

AUDIENCE PERCEPTION OF TVC NEWS COVERAGE OF BUHARI'S WAR AGAINST CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract: *This Paper, "Audience Perception of TVC News Coverage of President Buhari's War Against Corruption in Nigeria", examines audience perception of Television Continental News (TVC News) coverage of President Buhari's war against corruption in Nigeria in his first two years in office (May 2015 to May 2017). Anchored on perception Theory, the study adopts the survey research design with questionnaire as the instrument for data collection. Findings from the study revealed that TVC News is a popular television station among the residents of Nyanya in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, and that it gives prominence to the coverage of President Buhari's war against corruption in Nigeria. Further findings indicate that Television Continental News encounters challenges such as incomplete information about President Buhari's activities, ethical and organizational constraints in the coverage of President Buhari's war against corruption. The study therefore concludes that broadcast media, particularly the television plays crucial roles such as informing, educating, enlightening and sensitizing members of the public on issues of general or public interest such as the fight against corruption by Buhari's administration. The paper recommends that the government and anti-graft agencies should synergize more with the broadcast media, particularly, the television stations in their anti-corruption campaign because of its power of attraction and penetration with information, education, awareness creation and sensitization.*

Key Words: Audience, Perception, Broadcast Media, Corruption, TVC News

I. Introduction

Since independence, successive governments and leaderships in Nigeria have been grappling with the issue of corruption and its attendant effects on Nigerians (Lame and Odekunle, 2001, p. 59). The broadcast media in their social responsibility and watchdog roles have been instrumental in the coverage of the war against corruption in Nigeria. The fight or war against corruption assumed more vigour when the present administration under the leadership of President Muhammadu Buhari took over power from the former President Goodluck Jonathan in May, 2015. Since then, more and more cases of corrupt practices among politicians and other prominent Nigerians are being reported either through the print or the electronic or broadcast media on a daily basis, (Ezekwesili, 2016).

According to Transparency International (2014), the media has played an important role in buttressing democracy, by building a culture of openness and disclosure, which makes democratically elected governments accountable, engaging citizens in the business of governance by informing, educating and mobilizing the public. The role of the broadcast media in relation to corruption and anti-corruption reportage in a country is multi-fold, and it can act as a force against corruption, delivering both tangible and intangible results. Its tangible results are often associated with investigative reporting, which contributes to the launch of a criminal investigation against public officers, the resignation of a corrupt politician or the scrapping of law or policy that fosters corrupt practices. The intangible results are associated with its watchdog role in reporting corruption cases, which heighten the sense of accountability among elected officials, public bodies or institutions. The broadcast media and especially investigative journalism are seen as a treatment for the "disease" of corruption.

The battle between right and wrong, truth and falsehood vis-à-vis corruption is as old as man, it is a global phenomenon (Nwaeze, 2012). In Nigeria, it is both worrisome and lamentable, because like a cankerworm, it has eaten so deep into the socio-economic and political fabrics of Nigeria.

Nwaeze (2012) further affirms that the cases or incidences of corruption are growing by the day as reported by the various mass media in Nigeria and if this monster is not stamped out, socio-cultural, economic and political

development in Nigeria will continue to decline. Nigeria today is a nation at crossroads, struggling against all forms of vices. The country's media practitioners had at one time struggled for the political emancipation of the country, at another time, the media fought for the unity of the nation during a devastating 30-month civil war.

One of the major issues that should engage the attention of the media today is the anti-corruption war. There is therefore no gain saying the fact that, all hands need to be on deck so that the anti-corruption war could be won. How much Nigeria would succeed in the current battle against corruption depends largely on how effective, efficient and unbiased the broadcast media coverage vis-à-vis the mass media would generally be. Due to the pervasive nature of corruption in Nigeria, the broadcast media has always held its focus in reporting corruption cases and issues, as well as on different reforms to tackle corruption. However, the coverage of the broadcast media and a focus on the topic of corruption does not guarantee it to be an effective tool against the phenomenon. Like any other institution, the broadcast media can also be corrupt and in many cases, it does not live up to its ideals, transforming itself into a proxy in the battle between rival political groups, (Tirana, 2014).

Globally, concerned individuals and corporate organizations are not left out in the fight against corrupt practices. Hence, in April 2016, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, a worldwide cooperation agency in the fight against corruption organized a Conference in Abuja, Nigeria titled, "Roundtable on Corruption in Governance and Society" as part of their contribution to the war against corruption in Nigeria. Several papers were presented on the causes of corruption and how a society can exist without corruption. In other words, the causes of corruption are inexhaustive. However, he listed the most common ones which include; the inability of the government to provide the basic requirements of the citizens, flagrant disregard for value systems and norms, faulty legal framework and implementation, greed and selfish interests among others. The conference acknowledged that civil society groups and the media are key players in the fight against corruption.

This paper therefore, investigates audience perception of TVC News coverage of President Buhari's war against corruption in Nigeria.

II. Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study is to assess public perception of the role of broadcast media in the war against corruption in Nigeria from May, 2015 to May, 2019. Specifically, the study aims to:

- i) Examine audience perception on whether TVC News Abuja covers Buhari's war against corruption.
- ii) Find out audience perception on the frequency of TVC News coverage of President Buhari's war against corruption.
- iii) Examine audience perception on the kind of coverage TVC News makes on President Buhari's war against corruption.
- iv) Find out audience perception on whether TVC News Abuja gives prominence to President Buhari's war against corruption.
- v) Examine audience perception of the challenges TVC News faces in the coverage of President Buhari's war against corruption.

III. Conceptual Clarifications

Perception

Ngene (2016, p. 64) defines perception as the ability of a person to take intellectual cognizance of, to apprehend by the mind, to be convinced of by direct intuition, to note, to remark, to discern, see or to understand. Feldman (1999, p. 10), in Ngene (2016, p. 64) states that "Perception is the sorting out, interpretation, analysis and integration of stimuli involving our sense organs and brain." In other words, perception is conceived and regarded as a form of communication. Based on what people feel, experience, see, read, hear or talk about, they often make evaluative judgments of what is desirable and undesirable in a society or community. It is imperative to note that peoples' beliefs and values are shaped by their perception of the world in which they live. Their thinking and beliefs also determine their opinions and attitudes, motives, issues, events and the society at large.

The broadcast media have been influential in providing members of the society with vital information or issues which they can critique or rationalize and arrive at certain conclusions, (Ngene, 2016, p. 64). The broadcast media audience members watch news reports and other programmes on television, because they depend on it to know about current issues and what the public opinions are regarding issues of public interest and importance. The broadcast media can be very helpful in examining the extent and ways in which audience members perceive the media coverage of the war against corruption. According to Severin, (2001) in Ngene (2016, p. 64) different psychological factors influence perceptions. The factors include past experience, cultural expectations, motivations,

moods, needs and attitudes. Deductively, certain variations exist in perceptions and behaviours of different human beings.

From the foregoing, this research is of the opinion that perception is the process of receiving, organizing and interpreting information about one's environment so that it becomes meaningful. It can also be described as one's view or interpretation of something which requires power of observation, discernment and insight.

IV. Corruption

Lame and Odekunle (2001, p. 56) define corruption as "an act which deviates from the formal rules of conduct governing the actions of someone in the position of public authority because of private motive such as wealth, power or status". No wonder, Nwaeze (2012, p. 2) describes it as "private gain at public expense". In other words, corruption can be analyzed within the paradigm of political economy, whereby public office holders misuse public power for private benefits.

According to Musa (2006, p. 259), political corruption is a persistent phenomenon in Nigeria and the broadcast media has been instrumental in the reportage of cases of corruption. President Muhammadu Buhari (2015) describes corruption as the greatest form of human right violation. Since the creation of modern public administration in the country, there have been cases of official misuse of funds and resources. The rise of public administration and the discovery of oil and natural gas are two major events seen to have led to the increase in corrupt practices in the country.

The government has tried to contain corruption through the enactment of laws and the enforcement of integrity systems, but success has been slow in coming. In 2012, Nigeria was estimated to have lost over \$400 billion to corruption since independence.

Ngene (2016, p. 58) lists the following forms of corruption in Nigeria:

- A the 'get rich quick' at all cost syndrome;
- B open display of poor attitude to public service and criminal neglect of public property;
- C defrauding of the citizenry through the policy of payments for fuel subsidy;
- D stealing and mismanagement of pension funds;
- E imbibing the culture of seeking gratification even when one is performing his or her official duties;
- F kidnapping and political assassinations;
- G advance fee fraud (419);
- H examination malpractices;
- I armed robbery; and,
- J committing arson to cover up the tracks of cases of monumental corruption.

Theoretical Framework: Perception Theory

Perception theory is used to explain this study. Propounded by B. Berelson and G.A Steiner in (1964), the main assumption of perception theory is that the media want audiences to pay attention to their messages, learn the contents of the messages and make appropriate changes in attitudes, beliefs or produce the desired behavioural responses. In essence, the theory states that the process of interpreting messages is complex and that the goals may be difficult to achieve.

Berelson and Steiner (1964) assert that perception is a complex process by which people select, organize and interpret sensory stimulation into meaningful and coherent picture of the world. Research has identified two types of influences on human perception such as structural and functional. While structural influences on perception come from the physical aspect of the stimuli to which individuals are being exposed, functional influences are the psychological factors that influence perception and therefore introduce some subjectivity into the process.

According to Severin and Tankard (2001), there are three types of perception. They are:

- i. Selective exposure;
- ii. Selective attention; and
- iii. Selective retention.

Selective exposure deals with the tendency for individuals to expose themselves to those communications that are in agreement with their existing attitudes and to avoid those that are not. The notion of selective exposure follows agreeably from Festingers theory of cognitive dissonance which suggests that one way to reduce dissonance after making a decision is to seek out information that is consonant with the selection.

Selective attention is the tendency of individuals to pay attention to those parts of a message that are consonant with strongly held beliefs, attitudes or behaviours and to avoid those parts of a message that go against strongly held attitudes, beliefs or behaviours.

Selective retention is the tendency for the individuals or audience to recall information to be influenced by wants, needs, attitudes and other psychological factors.

Perception theory is relevant to this study because audience perceive TVC News reportage of Buhari's fight against corruption in Nigeria in different ways. Audience members usually have their own interpretation of the reportages. While some audience members may view TVC News reports on Buhari's war against corruption as highly educative and better than the reports of Channels Television on the same issue, the reverse may be the case for some other groups of audience members. This depends to a very large extent on the audience's exposure to the reports of the two (2) television stations and their knowledge of the fight against corruption by the Buhari's administration. Also, the general psychological make-up of the audience plays a significant role on the way such audience members perceive the reports or information they receive from the television station.

V. Review of Related Literature

Public Perception of Broadcast Media Influence in the Fight Against Corruption

According to Jatau (2013) the broadcast media is a powerful and influential source of information because both radio and television have the capability to penetrate every segment of the society. The position of Jatau shows that the influence or the role of the broadcast media in the fight against corruption cannot be overemphasized. This is because the broadcast media take into consideration the channels of communication capable of reaching heterogeneous audience members simultaneously with uniform message. Meyer (2002) states that the broadcast media in Nigeria regularly cover corruption related issues and cases.

According to Kaiman (2013), in China, since the February 2012 investigation of Bo Xilai, the powerful and popular former Chongqing party chief, and his wife over corruption and murder accusations, corruption has been a front-page issue in China, with Chinese and some international media outlets reporting on corruption scandals involving low and high-level officials on almost a daily basis. This further explains that the influence of the broadcast media in curbing corruption is not limited to Nigeria, it cuts across the borders of Nigeria. The Federal Government's support for anti-corruption efforts has made the broadcast media more influential and confident about voicing accusations, and has created greater space for public discussion of such issues. Furthermore, Areddy, (2010) states that Forbes magazine and a January 5, 2013 article from "The Guardian" point out that a new feature of media coverage of corruption in China has been the rising popularity of social media platforms. In other words, the media, radio, television and social media, play a very influential role in the war against corruption not only in Nigeria, but also in other nations of the world.

Broadcast Media Strategies in the Coverage of the Fight Against Corruption

Media coverage of corruption might also contribute to shaping public hostility towards corrupt behaviour that might result in the electoral defeat of individual politicians or of an entire government and in public pressure to reform policies and laws that otherwise create the conditions for corrupt behaviour. Areddy, (2010) observes that news stories assessing the work and exposing flaws, weaknesses and even corruption in accountability institutions, such as courts, police and anti-corruption agencies, might lead to public pressure to reform these institutions. Areddy further states that the by-products of all these actions might be to increase the costs of corrupt behaviour among public officials; to raise the standards of public accountability; to enhance the legitimacy of watchdog bodies and their independence from vested interests within the power structure that might otherwise interfere with their work; and to encourage witnesses of corruption to come forward. In other words, media aggressive reporting on corruption might also prompt pre-emptive responses by authorities eager to protect their reputation and the public image of their institution before any allegation is aired.

More intangible and indirect effects of media reporting on corruption have to be seen in the context of the broader role that media plays in society, particularly in contexts of weak political competition as in the case of Uganda and of many other African countries. In these contexts, aggressive and independent journalism acts as an indirect check on the sort of corruption that would otherwise flourish in the absence of political competition. By simply informing the public and presenting a variety of points of view media can promote public debate and enhance political and economic competition. Such competition might enhance accountability, open up alternatives to dealing with corrupt networks, and create incentives for political leaders to move against corruption. It might also encourage public participation and inform the debate by taking the lead in pressing for enhanced civil liberties such as freedom of expression. By disseminating knowledge about public decisions and procedures beyond a small elite

group of decision-makers, media can also play a major role in undermining a precondition to corruption, which is the “shared knowledge” among a restricted circle of beneficiaries of corruption.

Broadcast Media Challenges in the Coverage of War Against Corruption

Free, independent and hard-hitting media can play an important role in curbing corruption. For instance, media in Uganda (Nogara, 2009) enjoyed considerable freedom in this regard since Museveni came to power in 1986. The evolving power structure and a changing media landscape, however, presented both challenges and opportunities for media’s watchdog role on corruption. Nogara further explored how the environment defined such role between 1986 and 2006 during Museveni’s “no-party” rule.

Nogara (2009) further argued that, although media won important battles to promote accountability in public offices, the regime’s complex power structure has consistently challenged their role as an instrument of public accountability. This explains that media could face a number of challenges in the coverage of fight against corruption not only in Uganda but also in any other countries where anti-corruption campaign is the order of the day, particularly the current President Buhari’s anti-corruption war in Nigeria.

Media freedom of expression is essential to investigate and report incidences of corruption in a professional, effective and ethical manner. Freedom House, which monitors the free flow of information to and from the public, measures press freedom in terms of the degree to which laws and government regulations influence news content; the degree of political influence or control over the context of the news system; the economic influences on the media exerted either by government or private entrepreneurs, and the degree of oppression of the news media (Brunetti and Weder, 2003). Cross-country data measuring the effects of press freedom on corruption have found that press freedom is positively correlated with lower levels of corruption (Brunetti and Weder, 2003; and Ahrend, 2002).

Governments use a broad range of laws and actions aside coercion to censure journalists, close publications, hamstringing finances, or simply encourage a culture of self-censorship. Laws such as sedition and libel laws are frequently used to limit press freedom and discriminate against journalists in court cases. Media often come under fire from government officials allegedly for giving a platform to “terrorists” and “enemies” of the state. Governments also exercise control over the media content through the licensing requirement, existing in many African countries, which imposes conditions on media conduct and can be easily revoked. Furthermore, governments can exercise considerable pressure on the finances of the broadcast media, especially in developing countries where the state is the main source of direct subsidies and advertising for media outlets. The fear of being jailed and the threat of expensive and damaging libel suits, the risk of license being revoked or of losing advertising revenue and other financial benefits impose a lot of burden on journalists and media houses, which encourages a culture of self-censorship.

Access to information is at the heart of transparency and public accountability. Information flows may facilitate public oversight of government and increase the accountability of politicians for bad conduct. In most countries, citizens receive the information they need through the media, which serve as the intermediaries that collect information and make it available to the public. Without reliable access to information, the media are severely limited in their capacity to exercise their public accountability function. Laws and regulations, such as “Official Secret Acts” and similar devices, are often used by governments to limit press access to sensitive information for reason of national security in order to balance the citizens’ right to know and the State’s right and duty to protect its security. Under these laws and regulations, however, governments often enjoy considerable discretion to define what constitutes national security, which can easily be abused by governments to prevent opponents from expressing views through the media. Criminal defamation and libel laws, justified as necessary safeguards to privacy and security, are other legal instruments often used to provide special immunities and special rights to politicians and senior public servants, which prevent the media from doing their job

Research Methodology

The Researchers employed survey research design with questionnaire as instrument for data collection on a sample size of 100 respondents.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Data presentation and analysis is based on the data obtained from the questionnaire administered. The Researchers administered one hundred (100) copies of questionnaire, however, only ninety-five (95) copies were completed and returned usable. The remaining five (5) representing 5.2% formed the mortality rate. The mortality rate was however not significant to negatively affect the result of the study. Below is a tabular presentation of the data obtained:

Table 1: TVC News Coverage of President Buhari's war against corruption

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	32	33%
Disagree	17	18%
Strongly Agree	33	35%
Strongly Disagree	13	14%
Total	95	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Data in Table 1 show that a total of 32 respondents representing 33% agreed that TVC News covers President Buhari's war against corruption. 17 respondents representing 18% disagreed that TVC News covers President Buhari's war against corruption while 33 respondents representing 35% strongly agreed that TVC News covers President Buhari's war against corruption. 13 respondents representing 14% strongly disagreed that TVC News covers President Buhari's war against corruption. This implies that majority of the respondents (68%), that is, (agreed 33% and strongly agreed 35% = 68%) established that TVC News covers President Buhari's war against corruption.

Table 2: Frequency of TVC News Coverage of President Buhari's War Against Corruption

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Daily	69	73%
Weekly	16	17%
Monthly	10	10%
Total	95	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Data in Table 2 show the frequency of TVC News coverage of President Buhari's war against corruption. 69 respondents representing 73% affirmed that TVC News covers President Buhari's war against corruption on a daily. 16 respondents representing 17% affirmed that TVC News covers President Buhari's war against corruption weekly while 10 respondents representing 10% affirmed that TVC News covers President Buhari's war against corruption monthly. This implies that majority of the respondents representing 73% affirmed that TVC News covers President Buhari's war against corruption daily.

Table 3: Kinds of Coverage TVC News Gives to President Buhari's War Against Corruption

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Straight News	45	47%
News Analysis	20	21%
News Commentary	12	13%
Straight news, news analysis and commentary.	18	19%
Total	95	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Data in Table 3 show that a total of 45 respondents representing 47% affirm that TVC News uses straight news to broadcast their coverage of President Buhari's war against corruption. 20 respondents representing 21% establish that TVC News analyses the news coverage of President Buhari's war against corruption while 12 respondents representing 13% affirm that TVC news carries out news commentary on the coverage of President Buhari's war against corruption. 18 respondents representing 19% revealed that TVC news carries out news programme, news analysis, and news commentary on President Buhari's war against corruption. This implies that majority of the respondents (47%) affirm that TVC News coverage of President Buhari's war against corruption is mainly straight news.

Table 4: Whether TVC News gives prominence to coverage of President Buhari's war against corruption.

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	38	40%
Disagree	16	17
Strongly agree	32	34
Strongly disagree	9	9%
Total	95	100

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Data in Table 4 shows that a total of 38 respondents representing 40% agreed that that TVC News gives prominence to the coverage of President Buhari's war against corruption, 16 respondents representing 17% disagreed that TVC News gives prominence to the coverage of President Buhari's war against corruption. 32 respondents representing 34% strongly agreed that TVC News gives prominence to the coverage of president Buhari's war against corruption while 9 respondents representing 9% strongly disagreed that TVC News gives prominence to President Buhari's war against corruption. This implies that majority of the respondents 74% that is, (agreed 40%+strongly agreed 34%) establishes that TVC News gives prominence to the coverage of President Buhari's war against corruption.

Table 5: Challenges TVC News encounter in the coverage of President Buhari's war against corruption

Responses	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Incomplete information about his activities	21	22
Ethical Constraints	20	21
Organizational Constraints	24	25
All of the above	30	32
Total	95	100

Source: Field Survey 2019

Data in Table 5 show the challenges TVC News encounter in their coverage of President Buhari's war against corruption. A total of 21 respondents representing 22 % said incomplete information about his activities, 20 respondents representing 22% said ethical constraints, 24 respondents representing 25% said organizational constraints while 30 respondents representing 32% said all of the above. This implies that Television Continental News encounters challenges such as incomplete information about his activities, ethical and organizational constraints in the coverage of President Buhari's war against corruption is in-depth as affirmed by 30 respondents representing 32% of the entire respondents.

VI. Discussion

The first objective of the study was to find out whether TVC News covers President Buhari's war against corruption. In response to this objective, the study found that TVC News covers President Buhari's war against corruption. The finding agrees with Okpo (2010) observation that broadcast media in Nigeria cover corruption related issues and cases.

The study sought to find out the frequency of TVC News coverage of President Buhari's war against corruption. The study finds that TVC News covers President Buhari's war against corruption daily. This is in line with Shaw and McCombs (1972) agenda setting theory position that the media has the capability to predetermine what issues are important by the frequency of their occurrences.

The study also sought to find out the kinds of coverage TVC News gives to President Buhari's war against corruption. In response to this, the study finds out that TVC News covers President Buhari's war against corruption in news programme, news analysis and news commentary.

The study was also conducted to find out the level of prominence TVC News gives to President Buhari's war against corruption. In response, the study found out that TVC News gives a very high level of prominence to the coverage of President Buhari's war against corruption. This is also in line with Folarin (2002) observation that

“how popular an issue is or how important an issue is perceived among people corresponds to how much prominence such an issue is given in the mass media.

Finally, the study sought to find out the audience perception of the likely challenges TVC News faces in the coverage of President Buhari’s war against corruption. In response to this, the perception of the public shows that Nigerian journalists are not encouraged and protected enough to consistently campaign against corruption in Nigeria and that their report do not reach the rural areas where over 70% of Nigerians still reside and where every citizen of the country comes from.

VII. Conclusion/Recommendations

Based on the findings, the paper concludes that broadcast media particularly Television Continental (TVC) News covers the anti-corruption war of Buhari’s administration. Furthermore, for the broadcast media to play an effective role in the fight against corruption, an enabling environment and the professional skills necessary for hard-hitting and investigative stories that produce both tangible and intangible results against corrupt practices need to be put in place. Hard-hitting and investigative reporting requires a multitude of sources, field work, fact-checking, focusing on the public good rather than private lives, as well as journalists going beyond what they have witnessed and what has been said to uncover wrongdoing. Not all reporting on corruption is investigative reporting. For the most part it is a daily coverage, where journalists take information, weigh its significance, check its accuracy and balance and put it in context, in order to produce a coherent news report. The paper thus recommends that:

- i) The government and anti-graft agencies should synergize with the broadcast media, particularly, the television in their anti-corruption campaign because of its power of attraction and penetration with information, education, awareness and sensitization.
- ii) The broadcast media should on a regular basis conduct audience perception audit to assess their performance in the various programmes they air.
- iii) The broadcast media in its coverage of events should air more programmes on anti-corruption campaign. The programmes should include news analysis and news commentary.
- iv) The government should remove undue influence on the broadcast media so that they can effectively carry out their primary responsibility of information dissemination.
- v) In addition, anti-graft agencies such as Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) should involve the broadcast media as veritable tool in curbing corruption in Nigeria.
- vi) Finally, for the broadcast media to be an effective tool against corruption, both investigative reporting and daily coverage on corruption cases need to adhere to the guiding principles and standards of journalism. These principles can vary slightly from one broadcast media organization to another. Notwithstanding, they should always adhere to the standards of accuracy, fairness, completeness, honesty and impartiality.

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