

Ethnocentrism and Corruption in Nigerian Government: The Role of the Media in Changing the Tides

Joseph I. Chiadika, PhD

Lecturer, Department of Mass Communication
Delta State Polytechnic, Ogwashi-Uku
+234(0)8168403541/ifyjoe44@gmail.com
ORCID: [0009-0009-5667-0760](https://orcid.org/0009-0009-5667-0760)

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Ngozi Esther Okoye

Lecturer, Department of Mass Communication,
Delta State Polytechnic, Otefe-Oghara
+234(0)8101029499/ngozyokoye@gmail.com

Abstract

This study investigated the role of the media in changing the tides of ethnocentrism among Nigerians and corruption in Nigerian government as they are pervasive issues that are stunting the political and infrastructural development of the Nigerian society and undermine trust in government institutions. This research examined the impact of media coverage on public perceptions of ethnocentrism and corruption and also the challenges faced by media practitioners in reporting on these issues. The study adopted the survey research method to collect data from media professionals, government officials, and the general public. Data collection was done using the questionnaire which was administered to selected respondents. The findings revealed the importance of a free and independent media in promoting transparency and accountability in government. It was also found that the media plays an important role in sensitizing the people against ethnocentrism. More so, the study identified challenges such as ownership interference, repressive press laws, and limited access to information as limiting media efforts to stem the tide of ethnocentrism and corruption in government. It was concluded that media can play a vital role in changing the tides of ethnocentrism and corruption in Nigerian government by promoting rational thinking, collective-centered thinking, critical reporting, investigative journalism, and public engagement.

Keywords: Ethnocentrism, corruption, media, Nigerian government, transparency

Introduction

Arguably, corruption exists in every human sphere, permeating the very fabric of the human society. Its attendant effect ranges from inequitable distribution of often scarce resources to even death and destruction of property, in worse case scenarios. All over the world, one reoccurring decimal in the corridors of power or put succinctly, in government, is the prevalence of corruption.

In Nigeria, corruption has long been a formidable challenge undermining peaceful co-existence, equitable distribution of resources, good governance and generally, socio-economic development. Corruption, over the years has been deeply entrenched in the Nigerian political and administrative architecture, eroding public trust, weakening government institutions, and impeding overall national progress and development.

Another issue that is plaguing the Nigerian society and of course every other society with complex ethnocentric landscape like Nigeria is ethnocentrism. This, more often manifests as loyalty to one's ethnic group and the belief system that one's ethnic group should be protected and supported at all cost, often at the expense of national unity, and progress. This further complicates governance and developmental efforts in ethnic-diverse societies such as Nigeria.

The media plays a crucial role in driving social change and shaping public opinion. It is critical to tackling these connected issues (ethnocentrism and corruption). According to Thomas-Kuye (2024), the Nigerian media "acts as a watchdog, holding those in power accountable by investigating and reporting misconduct," and through these investigative and reportorial efforts, the media can influence policy changes by exposing corruption and its impact. Yet, despite this important role, the unabating corruption mostly fueled by ethnocentrism, in Nigeria, shows that there are limits and challenges on how well the media works. This issue needs immediate attention from scholars.

Existing research often points out the media's role in the anti-corruption campaign including educating the public and engendering accountability. However, there is an important gap regarding how the media deals with the ethnic biases and ethnocentric tendencies that affect Nigerian politics and governance. In Nigeria, corruption is not just about financial wrongdoing such as embezzlement, misappropriation of funds, outright illegal transfer of public funds and many others. It can also involve nepotism, and ethnic favoritism, which worsens inequalities and increases public distrust. While media coverage might highlight corruption, we know less about

how the media works to confront the harmful impact of ethnocentrism on anti-corruption efforts. Adaja (2017) asserts that “the role of the Nigerian media in mobilizing the citizenry to shun corruption is critical and crucial to the success of the anti-corruption campaign,” yet how this mobilization confronts ethnocentric divisions remains underexplored.

Furthermore, challenges like ownership influence, political interference, economic pressures on media organizations, and safety threats to investigative journalists limit the media's ability to effectively fight corruption. Studies often examine corruption and media roles separately from cultural factors like ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism plays a significant role in political loyalties, bureaucratic appointments, and resource distribution. The complicated relationship between media narratives, ethnic loyalties, and perceptions of corruption needs more investigation; this will help us understand how the media can truly be a transformative force.

The research gap exists in connecting the impacts of ethnocentrism with the media's role in combating corruption. We need to study how the media can shape public attitudes to address ethnic biases that protect corrupt practices. This study aims to fill that gap by analyzing the triangular relationship between ethnocentrism and corruption within Nigerian governance and the media's transformative role in changing these deep-seated patterns. It seeks to understand how media framing and reporting can break down ethnocentric barriers, improve transparency, and encourage national unity in anti-corruption efforts. By addressing this gap, the study provides valuable insights into strengthening democratic governance and accountability in Nigeria specifically, and the world at large, through better media strategies that tackle both ethnocentrism and corruption.

Research Objectives

Generally, the study sought to under study the triangular nexus between ethnocentrism, corruption and the media role in changing the tides. However, the specific objectives of the study are to:

1. assess the influence of ethnocentrism on corrupt practices in the Nigerian government
2. find out the role of the media in exposing and mitigating corruption linked to ethnocentric biases in Nigerian government
3. find out how media interventions can reshape public perceptions and reduce ethnocentrism to promote greater transparency and accountability in Nigerian government

Research Questions

The following research questions have been formulated to guide this study:

- 2 How does ethnocentrism influence corrupt practices in the Nigerian government?
- 3 What role do the media play in exposing and mitigating corruption linked to ethnocentric biases in Nigerian government?
- 4 In what ways can media interventions reshape public perceptions and reduce ethnocentrism to promote greater transparency and accountability in Nigerian government?

Literature Review

In this section, the researchers shall conduct in-depth review of relevant and related literatures in order to have a holistic view of the subject matter.

Ethnocentrism and Corruption in Nigerian Government

As noted ab-initio, ethnocentrism and corruption are intimately linked challenges in the Nigerian government and society in general, profoundly impacting governance and democratic stability. According to Joe-Akunne, Nwankwo, and Chine (2018), ethnocentrism and corruption in Nigeria manifest as intertwined vices, with the authors highlighting that it is hardly possible to differentiate between ethnocentrism and corruption as crime and as official conduct in Nigeria. This fusion indicates that ethnic favoritism often drives corrupt activities. It strengthens networks that value group loyalty more than national interest.

Arguably, political dynamics in Nigeria are greatly influenced by ethnic factors due to the ethnic-diverse landscape of the country. These factors help sustain corruption through patron-client relationships. Political appointments and resource allocations often depend on ethnicity, religion, and party affiliations. This creates an attitude that encourages cronyism, nepotism, and other self-serving behaviors, compelling public officials to leverage their positions for the exclusive advantage of their groups, often to the detriment of the wider community (Oji, 2024). This condition has made corruption a regular part of the political culture. State offices are seen as opportunities for personal and ethnic gain.

Corruption in the Nigerian government has undermined merit-based hiring or even contract award replacing meritocracy with nepotism where party loyalists and people with ethnic affiliations are

given the jobs they clearly do not have the competence to handle. In a South African study by Kaizer (2022), it was found that the execution of merit-based hiring in public services is obstructed by political factors, such as the cadre deployment policy of the African National Congress (ANC), complicating the process by favouring the appointment of party loyalist unqualified candidates. In a similar vein, Nkoana et al. (2024) posits that many government employees obtain their positions through nepotism and lack the skills to perform their tasks, resulting in services not reaching local communities. As a result, individuals hired through nepotism often engage in misconduct including corruption and fraud (Mamokhere & Kgobe, 2023). This not only weakens effective governance but also creates an environment where local interests take precedence over national development goals.

Anti-Corruption War in Nigeria: The Role of the Nigerian Media

The role of the Nigerian media in the anti-corruption war has been pivotal in shaping public opinion and pressuring government institutions to act against corrupt practices in the country. Recent scholarly works consistently underscore the media's watchdog function and its critical role in informing the populace and enhancing transparency in governance.

For instance, a study by Muhammed, Ogunyemi and Ezegwu (2023) investigated the impact of Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) corruption reportage on Abeokuta residents' perceptions of corruption during Buhari's administrations (2015-2023). The research used Agenda setting theory and a survey for data collection. The findings revealed positive effects such as increased government pressure, strengthened anti-corruption agencies, and fund recovery. The study recommends media attention to corruption to increase public focus.

This aligns with broader scholarly position that the media is supposed to serve as the bridge between the government and the governed as well as the mouthpiece of society; in other words, one of the professional duties of the media in every society is to be a civic watchdog whose mission is to uncover secrets/issues and keep the government accountable to society (Eze, 2023). The media help to create and maintain a sense of nationhood and undertake developmental tasks through education and building political stability, help in the formation of public opinion and create forum for public discussions and, as well, serve as watchdogs on government to prevent all forms of abuses (Eze, 2023).

Moreover, the media's watchdog role is essential in stopping corruption by investigating and exposing corrupt activities which ultimately fosters accountability. Scholars highlight that journalists' work in this area is based on watchdog theory, which urges the press to examine public officials and institutions to prevent abuses of power. In a recent study affirms the strong relationship between media reportage and anti-corruption campaign noting that "the most spectacular manifestations of the potentials of the media in curbing corruption has been the forced resignations of Mallam Salihu Buhari, Evans Enwerem, Chuba Okadigbo, Adolphus Wabara, and Patricia Ette, Adenike Grange and others on scandals of forgeries, falsifications and contract scams" (Edmond & Wilson, 2018). In sum, the Nigerian media serves not just to inform but also to rally public opinion which is ultimately crucial for the success of anti-corruption campaigns. It helps educate citizens, encouraging them to reject corrupt practices.

Challenges remain, including political interference, a lack of legal protections, and media bias that can weaken media coverage of corruption. Still, many agree that improving investigative journalism, creating freedom of information laws, and backing independent media are essential for the media to play its anti-corruption role effectively. The media's bold reporting has led to real results, such as the resignations of corrupt officials and reforms prompted by public outcry. This demonstrates its crucial role in Nigeria's ongoing battle against corruption. Consequently, the Nigerian media is a key player in this fight, promoting good governance through transparency, public involvement, and accountability.

Media Role in the Campaign against Ethnocentrism in Nigeria

Recent Nigerian research highlights the important role of media in fighting ethnocentrism, especially in Nigeria's diverse ethnic landscape. Scholars recognize that ethnocentrism, which often appears as distrust and prejudice among Nigeria's more than 250 ethnic groups, creates serious socio-political problems, including ethnic bigotry, ethnic hate speech and community violence among others. Media platforms, especially digital and social media, are crucial in both spreading and challenging these ethnocentric narratives. For instance, Olusegun and Adebisi (2024) found that mass media significantly influences public discourse on sustainability in Nigeria. A large portion (74%) of the respondents reported that mass media contributes to their awareness of environmental issues and shapes their attitudes and this aligns with Agenda-Setting Theory (Olusegun & Adebisi, 2024). This shows the media's agenda-setting capacity to influence public discourse against ethnocentrism in Nigeria.

Social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook have become double-edged swords in Nigeria's ethnic landscape; "while it empowered citizens and increased political participation, it also facilitated the spread of harmful narratives that could incite violence or deepen societal divides" (Chukwu & Chiadika, 2025). More so, the media have been used to spread ethnocentric disinformation and ethnic hate speech, especially during sensitive times like elections. However, scholars also see the positive potential of these platforms in campaign efforts to promote inter-ethnic understanding and peace. Despite the widespread ethnic hate speech, the media has also helped create counter-narratives that challenge ethnic stereotypes and encourage discussions among different ethnic groups. These efforts show that the media can work against divisions by highlighting voices that emphasize national unity instead of narrow ethnic interests.

Some Nigerian studies highlight how the media contributes to cultural education and intercultural communication. These factors help reduce ethnocentrism. Egbonu (2024) in a study on "Interculturality: Solution to the dilemma of ethnocentric mindset in Nigeria" posits that even amongst culturally comparative groups, ethnicity often plays out as tool for conflict amongst them. The study further notes that:

This conflict is not some simple disagreement on opinions but complex matters of superior/inferior and majority/minority appropriations of liberal and social matters. The rising trend of interculturality, if applied as a prescriptive tool, may restore unity to our society while also maintaining the identity that is important to each group. It is therefore, the position of this paper that, interculturality carries a new order for human interactions that is capable of unifying seemingly divergent groups and orientations.

This approach supports the idea that media should help foster conversations that celebrate Nigeria's diversity and question stories of ethnic superiority. Overall, Nigerian authors agree that while the media can reinforce ethnic divides, it also has the ability to change views in campaigns against ethnocentrism. This happens through shaping stories, encouraging intercultural dialogue, and raising public awareness about the risks of ethnic bias. The blend of traditional and digital media efforts is especially important for creating lasting change in the country's ongoing pursuit of ethnic harmony.

Challenges and Prospects of Media Campaign against Ethnocentrism and Corruption in Nigeria

A strong body of work on the challenges and opportunities of media campaigns against ethnocentrism and corruption in Nigeria shows a complicated landscape. Nigerian media, as the leading sources for public awareness and advocacy, encounter major obstacles in these campaigns. Empirical studies suggests that the media in Nigeria have often been more involved in political and ethnoreligious conflicts than acting as unbiased referees.

Eze (2008) observed that the broadcast media campaigns have suffered setbacks due to "people's negligence towards the broadcast campaign on this menace," underscoring a public disengagement challenge. The Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), among others, has been actively involved in coverage and dialogues aiming at ethno-religious peace, yet "communal orientation precluded any attachment to the state" remain a persistent barrier (Eze, 2008).

In anti-corruption campaigns, media practitioners often contribute to the problem. Even though the media can serve as watchdogs, corruption within the Nigerian press, including issues like bribery and the "brown envelope syndrome," weakens this role. Many journalists participate in corrupt practices without facing consequences. This internal conflict restricts the media's ability to hold public officials accountable. Adaja (2024) argues that anti-corruption efforts relying on media mobilization must confront these internal challenges to successfully educate the public and demand reforms. The media plays a crucial role, but it is weakened by systemic and ethical problems.

These challenges are compounded by political and structural constraints in Nigeria. Reporting on corruption or ethnocentrism frequently encounters impediments such as political immunity and threats against journalists. Umaru Pate, a Nigerian Professor of Media History was quoted by Egwu (2024) to have highlighted that journalists engaged in investigative reporting are being targeted or compromised by authorities. "The media as an institution is experiencing serious challenges because of funding, digital evolution, credibility, and safety issues," Pate said. "There are also problems related to ownership because, in some cases, those who are seen as corrupt or have relationships with the government own the media and control their operations directly or indirectly." Moreover, the widespread nature of ethnocentric politics still poses a risk to national integration and the media's efforts to build peace. This is evident in the larger social and political

context, where personal and group interests are prioritized over shared values and the national interest.

Despite these challenging issues, the media in Nigeria have a strong potential to drive social change. With clear reforms to improve journalistic ethics and protection, and with cooperation from the government and civil society, media campaigns can rally public opinion against ethnocentrism and corruption. The mobilization model of media practice highlights how "journalists, through information dissemination, influence and mobilize the general public to demand reforms" (Adaja, 2024). The potential lies in making the media reliable platforms for advocacy and education. This involves addressing both internal and external challenges that reduce their effectiveness.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on the Agenda-Setting Theory. Introduced by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972, this theory suggests that media shapes public perception and priorities by focusing on specific issues. This focus guides societal discussion and action. As noted by recent Nigerian research, broadcast media plays a "crucial role in raising public awareness of corruption in Nigeria by exposing corrupt practices, educating citizens on the consequences, and encouraging informed discussions about the issue across various segments of society" (Eke, Okure & Olufunke, 2025). This statement highlights how media sets the agenda by making corruption a visible and urgent issue for people. It shapes governance through communication that promotes cultural integrity.

The media's watchdog role fits the theory. It investigates and reports government wrongdoing. This is crucial in a context that is heavily influenced by ethnocentrism, which can cloud national unity and accountability. Thomas-Kuye (2024) notes that "media acts as a watchdog, holding those in power accountable by investigating and reporting misconduct." This shows its role in driving policy change through public pressure. She also points out that exposing corruption helps combat ethnocentrism by encouraging a national rather than sectional view.

The media mobilization model in the agenda-setting framework highlights that media exposure can change public opinion and drive reforms. Media exposure leads to policy changes by first shifting public opinion, which is vital in Nigeria's battle against deep-rooted corruption fueled by ethnic divisions. The agenda-setting theory, supported by recent studies in Nigeria, provides a

strong way to understand how the media can reshape public awareness in Nigeria's ethnic and corrupt political landscape, turning awareness into real governance reforms.

Methodology

The study used a survey research design to explore the media's role in tackling ethnocentrism and corruption in the Nigerian government. Researchers collected data through structured questionnaires sent to a selected sample of 200 individuals, including media professionals, government officials, and members of the public. The sample size were determined using the purposive sampling and the selection was done using the simple random sampling technique. This approach aimed to gather quantitative data on perceptions and experiences related to media coverage, ethnocentric behaviors, and corruption in governance. The questionnaire aimed to capture respondents' views on the effects of media reporting and the challenges faced by media workers, such as ownership interference and press restrictions. The sampling strategy sought to ensure representation from key groups to provide a well-rounded understanding of the topic.

Data analysis involved descriptive statistics to identify trends and relationships, helping to assess how effectively the media shapes public attitudes and promotes government transparency. By focusing on quantitative data, the methodology follows recognized practices in Nigerian media research and allows for an objective look at the media's ability to encourage critical thinking, raise collective awareness, and promote accountability in governance. This method also helps identify systemic barriers that limit media efforts to address corruption and ethnocentrism in Nigeria, offering valuable insights for policy and practice recommendations.

Findings and Discussions**Table 1: Demographic Data**

Demographic Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	110	55.0
	Female	90	45.0
Age	18-35	70	35.0
	36-45	55	27.5
	46-55	40	20.0
	56-65	25	12.5
	66-75	10	5.0
Educational Qualification	First Degree	120	60.0
	Postgraduate	60	30.0
	Professional	20	10.0
Respondents' Category	Media Professional	70	35.0
	Government Official	65	32.5
	Member of Public	65	32.5

Table 2: Answers to Research Questions

Questionnaire Items	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean
5. Ethnocentrism influences corrupt practices in the Nigerian government by creating favoritism based on ethnicity.	15 (7.5%)	35 (17.5%)	30 (15%)	80 (40%)	40 (20%)	3.55
6. Media plays a significant role in exposing corruption linked to ethnocentric biases in government.	10 (5%)	25 (12.5%)	25 (12.5%)	90 (45%)	50 (25%)	3.75
7. Media coverage increases public awareness of corruption related to ethnocentrism in Nigerian government.	12 (6%)	30 (15%)	33 (16.5%)	85 (42.5%)	40 (20%)	3.60
8. Media interventions effectively reshape public perceptions to reduce ethnocentrism in Nigeria.	18 (9%)	38 (19%)	30 (15%)	75 (37.5%)	39 (19.5%)	3.43
9. Media reporting promotes transparency and accountability in Nigerian government by addressing ethnocentrism.	10 (5%)	28 (14%)	28 (14%)	82 (41%)	52 (26%)	3.73
10. Challenges such as government interference restrict media's ability to combat corruption linked to ethnocentrism.	20 (10%)	40 (20%)	35 (17.5%)	65 (32.5%)	40 (20%)	3.35

The demographic data show a fairly balanced representation by gender, with slightly more males (55%) than females (45%). The majority of respondents are young adults aged 18-35 (35%) and those holding a first degree (60%). This suggests a fairly educated sample. Respondents include media professionals, government officials, and the public.

Regarding how ethnocentrism affects corruption, 60% agreed or strongly agreed that it leads to favoritism. The mean score of 3.55 indicates moderate agreement. There was even stronger agreement about the media's role in exposing corruption related to ethnocentrism, with a mean of 3.75. This shows recognition of the media as a watchdog.

Public awareness through media coverage is also acknowledged positively, with a mean of 3.60. The media also has the ability to reshape perceptions and reduce ethnocentrism, although this received slightly less agreement, with a mean of 3.43. Transparency and accountability promoted by media reporting received strong support, with a mean of 3.73. Challenges like government interference are seen as significant barriers to media effectiveness. This scored the lowest mean agreement at 3.35, but it still reflects notable concern.

Overall, the findings suggest that the media is viewed as a critical player in tackling ethnocentrism and corruption in Nigeria. However, its efforts face structural challenges. The moderate to high mean scores reflect optimism about using media for governance reform. This analysis aligns with Nigerian research that highlights the essential role of independent media in promoting transparency and societal change despite obstacles.

Conclusion

The study shows that the media is crucial in fighting ethnocentrism and corruption in the Nigerian government by promoting transparency, accountability, and public awareness. Media coverage greatly shapes public opinion, making citizens aware of the dangers of ethnic favoritism and corrupt practices that harm national development. Yet, the success of media efforts faces challenges like political interference, ownership biases, legal limits, and restricted access to information. Even with these obstacles, the media continues to be an important force for change through investigative journalism, critical reporting, and civic engagement. This work helps develop rational thinking and collective action needed to address the deep-rooted issues of ethnocentrism and corruption in Nigeria's governance. To enhance the media's power to promote democratic governance and national unity, it is vital to strengthen media independence and protections for journalists.

Recommendations

- i. The Nigerian government should reform media laws to ensure press freedom and independence. This includes repealing restrictive laws and strengthening protections against political interference. These changes will empower the media to investigate and report on corruption and ethnocentrism effectively.
- ii. Media organizations should focus on building their capacity, which includes specialized training in investigative journalism, ethical reporting, and intercultural communication. This training will prepare journalists to challenge ethnocentric biases and report on corruption with rigor and integrity. It will help foster greater public trust and accountability.
- iii. Media, civil society, and government agencies should work together to improve access to information, protect whistleblowers, and promote inclusive narratives that reduce ethnic divisions. This approach will strengthen media's role in promoting transparency, social unity, and democratic governance in Nigeria.

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