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*FATONJI, Stephen Sonayon;
OYEGBILE, Olayinka,
ONI, Kola & EBISI, Edith*

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CHAPTER SEVEN

PERCEPTION OF OBJECTIVITY AND BIAS IN NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF BUHARI-LED ANTI-CORRUPTION CAMPAIGN

*FATONJI, Stephen Sonayon;
OYEGBILE, Olayinka,
ONI, Kola
&
EBISI, Edith*



INTRODUCTION

Corruption impedes the transformation of countries. In fact, development scholars have argued that the level of corruption has a direct link to the level of economic development of a nation. Although, corruption is global, it is more prevalent in developing countries like Nigeria. According to Anderson H. Etal (1999:316), “The condition of these countries are such that corruption is likely to have different causes and consequences than in more developed countries (Lydia, 2014)”. Regardless of the causes of corruption in Nigeria, the problem has become highly systemic. This implies that corruption cuts across every facet of Nigeria. There is no sector that seems to be free from corruption thus making corruption closely intertwined with everyday activities and living. Ajie and Wokekoro (2012:2) supported the above observation when they said:

Without doubt, corruption has pervaded the Nigeria society and in the words of Achebe, anyone who can say that corruption in Nigeria has not yet been alarming is either a fool; a crook or else does not live in this country. The evils exist in every facet of our society. You bribe to get your child into a school, you pay to secure a job and you also continue to pay in some cases to retain it.

Corruption in Nigeria is institutionalized and has penetrated the value system. It has become an acceptable norm and culture. Nwaze (2012) affirmed the systematic nature of corruption in Nigeria when he said that the “endemic parasite” has become malignant. Merely removing corrupt officials from office and replacing them with perceived honest people may have little impact because the problem is not just about the person, but the system.

The media on the other hand have a critical role to play in holding public officials accountable to the people. This role is entrenched in the Nigerian constitution and other international conventions signed by Nigeria. Interestingly, the media, especially newspapers, have been saturated with stories on corruption scandals among public officials since the inception of the Buhari-led administration in 2015. This study however is concerned with evaluating newspaper readers' assessment of the objectivity or bias of newspaper coverage of corruption among public officials in Nigeria since 2015.

Statement of the Problem

Although corruption is neither new nor peculiar to Nigeria, it is obviously endemic to the country (Ajie&Wokekoro, 2012). Severally, Transparency International has consistently rated Nigeria as one of the most corrupt nations in the world. Since Nigeria's President Muhammadu Buhari assumed office on May 29, 2015, the mass media, especially newspapers, have been replete with issues on corruption and the government's efforts to overcome it. The activities of the nation's anti-graft agencies, notably the EFCC, ICPC and CCT/CCB are frequently featured on the media. The endless court cases on corruption charges and breach of office codes among other related sensational issues were also common in the media.

The media are expected to be objective, balanced and fair in their coverage of issues which affect society. On the contrary, media objectivity has increasingly been subjected to serious debate in scholarly discourse. Several media organizations in Nigeria and other parts of the world have even been accused of partisanship, deliberate manipulation of news to suit vested interests, among others. Needless to say, the patronage of any media organisation is commensurate to the extent to which it is perceived as objective. Given this assertion, the study investigated readers' perception of objectivity and bias in newspaper reportage of corruption stories between 2015 and 2017.

Research Objectives

This study set out to achieve the following objectives:

1. To determine the extent to which readers perceive newspaper coverage of corruption scandals as objective.
2. To evaluate readers' rating of newspapers' coverage of corruption stories
3. To assess the level to which readers consider newspaper reportage of corruption as factual.

Research Questions:

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent did readers perceive newspaper coverage of corruption scandals as objective or bias?
2. What is the rating of newspapers' coverage of corruption stories?
3. To what extent did readers consider newspapers' coverage of corruption as factual?

Overview of Nigeria's Current Corruption Profile

For four consecutive years (2013-2016), Nigeria failed to rise in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, which ranked Nigeria 136 out of 176 countries in January 2017. The 2018 report ranks Nigeria 146 out of 180 countries, indicating a worse record than the previous two years.

The campaign against corruption is one of the cardinal objectives of the President Muhammadu Buhari-led government which took over in May 2015. The administration claims to have recovered billions of dollars in cash and assets in the last 18 months but the anti-graft war is perceived to be one-sided (Punch Newspaper, January 10, 2017). In the 2017 report, TI ranks Denmark as number one with a score of 90 per cent while Somalia is placed at the bottom with a score of 10 per cent. Corruption Rank in Nigeria averaged 119.14 from 1996 until 2016, reaching an all-time high of 152 in 2005 and a record low of 52 in 1997. In early September 2017, the fight against corruption by the President Muhammadu Buhari-led administration received a major boost when Chief Justice of Nigeria [CJN] Justice Walter Onnoghen announced the setting up of special courts to try corruption cases. The CJN further directed all heads of courts to clamp down on lawyers who deploy delay tactics in criminal matters before them. He said “where such cases come on appeal to either the Court of Appeal or the Supreme Court, special dates on each week shall be fixed solely for hearing and determining such appeals.” The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) also claims to have secured about 1, 500 convictions since inception in 2003.

Nigerian Corruption Survey (2017) published by the National Bureau for Statistics (NBS) has revealed that over 90% of Nigerians will accept a bribe when offered or pay a bribe when demanded from them. The survey published on August 16th 2017 showed that only 5.3 per cent of Nigerians will either refuse to pay a bribe when asked to or refuse to accept when a bribe is offered to them. The Nigerian Corruption Survey, which revealed how different forms of corruption affect daily life of the average Nigerian citizen, is being published for the first time. In May 2016, the NBS announced that it was collaborating with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the European Union to conduct a survey on the quality and integrity of public services in Nigeria and the impact of corruption on daily life in Nigeria. According to the NBS (2017), other objectives of the survey would include “direct experiences of corruption events as victims by citizens, opinion and perception of citizens about recent trends, patterns and policies on corruption, experience of reporting corruption and other crimes to public authorities and access to justice”. The result of the survey revealed only 20 out of 100 people who were to pay bribe refused to comply. It also showed that majority of Nigerians (56 per cent) experience negative consequences after refusing to pay a requested bribe. However, only 3.7 per cent of those who were asked to pay bribes reported their experience to an official authority. Interestingly, only a small percentage (9.1 per cent) of those who reported to an official authority faced negative consequence for reporting a bribery incident.

According to the Nigerian Corruption Survey (2017), the Nigerian Police is by far the most corrupt public institution, according to the survey. The survey revealed that that the frequency of bribery was more among police officers (46.4 percent). Incident of bribery in the judiciary comes at a close second after the police with prosecutors and judges flagged as being among the most corrupt. Prevalence of bribery among prosecutors is put at 33.6 percent, and judges/magistrates at 31.5 percent. Other public agencies with high prevalence of corruption are the immigration services (30.7 percent), car registration and driving licensing agency (28.5 percent), tax/revenue agencies (27.3 percent) and customs (26.5 percent). The survey further revealed that the perception of the Nigerian government's commitment and effectiveness in the fight against corruption is heavily laced by political undertones. Data published in the survey shows that the perception that government is committed and effective in the fight to tackle corruption, is highest in the geo-political zones where President Muhammadu Buhari enjoys much support and lowest where the president is least popular.

According to the NCS report (2017), the perception of the government's commitment and effectiveness to tackle corruption is highest in the North-west region (Mr. Buhari's home region) with 90 percent of the respondents saying government is either very committed or committed in the fight against corruption and 90.2 percent agreeing that it has been either very effective or effective in fighting corruption. The North-east zone where Mr. Buhari scored his second largest votes during the 2015 presidential election unsurprisingly has the second highest perception of the government's commitment (89.6 percent) and effectiveness (88.4 percent) to confront corruption. The North-central region is a close third with 77.9 percent of the respondents saying the government is committed to the fight against corruption and 72.6 percent saying it is has been effective. Also, vast majority of the respondents in the South-west zone (72.4 per cent) say the government is committed to its anti-corruption fight while 68.9 percent say it has been effective. The perception of the government's commitment and effectiveness on corruption are lowest in the South-east and the South-south zones. About 45 percent of respondents in the South-east agreed the government is committed to the fight of eradicating corruption while 41.2 percent agree that it has been effective. Similarly, 47.5 percent of respondents in the South-south say the government is committed while a mere 41.3 percent believe it has been effective. This is unsurprising because the president enjoys the least support from both of these geo-political zones. Apart from looking at corruption and bribery in the public sector, the report also showed that bribery is a problem in the private sector. According to the NCS (2017), the prevalence of bribery is biggest among officials of private Insurance companies (6 percent) followed by teachers in private schools (5.9 percent) and doctors in private hospitals (3.7 percent).

Roles of Media in Mitigating Corruption

The media is expected to play a leading role in exposing corruption by mediating different positive and negative forces in a society. They are crucial for opinion formulation and eventual outcomes of events. According to Ojo (2003, p. 828), “the mass media is perhaps even more necessary for a congruent political culture to evolve” in a developing democracy divided along ethnic and religious cleavages, as Nigeria. Asemah (2009) describes the media as agents of social change that can bring about positive attitudinal change in the audience (readers) as they set an agenda for people to follow in any society. The media are champions in the crusade against corruption (Bello, 2014). They act as the eyes, ears and voices of the public. Through their work, they can encourage governments and civil society organizations to effect change that will improve the quality of people's lives. The media is expected to “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).

The 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) recognizes the crucial role the press could play, not only in political communications but also in national integration and development: "The press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objective contained in this chapter and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people of Nigeria”.

All the above reveal the importance and power attributed to the media in Nigeria. Although, the media have suffered several humiliations and attach from political office holders in Nigeria, the Nigerian media still remains one of the most vibrant in Africa.

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.

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. The media have also done well in few cases. 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 media's disposition toward some issues of corruption has called 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.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by selectivity theory. Klapper (1960) in Reber and Harris (2004:2) defined selective exposure as “the tendency of people to engage themselves into mass communication in accordance with their existing opinions and interest and to avoid unsympathetic material”. Klapper conceived that audiences cogently decide what they will watch or hear. Zillmann and Bryant (1994) made advances in this area of study by expanding on Klapper's concept of selective exposure. They investigated what many considered to be the missing element of Klapper's theory, whether audiences affectively (emotionally) determine what they will hear or watch. Often, though by no means always, people will do things - spontaneously or on impulse” (Zillman and Bryant, p.61). They further used a broad definition of selective exposure, explaining that “*Selective exposure designates behaviour that is deliberately performed to attain and sustain perceptual control of particular stimulus events*” (pg. 1). They proceeded to include any activity regardless of attention level, as long as exposure occurs. “Selective exposure can be accomplished with little effort, or it may require a great expenditure of energy (Zillman and Bryant, pg 2). Adding to that, Zillman and Bryant developed an operational model to further explain the process a media user may employ to rearrange his/her environment through channel switching activity. This model states that “a media user samples a variety of media offerings, either by mindless probing or by directed choice”. The user will continue the offering process until a selection is encountered that causes the user to become pleurably reinforced. This measurably reinforcement is primarily an affective reaction. Rejected samples will remain in short-term memory and will be compared to future samplings until finally the user eventually determines which media sampling will be the most pleasurable. Past experiences also may play a role in this decision-making process.

Selectivity processes include selective exposure (an individual's tendency to expose oneself to attitudinally congruent messages than incongruent messages) and selective perception (one's tendency to perceive attitudinally congruent messages more positively). Campaign failure is often attributed to low exposure to campaign messages (Hornik, 2002). Although low exposure, in many cases, reflects low availability of campaign messages in the media environment, low exposure to campaigns can be a consequence of audiences' tendency of selective exposure. Those who hold beliefs inconsistent with campaign message arguments may selectively avoid campaign messages.

In describing how their model relates to selective exposure, Zillmann and Bryant wrote, “the outlined choice model for selective exposure differs considerably from choice models that assume complex cognitive operations in the framework of sophisticated evaluation criteria” (pg. 162). They also noted “the selection of particular programs may be thought out and planned. But it may also be spontaneous and rather mindless, even mechanically determined”. Obviously, Zillmann and Bryant were not testing selective exposure as it was originally written. Rather, they added another aspect to it: the missing affective aspect. While they made no claims that emotions solely drive audiences, they claimed that emotions could periodically drive audience. They also acknowledged that this process can be mechanically determined or impacted by media reception abilities. This process may be indicative of the audience activity level in the selection process. Also writing on the theory, Folarin (2005:89) said:

It is only natural that people seek out information that caters to their own interests, confirms their beliefs and boosts their own ego, while avoiding those that are contrary to their own predispositions and attach self-image. This determines which papers they subscribe to or read at all, which television stations they turn to, and which programmes they watch on these channels.

Applying the theory to this study therefore, it is logical to say that free readers make their reading choices based on the available papers and their pre-existing beliefs about the papers. This they do by consciously or unconsciously selecting only those papers that reinforce those beliefs and avoid those that are contrary to their beliefs.

Method

The researchers adopted the survey research method and complemented it with in-depth interview. Using available sampling technique, 130 free readers were sampled from five newspaper stands in Ikeja, the capital of Lagos State, South West Nigeria, using self-administered questionnaires.

One of the growing trends in Nigeria's newspaper consumption is the formation of Free Readers' Association. It is an informal group mostly made up of job seekers. They meet on a daily basis at various newspaper stands to read available newspapers without purchase. Sometimes, they contribute a token to be allowed to read while other times, they do not pay anything. The older a member becomes, the more likely such a member will not pay for full reading. The free readers' association is different from general free readers. While members of free readers' association are often allowed to read the full content of some papers, the general free readers are only allowed to scan through the headlines, usually without touching the paper.

The tradition at newspaper stands is that the free readers lead discussions and debates on major issues of the day. Sometimes, the discussions degenerate into heated debates and quarrels. Daily gathering at newsstands has become a culture and a major form of public sphere in Nigeria. For them, the newspaper is both for the eyes and ears. Free readers use the newspapers to get information and interpretations of public affairs; as tools for daily living (for example, advertisements on job vacancies), for relaxation and escape, for prestige and social interaction. The aforementioned characteristics informed the choice of free readers for the population of study.

In order support the survey, two males and two female readers were selected for in-depth interview. Data was analysed through the use of simple frequency distribution via the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and supported with quotations from the in-depth interview.

Results

All the 130 questionnaires administered were retrieved, thus yielding 100% response rate. Most of the respondents (n123=94.6%) were male; 67.7% were youths and mid-aged adults between 26 and 46 years old while majority (66.1%) were Graduates and Secondary School leavers ; 69.2% were married and 86.9% were Christians. Most of the respondents (61.5) said they read newspapers on daily basis while majority (47%) spends between 30 minutes and 1 hour per day. Majority of the respondents (n58=45.7%) spent an average of 5-29 minutes per day reading newspaper headlines and reports on corruption. One of the respondents in the in-depth interview threw more light into the reading pattern of free readers:

Usually, I come here most times to glance at headlines and listen to conversations on stories of the day. Sometimes, I may spend 5 to 15 or 20 minutes to read the headlines. Later in the day, I go online to read more. I also watch TV to confirm the stories.

The above report shows that free readers sometimes do not read details of the stories at the paper stands. Rather, they glance through the headlines and engage in arguments on the stories.

Most of the respondents (46.1%) said they were well exposed to reports on corruption. This corresponds with the 45.7% who said they spend 5-29 minutes per day on reports about corruption. In all, 95.3% of the respondents indicate that they read newspaper reports on corruption. This reveals that most of the respondents were well exposed to newspaper reports on corruption.

RQ 1: To what extent did readers perceive newspaper coverage of corruption scandals as objective or biased?

The media in general play a key role in the way people perceive issues. Yet, the way the audience perceives the media itself is probably more important. The first research question was aimed at measuring the objectivity or bias perception of newspapers' reportage on corruption. This is perhaps the most important factor that determines the consumption choice of any media offering.

Table 1: Perception of Objectivity in Newspaper Reportage of Corruption

Level of Objectivity		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Very high	4	3.1
	High	25	19.5
	Some extent	65	50.8
	Little	18	14.1
	Very little	6	4.7
	No extent	1	.8
	Undecided	8	6.3
	13.00	1	.8
	Total	128	100.0
Missing	System	2	
Total		130	

Most of the respondents in the table above (50.8%) said that newspapers were objective in their coverage of corruption stories to some extent. Less than quarter of the respondents (19.5%) said Nigerian newspapers were objective to a high extent.

RQ 2: What is the rating of newspapers' coverage of corruption stories?

Table 2: Respondents Rating of Newspaper Coverage of Corruption Stories

Newspaper		Frequency	Percent%
Valid	Punch	43	33.1
	The Sun	23	17.7
	Guardian	17	13.1
	Others	12	9.2
	The Nation	11	8.5
	Vangurad	9	6.9
	ThisDay	4	3.1
	Leadership	4	3.1
	Tribune	3	2.3
	Daily Times	2	1.5
	Sahara Reporters	2	1.5
	Total	130	100.0

The above results show that most of the respondents (50.5%) read corruption stories mostly from Punch (33.1%) and the Sun (17.7%) Newspapers. The two newspapers were also rated best for coverage of stories on corruption.

RQ 3: To what extent did readers consider newspapers' coverage of corruption as factual?

Table 3: Newspapers' Reflection of Facts in Corruption Reportage

Facts		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Yes	63	49.2
	No	33	25.8
	Undecided	32	25.0
	Total	128	100.0
Missing	System	2	
Total		130	

Table 3 above shows the extent to which respondents believed in the reflection of facts by newspapers in their coverage of corruption. Nearly half of the respondents believed that newspapers reported factual corruption stories within the period.

Table 4: Believability of Corruption Stories

Level of Believability		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Very High	7	5.5
	High	49	38.3
	Some extent	37	28.9
	Little	13	10.2
	Very little	9	7.0
	No extent	2	1.6
	Undecided	11	8.6
Total		128	100.0
Missing	System	2	
Total		130	

From the above results, majority of the respondents (43.8%) said they believe newspaper reports on corruption to a significant extent. This is followed by those who said they believe the reports only to some extent (28.9%)

Table 5: General Rating of Newspapers' Performance in Coverage of Corruption

Rating		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Excellent	1	.8
	Very Good	14	11.1
	Good	42	33.3
	Fair	52	41.3
	Poor	12	9.5
	Very poor	4	3.2
	7.00	1	.8
Total		126	100.0
Missing	System	4	
Total		130	

Table 6 above shows respondents' rating of Newspapers' performance in coverage of corruption matters. About half of the respondents (45.2) rated newspapers high while only 12.7% rated them low. However, almost half of the respondents (41.3%) rated them as 'fair' in their performance. This rating suggests that the respondents were not so impressed with newspapers' performance.

Discussion of Findings

The aim of this study was to measure free readers' perception of newspaper coverage of the Buhari-led administration's agenda against corruption in Nigeria. Results indicate that most of the respondents (95.3%) read newspaper reports on corruption; majority of this percentage (45.7%) spent an average of 5-29 minutes per day reading newspaper headlines and reports on corruption while 46.1% said they were well exposed to reports on corruption. Results from the in-depth interview reveal a similar pattern, although with some differences. One of the respondents says “I read newspapers every day and there is no day I don't see one story or the other on corruption but I focus mostly on sport news, I may use few minutes, may be 5 to 10 minutes to glance through general headlines”. Another respondent describes his readership pattern thus:

I read a lot of newspapers every day. At least I spend 2 to 3 hours on papers, after reading here, I go online to read. Sometimes, I can stay till evening reading papers and discussing with other readers because I like information. I also go through guardian to check adverts for work.

Supporting the other speakers, one of the respondents said “Is there anybody that will say that he does not read stories on corruption? Because they are always on the front pages, it's just that we are tired of all these nonsense stories. People are hungry”. The data above indicate that the respondents were adequately exposed to newspaper reports on corruption.

The media in general play a key role in the way people perceive issues. Yet, the way the audience perceives the media itself is perhaps more important. The second research question was aimed at measuring readers' perception of newspapers' role in reportage of corruption matters. Majority

(55.4%) said newspaper was their primary source of information on corruption stories, although they consumed other media like TV (13.5%), radio (11.9%) and social media (8.5%). This may be attributed to the fact that the study focused on newspaper readers. Most of them (66.9%) agreed that the newspapers frequently reported corruption stories. Most of the respondents (50.5%) read corruption stories mostly from Punch (33.1%) and the Sun (17.7%) newspapers respectively.

Majority of the readers (50%) rated the Punch (31.5%) and Sun (18.5%) newspapers as the best papers for coverage of corruption. Most of the respondents (50%) said that newspapers generally cover corruption stories with accuracy, fairness and objectivity “to some extent”. Most of the respondents (46.2%) believed that most of the newspapers investigate reports on corruption before publishing the stories. In all, 80.7% agreed that stories on corruption were investigated before publishing. From the above results, majority of the respondents (43.1%) said they believe newspaper reports on corruption to a large extent. This is followed by those who said they believe the reports only to “some extent” (28.5%). About half of the respondents (43.9) rated newspapers high while only 13.1% rated them low. The high rating and commendation was in line with the commendation by Afolayan (2012) who commended 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 the several 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. In the recent past, the media have also done well in few cases. However, almost half of the respondents (41.3%) rated them as 'fair' in their performance. This rating suggests that some of the respondents were not so impressed with newspapers' performance. One of the interviewees in the in-depth interview supports the above result:

Although the newspapers are trying by telling us the scandals among politicians but they don't tell us the whole truth because many of them are owned by the corrupt politicians. For example, Tinubu is the owner of the nation. Have you ever read anything against Tinubu in the Nation? They will only tell you what they want you to hear and because they are afraid of the government, they will not come out bold to say everything. That is why I don't totally depend on them, I read a lot of stories online and TV before coming here to read. Punch is trying, but it's neither here or there. It tries to play safe. I think I prefer Vanguard and the Sun newspapers.

Another respondent corroborated the above point: “I don't believe everything newspapers tell us because they just want to sell, they tell us half-truth, half lie”. The above observations are in line with the position of Oso (1991, 2012) on the media system in Nigeria. According to Oso (1991 p.1), “most, if not all, historical accounts of the Nigerian press are premised on its overt political nature... The Nigerian press, as constituted now, is a commercial press”. On the allegation that the media is often “afraid of the government” when reporting corruption and other crimes, Ogbondah (2012: 40) observes that “a more pragmatic rationale that explains the state's clampdown on the press was to incapacitate it from investigating and unearthing the bombastic level of corruption, fraud, embezzlement and greed among Nigeria's ruling bourgeoisie”. But

that was the situation in the past and between 1999 and 2005 as reported by Ogbondah. Since the current administration is all out to fight corruption, the media as a crucial partner needed for its success, should not tender the excuse of being afraid of the government. At least, they are protected by freedom of information act. All they need is to ensure that whatever they are publishing is factual, with evidences to prove the veracity of the story.

On the perception of the anti-graft war itself, majority of the respondents (n64=49.2%) rated the anti-corruption crusade low while 32.3% rated it high. Only 17.7% rated it as “fair”. 73.8% perceived the anti-corruption war as one-sided. Most of the respondents (71.6%) also said that the anti-corruption war is bias, focusing mostly on the political opponents. One of the respondents in the in-depth interview thus affirms the finding:

Which war are they fighting when people are hungry? I don't believe in any anti-corruption war because even Buhari himself is corrupt. How many APC members in his government has he prosecuted? Look at the time it took him before Babachir Lawal was suspended, even though he was supposed to be expelled. What is Amaechi still doing there? What about Magu that the Senate rejected? Although the Senate itself is a house of fraud. See, I don't believe in any of them again.

One of the two females that responded to the questionnaire was also interviewed in the in-depth interview. She comments:

My brother, forget that thing. During the time of Jonathan, things were not like this. Right now, I don't sell quarter of what I use to sell, life has become suddenly difficult all in the name of fighting corruption. If they succeed, let them first deal with the issue of hunger and the economy, otherwise, we will continue to be corrupt.

On the other, some of the respondents spoke in favour of the Buhari-led war against corruption. A middle-aged free reader observes:

The current administration has really done well in the fight against corruption. They have set the pace. Have you ever heard that a former Governor is prosecuted and sentenced to jail in Nigeria over corruption? If they are complaining that the anti-corruption war is one-sided, was it not the PDP that just left the office and squandered the nation's treasury for 16 years? See, Buhari is doing what is right. If PDP takes over power, let them also prosecute APC, but at least something good has started.

Majority of the respondents (72.3%) indicated their support for the crusade. However, they called on the government to ensure fairness to all sides, not focusing mostly on perceived political enemies, which has been the trend in Nigeria's campaign against corruption.

On the other hand, Nigerian newspapers need to improve on their role of holding the government accountable to the public. Partisanship and gross neglect of ethical standards required in investigative journalism will lead to loss of public trust in the media and its eventual death.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study set out to investigate the perception of free newspaper readers on the Buhari-led anti-corruption crusade. The objectives were to measure readers' exposure to stories on corruption, assess their perception of newspapers' coverage of the subject and ascertain readers' perception of Buhari's anti-corruption war. It was found that majority of the free readers' positively perceived newspapers' coverage of corruption but believed that the Buhari-led anticorruption crusade, though commendable, is largely one-sided. Some of the readers also revealed that newspaper reports are not absolutely objective and reliable as they take side with the government.

In view of the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. The media, especially newspapers should ensure that information derived from official sources on corruption is investigated before publication. Efforts should be made to contact the accused parties or their representatives to include their views.
2. Anti-graft agencies should be strengthened and made more independent. It should and must not be a tool in the hand of the ruling party to fight its opponents.
3. The media and the National Orientation Agency should make conscious efforts at educating readers and other media audiences on anti-corruption crusade in order to support the government in achieving its objectives in this regards.
4. The government on its part should demonstrate increased sincerity in its fight against corruption. This can be achieved by deliberately probing accused members of the ruling party and members of the cabinet accused of corrupt practices.

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