

Coverage of Corruption News by Major Newspapers in Nigeria

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Abstract

This research arises from the need that conscious effort and attention is needed to curb the negative effects of corruption on socio-economic transformation of the nation and that exploiting the media to expose corrupt practices in sectors of the nation's economy is the best way in shaping public opinions on the menace of corruption. This study used content analysis to determine the Newspaper coverage of corruption news in the major sectors of the Nigeria economy over a period of 5 years (2006 - 2010). A multi-stage sampling technique was used to select three newspapers namely Tribune, The Nation and Guardian; and a total of nine hundred and thirteen (913) corruption articles generated from the 540 issues were analysed in this study. Data were collected on frequency of coverage, categories of items/stories, prominence, space allotment and depth of treatment of articles on corruption. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages and means was used to summarise the data collected. Findings revealed that frequency of coverage of corruption articles in year 2010 carries the highest percentage of 23.7% while the Nigerian Tribune ranked first on the coverage of corruption articles with a total number of 381 (41.7%) articles. Overall, prominence was given to inside page articles (87.4%) in all the three newspapers, however, the Guardian newspaper, reported the highest in the front page having 41.7%. Majority (76.7%) of the corruption articles fell in the news category with the Nigerian Tribune having 42.4%. More than half (56.8%) of space allotted to corruption articles is one-quarter page while the Nigeria Tribune recorded highest (61.4%) space allotment of full page. The politics/governance sector ranked first with a total of 522 news items accounting for 57.2% of the whole corruption stories while agriculture, transport and energy sectors occupied the lower rung of the ladder. Also, politics/governance sector had the highest level of prominence with score of 654. Study concluded that Politics/Governance, Service oriented (i.e. telecommunications and banks), and sports sectors are perceived to be more corrupt sectors in Nigeria.

Keywords: Corruption news, newspapers, coverage, Nigerian sectors.

1. Introduction

Corruption is a global phenomenon that is attracting global reactions. Africa and the World group (AFRICAW) 2012 asserted that corruption is perhaps the most important factor that is impeding the accelerated socio-economic transformation of developing or less developing countries (LDCs) of the world, and that it is in fact, recognized by development scholars that the level of reduction in corruption has a very direct link to the level of economic development of nations in the world. To curb the negative effects of corruption on economic and sustainable development requires conscious efforts and attention. The word corruption simply means the deviation from what is right, ideal or correct. According to the Macmillian dictionary, corruption is defined as dishonest or illegal behaviour by officials or people in positions of power, especially when they accept money in exchange for doing things for someone. It is the departure from what is lawfully acceptable. Corruption is the act of changing or of being changed for the worse. Lipset and Lenz (2000) in their definition opined corruption as efforts to secure wealth or power through illegal means; private gain at public expense; or a misuse of public power for private benefit. Sen (1999) viewed corruption or corrupt behavior as that which involves the violation of established rules for personal gain and profit.

Corruption cut across all sectors of the economy as it is evidence in every sphere of the nation be it government/public sectors, unions, corporate or non-governmental organizations. Corruption could be political, electoral, bureaucratic, institutional or cultural. Corruption take different forms which include accepting and giving bribery, theft, fraud, embezzlement, extortion, blackmailing, favouritism, nepotism, accepting undue advantage, using influence or paying for it, abusing power, documents forgery, exploiting conflicting interests, misappropriation of funds even if they were legally obtained. Oyinola (2011) stated that corruption is found in the award of contracts, promotion of staff, dispensation of justice, and misuse of public offices, positions, and

privileges, embezzlement of public funds, public books, publications, documents, valuable security, and accounts. The reasons for the persistence of corruption in Nigeria has been attributed to factors such as obsession with materialism, compulsion for a shortcut to affluence, glorification and approbation of ill-gotten wealth by the general public (Ndiulor, 1999 cited in Dike, 2008). Dike (2008) asserted that lack of ethical standards throughout the agencies of government and business organizations in Nigeria is a serious drawback.

The issue of ethics in public sector and in private life encompasses a broad range, including a stress on obedience to authority, on the necessity of logic in moral reasoning, and on the necessity of putting moral judgement into practice (Bowman 1991 cited in Dike, 2008). Dike however holds the view that, many officeholders in Nigeria whether appointed or elected do not have clear conceptions of the ethical demands of their position; even as corrupt practices are going off the roof, little attention, if any, is being given to this ideal. Olushey (2013) stated that the widespread corruption in Nigeria is traceable to the increasing wave of covetousness, greed, inordinate ambition, materialism, the get-rich-quick-syndrome of the post-independence era, nationwide poverty, inadequate social security, corrupt/extravagant political system being operated and the inefficient socio-economic structures and systems put in place by our governments to alleviate the rampant abject poverty and combat the increasing wave of corrupt practices.

In Social sphere, corruption leads to discouragement of people to work together for the common good; frustration and general apathy among the public result in a weak civil society; demanding and paying bribes becomes the tradition; social inequality and widened gap between the rich and poor; civil strife, increased poverty and lack of basic needs like food, water and drugs; jealousy, hatred and insecurity (Transparency Ethiopia, 2013). Consequences of corruption that are acknowledged according to Floristeanu (2010) include low quality services, public resource embezzlement, increase in the degree of population poverty and suffering, high social costs, abuse spreading, property impairment, decrease in public income, inefficient allotment and faulty public resources management. Poor reward system and greed also contributed to the menace of corruption. Dike (2008) stated that Nigeria's reward system is perhaps the poorest in the world as Nigeria is a society where national priorities are turned upside down, hard work is not rewarded, but rogues are often glorified.

As rightly stated by Olagunju (2012) that corruption is indeed the bane of any nation; its malady cut across every religious denomination and political system and it affects both young and old, man and woman alike. Olagunju also likened it to cancer that contaminates all strata of the socio-political and economic structure of any society and its malignant nature is difficult to treat. Corruption indeed impedes economic growth, generates inequities and erodes government credibility and the efficient functioning of state institutions (Floristeanu, 2010). Corruption is often responsible for increased costs of goods and services, the funneling of scarce public resources to uneconomic high profile projects at the expense of the much needed projects such as schools, hospitals and roads, or the supply of potable water, diversion and misallocation of resources, conversion of public wealth to private and personal property, inflation, imbalanced economic development, weakling work ethics and professionalism, hindrance of the development of fair in market structures and unhealthy competition there by deterring competition (Transparency Ethiopia, 2013).

Development projects are often made unnecessarily complex in Nigeria to justify the corrupt and huge expense on it (Dike, 2008). Because of the fact that corruption affects public projects, that it determines significant loss to education, health and poverty prevention budgets, in both underdeveloped and developed countries, corruption is considered to be an important obstacle in the way of sustainable development (Floristeanu, 2010). A lack of action can result into state capture by private interest groups, with harmful effects on the state, its economy and society, because the rules of the game can be fundamentally distorted for good, in the favor of some privileged individuals (Anderson and Gray, 2006). The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) released by the Transparency International for the year 2012 suggests that levels of bribery, abuse of power and secret dealings are still perceived to be very high in most countries (Shruti, 2012).

The media and Civil Society groups have been identified as the two very important weapons to fight the scourge of corruption worldwide and the media itself is considered the strongest force in shaping public opinion on issues (AFRICAW - Africa and the World, 2012; WSCIJ, 2013). The World Anti-corruption Watchdog, the Transparency International, reported in its recent anti-corruption handbook that a free and independent media is one of the principal vehicles for informing the public about corrupt activity (AFRICAW, 2012). AFRICAW group stated that the Transparency International noted that by investigating and reporting on corruption, the media provides an important counterpoint to the abuse of entrusted power for private gain, shedding light on the wrongdoings of public office holders and corporate executives alike. The media can channel its whistle-blowing

function and ability to influence policies and government action to in turn bring about the much-needed development and good governance (WSCIJ, 2013).

It is important to note that in contemporary times, the attention to corruption has shifted from the pulpits' and philosophers' arenas to that of the media's. Anderson (2002) reported that media coverage of corruption in sectors of a nation's economy is indicative of the pervasiveness of the cancer in such sectors and can go a long way in curbing the spread. For example, the extensive media coverage of corruption scandals in Italy and Germany involving high-ranking politicians (Giglioli 1996, Heidenheimer 2000, Lashmar 2001) resulted in the very legitimacy of the political parties and the political system as a whole being shaken and the conviction of several high-level politicians on bribery charges respectively. Hence, this study intends to find out the extent to which Nigerian newspapers had covered corruption issues in all sectors of the nation over a period of 5 years.

2. Methodology

This study used content analysis to determine the Newspaper coverage of corruption news in the major sectors of the Nigeria economy. The population of this study consisted of all daily newspapers published in Nigeria between year 2006 and 2010. According to Aina (2002), there are 43 daily newspapers in circulation in Nigeria. These newspapers constituted the population for this study. A multi-stage sampling technique was adopted in the sampling of issues of the newspapers selected for the study. The first stage includes the sampling of 3 newspapers namely Tribune, The Nation and Guardian from a list of widely circulated newspapers in Nigeria using simple random sampling technique. The second stage involved the division of each year into six parts of two months each i.e. January/February, March/April, May/June, July/August, September/October, and November/December. From a segment of two months, the first month of each segment was selected for the year 2006, 2008, and 2009 while the second month was selected for each segment for the year 2007 and 2010 using simple random sampling technique. On the third stage, two weeks (representing 50%) were selected from each of the sampled months and three days (representing 40%) from each of the sampled week. This was accomplished using simple random sampling technique. This gave a total of six issues per month for each of the newspapers and a total of 36 issues per year for each newspaper. Thus, a total of 540 issues (180 issues per newspaper) were sampled for the period of five years across the three newspapers. A total of Nine hundred and thirteen (913) corruption articles generated from the 540 issues were analysed in this study.

The units of analysis are articles of stories on corruption/corrupt practices. The articles or stories could be in form of news, features or opinion (editorials). Two broad categories were created: corruption/corrupt-practices-oriented stories and non-corruption related stories. The corruption/corrupt-practices-oriented stories included bribery, embezzlement, influence-peddling, appropriation of public resources for private gain, patronage, pork-barreling, bureaucratic conflict of interest, impropriety and others. Every other editorial matter in the newspapers that did not fall into any of these categories was regarded as a non-corruption related stories and thus was excluded from the sample. Sectoral analysis of the relevant stories/articles was carried out vis-a-viz frequency of coverage, category of corruption articles, prominence, space allotment and depth of treatment:

Frequency of coverage: this refers to the number of times a sub-category appears in the publication

Prominence: this relate to the part of the newspapers in which a sub-category appears. A sub-category may appear in the front page, back page or inside pages. It also includes point-size used for the headlines of stories.

Depth of treatment: this refers to the amount of space an issue is given in a particular story; in other words, the lengths of stories. Lengths of stories will be measured in paragraphs and page dimension.

Three coders were trained and supervised to content analyze the corruption news contained in the selected newspaper editions. All the corruption articles were coded into four categories and classified into nine major sectors. Trial coding was conducted to increase the chances of agreement between the coders to obtain reliable and accurate data. The inter-coder reliability coefficient obtained for the three selected newspapers was 0.91 using the Holsti's (1985) reliability formula stated as follows:

Reliability = $2M/N1+N2 +N3$. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages and means was used to summarise the data collected.

3. Results and Discussion

Table 1: Frequency distribution of corruption articles covered by the selected Newspapers across year

	The Nation	Tribune	Guardian	Total	Rank
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)	
Rank	3	1	2		

*Figures in parentheses are in percentage (from the content analysis of the newspapers)

Results in Table 1 show the frequencies of corruption articles covered by each selected newspaper within the study time frame. This result shows that information about corruption practices was high during the year 2009 which Nigeria Tribune reported 50.2% during that year. This was followed by The Nation newspaper in the year 2010 having 42.1% and 41.5% in the year 2008 in the Tribune newspaper. This thus shows that corruption in the Country kept on increasing despite measures of Economic and Financial Crime Control (EFCC) and The Independent Corrupt Practice and Control (ICPC) that were put in place to tackle corruption and other related offences. The year 2006 happens to be the lowest which The Nation Newspaper report 30 corrupt articles. In all, year 2010 carries the highest percentage of corruption article having the Total of 23.7%, this thus, implies that as the year increases in arithmetically, corruption increases geometrically. The result on Table 1 implies that the media has actually be reporting and investigating corruption issues and this will help in bringing to light various wrongdoings in different sectors of the nation's economy. This is in line with the statement made by AFRICAW group (2012) that the Transparency International noted that by investigating and reporting on corruption, the media provides an important counterpoint to the abuse of entrusted power for private gain, shedding light on the wrongdoings of public office holders and corporate executives alike.

Table 2: Prominence of corruption/corrupt-practices-oriented articles in the selected Nigerian daily newspapers

	The Nation	Tribune	Guardian	Total	Rank
Inside Page	237(29.7)	344(43.1)	217(27.2)	798(87.4)	1
Back Page	2(16.7)	5(41.7)	5(41.7)	12(1.3)	3
Front Page	28(27.2)	32(31.1)	43(41.7)	103(11.3)	2
Total	267(29.2)	381(41.7)	26(29.0)	913(100)	

*Figures in parentheses are in percentage (from the content analysis of the newspapers)

Result in Table 2 shows the prominence given to the coverage of corruption articles in the selected newspapers. Overall, Inside page articles ranked first (87.4%), followed by articles in Back pages (1.3%) and 11.3% in the Front page. The front, inside and back pages of the newspaper are regarded as the most prominent pages. Out of the three newspapers, the Nigerian Tribune gave more prominence in the Inside page having 43.1%. The Tribune and Guardian newspapers reported equal number of corruption articles in the Back page having 41.7% respectively. The Guardian newspaper, reported the highest in the Front page having 41.7%. The back page had the lowest coverage of articles having 1.3%. In general, more articles were reported in the Inside page in all the three newspaper. This implies that the media is making its own effort in informing the populace about corruption news but that it is not sufficient as corruption articles had been concentrated in the inside pages (87.4%). Most a times people read just the front and back pages and may not necessarily go through the inside pages.

Table 3: Frequency distribution of categories of corruption articles across the newspapers

	The Nation	Tribune	Guardian	Total
News	212(30.3)	297(42.4)	191(27.3)	700(76.7)
Features	14(23.7)	26(44.1)	19(32.2)	59(6.5)
Editorial	4(27.3)	57(38.0)	52(34.7)	150(16.4)
Others	0(0)	1((25.0)	3(75.0)	4(0.4)
Total	267(29.2)	381(41.7)	265(29.0)	913(100)

*Figures in parentheses are in percentage (from the content analysis of the newspaper)

Results in Table 3 show the categories of corruption articles that were reported by the newspapers within the study time frame. This result shows that articles in the form of news was the highest having 76.7% followed by editorial having 16.4% and features 6.5%. Articles about News comprises of Individuals, People and Personalities as well as the amount of money, the nature and the effect it had on the economy of the country, human lives and the environment. **Articles about Editorials were issues that were raised by well meaning people and the trend at which individuals mostly those in government parastatals.** In addition, the way corruption allegations were handled by the judiciary in the Country and Anti-corruption agencies which might have led to the increase in corruption in the Country. Category that had the lowest were articles that were classified under “Others” having 0.4%. The Nation newspaper did not report any article or information in these categories. This result shows that the major category article is News article in the three newspapers.

Table 4: Space allotted to corruption articles in the selected Nigerian newspapers

	The Nation	Tribune	Guardian	Total
One-quarter page	157(30.3)	173(33.3)	189(36.4)	519(56.8)
Half page	83(30.4)	140(51.3)	50(18.3)	273(29.9)
Three-quarter page	10(30.3)	14(42.4)	9(27.3)	33(3.6)
Full page	17(19.3)	54(61.4)	17(19.3)	88(9.6)
Total	267(29.2)	381(41.7)	265(29.0)	913(100)
Rank	2	1	2	

***Figures in parentheses are in percentage (from the content analysis of the newspaper)**

Table 4 shows space allotted to articles in the Nigeria newspapers. Space allotment has to do with the total area allocated to corruption articles on the pages of the newspaper. The total area for the Guardian is 897cm²; Nigeria Tribune is 884cm² while the Nation is 884cm². The result on Table 4 reveals the overall frequency of the space category. In the Nation newspaper, 30.3% of corruption articles was allotted to one-quarter page, 30.4% were categorized as half page size, 30.3% as three-quarter page size and 19.3% as a full page size article. The Guardian had the highest in the one-quarter page as 36.4% followed by the Tribune having 33.3%. The Tribune newspaper allotted more space in the half size page category having 51.3% and the highest (61.4%) also in the full or large space category. The Nation and The Guardian newspapers had the equal allotment to corruption articles having 19.3% respectively. In overall, result reveals that the Tribune newspaper allotted more space to corruption articles as it ranked first than the two remaining newspapers.

Table 5 shows the coverage of corruption news items across the selected sectors of the nation’s economy. On the number of corruption items reported, the table shows that politics/governance sector ranked first with a total of 522 news items accounting for 57.2% of the whole corruption stories reported in Nigeria daily newspapers published between 2006 and 2010. This high reportage attests to the pervasiveness of corruption among the political class in Nigeria as argued by Alemu (2011) and Akinbi (2003). The table further shows that service oriented sector i.e. telecommunication and banks; and entertainment/sports sector ranked as second and third as they accounted for 14.2% and 13.3% respectively of the total corruption news items reported by the newspapers.

On the other hand, the distribution shows that agriculture, transport and energy sectors occupied the lower rung of the ladder as coverage of corruption news items in these sectors accounted for only 2.1%, 1.0% and 0.9% respectively of the total news items covered by the newspapers. Given the argument by Anderson (2002) that media coverage of corruption in sectors of a nation’s economy is indicative of the pervasiveness of the cancer in such sectors, therefore, it can be inferred that this results suggests the order with respect to the degree to which corrupt practices manifests in these sectors. While it may be encouraging to observe that extent of corruption in the agricultural sector of Nigeria is not as high as found in the political sector, results on Table 5 however reveals that the quantum of corruption in the agricultural sector is considerable. Furthermore, the result of this study reveals that majority (76.7%) of the corruption news items were news while, 16.8% were editorials. Also, politics/governance sector had the highest level of prominence and depth of treatment with score of 654 and 1740 respectively. While service oriented and entertainment/sports sector ranked 2nd and 3rd respectively on the depth of treatment.

Table 5: Newspaper coverage of corruption articles across the major sectors of Nigeria economy

Sectors	No. of items		Category of items/stories				Page Placement			Prominence	Space Allotment				Depth of treatment	
	F	%	News	Features	Editorials	Front Page	Back page	Inside page	Score		About 1/4 of a page	About 1/3 of a page	About 1/2 of a page	About a full page	Score	Rank
Agriculture	19	2.1	14	1	4	4	1	14	28	11	4	1	3	61	7	
Oil and Gas	36	3.9	28	2	6	8	1	27	33	21	9	1	5	118	5	
Industry	22	2.4	18	0	4	1	0	21	24	16	6	0	0	82	6	
Service oriented	130	14.2	115	2	13	15	1	114	160	74	37	4	15	430	2	
Transport	9	1.0	6	1	2	2	0	7	13	5	2	1	1	29	8	
Energy/	8	0.9	6	0	2	1	1	6	11	6	0	2	0	28	9	
Politics/	522	57.2	388	40	94	63	6	453	654	289	165	21	47	1740	1	
Governance																
Education	46	5.0	33	1	12	1	0	45	48	22	20	0	4	152	4	
Entertainment/	121	13.3	92	12	15	8	2	113	139	75	30	3	13	409	3	
Sports																
Total	913	100												3049		
F			700	59	154	103	12	798		519	273	33	88			
%			76.7	6.5	16.8	11.3	1.3	87.4		56.8	29.9	3.6	9.6			

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

The study concluded that there is an increase in the coverage of corruption articles by the media but articles are concentrated more on the inside pages of newspapers and space allotment to corruption articles is small as majority of these articles occupied one-quarter page of the newspapers. Politics/Governance, Service oriented (i.e. telecommunications and banks), and sports sectors are perceived to be more corrupt sectors in Nigeria giving the relatively high prominence corruption news in these sectors attracted across the sampled newspapers. It is necessary to place the reportage of corruption articles on the front burner of Nigeria newspapers agenda giving the pervasiveness of the problem in the country. Also, efforts should be intensified by journalists in the area writing of editorials on corruption. This is required to raise a virile social movement against corruption in the country.

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