among public officials and institutions is poor.	341	1.00	5.00	3.7830	.06527	1.20531
Culture of investigation among print media journalists remains poor	341	1.00	5.00	3.3578	.05728	1.05768
Print media owners rarely invest in investigative reporting	341	1.00	5.00	3.5748	.07297	1.34748



Statement	N	Min.	Max.	Mean		Std. Dev.
	Stat.	Stat.	Stat.	Stat.	Std. Er	Stat.
Absence of Ombudsman leads to poor monitoring of FOIA implementation	341	1.00	5.00	3.3842	.06585	1.21592
Remuneration and welfare package of print media journalists are poor	341	1.00	5.00	3.9003	.07873	1.45381
Corruption issues involving print media owners hardly get covered	341	1.00	5.00	3.5601	.07073	1.30611
Unwillingness of state governments to domesticate FOI Act	341	1.00	5.00	4.0059	.05618	1.03751
Lack of safety measures and programmes for investigative journalists	341	1.00	5.00	3.9472	.06561	1.21153
Lack of adherence to code of ethics by journalists	341	1.00	5.00	3.3372	.07013	1.29503
Mutual Suspicion between media and government functionaries	341	1.00	5.00	3.5543	.06273	1.15840

Source: Field work, October 2020

Table 7 presented factors that may negatively impact the application of the FOI Act in the coverage of anti-corruption campaign. This was measured with a 5-item scale with 1 representing least agreement while 5 represented highest agreement. The average agreement is N greater than 3.0 mean.

The respondents believed that unwillingness of state governments to domesticate Freedom of Information Act with a mean of 4.00059 may negatively impact the application of the FOI Act in the coverage of anti-corruption campaign. Also, the respondents observed that lack of safety measures and programmes for investigative journalists with a mean of 3.9472 may negatively impact the application of the FOI Act in the coverage of anti-corruption campaign. Moreover, respondents emphasized poor remuneration and welfare package of print media journalists (with 3.9003 mean) as another factor that may negatively impact the application of the FOI Act in the coverage of anti-corruption campaign.

In addition, the respondents believed absence of sanction for defaulting

public institutions (with a mean of 3.8534) and anti-media laws such as Official Secrets Act in the statute book are hampering print media journalists' access to public record and information with a mean of 3.8152; record keeping practice among public officials and institutions is poor with a mean of 3.7830 may negatively impact the application of the FOI Act in the coverage of anti-corruption campaign. However, the respondents believed that lack of adherence to code of ethics by journalists with a mean of 3.3372 may negatively impact the application of the FOI Act in the coverage of anti-corruption campaign.

However, there is consensus among the interview participants that these challenges can be overcome leading to effective implementation of the Freedom of Information Act if the following policies were implemented:

- Repeal of the official Secret Act and other anti-press laws.
- Domestication of the Freedom of Information Act by State governments.
- Appointment of Ombudsman to provide leadership for effective implementation of FOI Act.
- Criminalisation of failure by public institutions to respond to FOI requests.
- Use of new technology for record keeping by public institutions.
- Training journalists on the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act.
- Collaboration among print media professional bodies such as the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), the Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE) and the Newspaper Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN).
- Getting the judiciary to hear matters concerning FOI Act within 2 weeks.

In summary, there are challenges impinging the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act in print media coverage of corruption issues in Nigeria. However, there are glaring solutions to these challenges for the Freedom of information Act to effectively drive the anti-corruption campaign in Nigeria.

- RQ4: To what extent do public institutions respond to FOI requests by print media journalists?

There was a consensus among the interview participants that most public in-

stitutions rarely respond positively to Freedom of Information requests by print media journalists. Majority of the interviewees confirmed that the use of Freedom of Information Act to request for information from public institutions does not usually yield the desired result because these agencies usually provide materials that are not relevant to the subject matter of the request.

Majority of the interview participants also mentioned tricks such as the Official Secret Act and other anti-press laws employed by the public institutions to frustrate and deny FOI requests.

The conclusion is that public institutions rarely respond positively to request for information made by print media journalists using the Freedom of Information Act.

### **Discussion**

This study examined the influence of the Freedom of Information Act on the print media coverage of anti-corruption campaign in Nigeria. The first research question interrogated the level of knowledge of the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act among print media journalists in Nigeria and the analysis of the data collected from the survey showed that print media journalists have a fair knowledge of the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act, 2011. This finding is in tandem with the views expressed by the interview participants. They submitted that the fair knowledge of the provisions of the Act did constitute a major impediment to the effective implementation of the Act ten years after its enactment; thus, the print media coverage of the anti-corruption campaign remains unimpressive.

A conclusion can therefore be drawn that fair knowledge of the provisions of the Act is not enough to stimulate robust and impressive coverage of anti-corruption campaign by the print media journalists.

The second research question investigated the extent to which print media journalists use the Act in their coverage of anti-corruption campaign and findings from the survey as well as the interview revealed that high percentage of print media journalists in Nigeria do not use the Freedom of Information Act to access information held by public institutions. More so, the study found out that print media journalists rarely used the Freedom of Information Act, 2011 to seek information to uncover corruption but to fact-check records and information. Submission by interview participants corroborates this finding as they mostly underscored apathy of usage among print media journalists.

The third research question sought to identify challenges of implementation of the FOIA in relation to the print media coverage of corruption issues

in Nigeria and responses from the survey revealed unwillingness of state governments to domesticate Freedom of Information Act; existence of the Official Secrets Act; absence of sanction for defaulting public institutions; poor remuneration and welfare package of print media journalists; as well as lack of safety measures and programmes for investigative journalists.

Majority of the interview participants corroborated this finding as they also listed the aforementioned factors. They however, expressed optimism that the Freedom of Information Act would stimulate efficient and effective coverage of anti-corruption campaign when the media practitioners show determination to keep on the fight to enforce the law, without submitting to the frustration that will discourage seeking classified information through the Freedom of Information Act; approach the National Assembly to ensure the domestication of the Act at the state levels; approach the Supreme Court to seek clarification on the implementation of the law; pulling resources together to create a united and sustained fight for its implementation; and embark on sustained advocacy for public institutions to embrace proactive disclosure of information as enshrined in the FOIA.

The fourth research question was designed to establish the level of responsiveness of public institutions to FOI requests by print media journalists and the responses showed that public institutions respond to Freedom of Information requests by print media journalists poorly.

### **Conclusion**

The study concludes that the Freedom of Information Act has not impacted the anti-corruption campaign in Nigeria. Also, the study concludes that the disconnection between the propositions that the anti-graft campaign would be strengthened by the enactment of the Freedom of Information Act is a reflection of the FOI agitation as a problematic minefield of competing and often contradictory expectations (Calland, 2010). Furthermore, the study concludes that FOI environment under which accessibility to corruption-related information is neither cumbersome nor denied may not necessarily lead to effective and efficient anti-corruption campaign.

In light of the aforementioned findings, it is therefore recommended: that intense and continuous sensitisation is designed to address the general apathy among those that should operate the Act, especially journalists; that necessary steps be taken by stakeholders in the media industry as well as government circle to encourage public institutions to develop FOI online portal to proactively publish their activities, operations and businesses as required by

the Act to enable easy public access; that stakeholders in the media industry should develop a mechanism that fosters strong attachment to investigative journalism through which the functionality of information law can be directly linked to the anti-corruption campaign.

It is also suggested that strong advocacy is undertaken to emphasise the need for concerted efforts by all tiers of government to ensure that public officers shrug off the culture of secrecy and embrace the values of transparency and openness embedded in the Act.

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