

Keeping Up with Power/Corruption in a Pandemic: A Study of an Investigative Journalist's Twitter Handle

Pandemide İktidarı/Yolsuzluğu Takip Etmek: Bir Araştırmacı Gazetecinin Twitter Kullanımına Yönelik Bir Analiz

Omotayo OMITOLA* 

Abstract

Investigative journalists have the special role of conducting investigations and reporting on them. In Nigeria, studies have confirmed that a lot of investigative reports are found in the traditional media, both broadcast and print, and most of these reports, which are about financial scandals, originate from government agencies saddled with the responsibility of battling corruption. This paper applies the social responsibility theory of the press to investigate the transformation and change in investigative reporting in Nigeria as occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic and disseminated on the social media. The study focuses on the COVID-19 tweets of Fisayo Soyombo, an acclaimed Nigerian investigative journalist who has over 101,000 followers on Twitter. Soyombo's tweets from 1 April 2020 to 30 June 2020 harvested from his eponymous Twitter handle formed the study sample. By identifying narratives of corruption, scandal stories and follow-up stories in the tweets, the paper finds out that unlike what obtains in the traditional media, Soyombo initiates investigation into the non-financial activities of people in positions of authority and seizes the opportunity of asynchronous communication on Twitter to report his findings regularly. However, the same asynchronicity as well as the unfolding events of the pandemic also cause him to end up with many questions and not enough answers. Nonetheless, the paper concludes that such questions can form the basis of further investigations beyond the pandemic.

Keywords: Fisayo Soyombo, Twitter, COVID-19, Nigeria, Investigative Journalism

Öz

Araştırmacı gazeteciler çeşitli araştırmalar gerçekleştirmeleri ve bunları haberleştirmeleri bakımından özel bir role sahiptirler. Nijerya'da yapılan çalışmalar, yolsuzluğa karşı mücadele etmekle sorumlu olan hükümete yakın kurumların da dahil olduğu finansal skandallara dair çok sayıda araştırmacı gazetecilik

* Dr. Omotayo Omitola, Cultural and Media Studies Unit, Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Nigeria
E-mail: tayolakojo@gmail.com, Orcid: 0000-0003-1075-4087

haberinin geleneksel medyada mevcut olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Bu çalışma, basın dahilinde toplumsal sorumluluk kuramından hareketle Nijerya'da COVID-19 pandemisiyle birlikte araştırmacı gazetecilikte yaşanan değişim ve dönüşümleri sosyal medyadaki yayınlar bağlamında analiz etmektedir. Bu kapsamda çalışma, Twitter'da 101.000'den fazla takipçisi olan Nijeryalı gazeteci Fisayo Soyombo'nun COVID-19 hakkında yayınlamış olduğu tweet'lere odaklanmaktadır. Soyombo'nun 1 Nisan 2020 ve 30 Haziran 2020 tarihleri arasında atmış olduğu tweet'ler çalışmanın örneklemini oluşturmaktadır. Tweet'leriyle belirtilen dönemdeki yolsuzluk anlatılarını, skandal hikayelerini ve sonrasındaki gelişmeleri teşhis eden Soyombo'nun araştırmacı gazeteciliği, iktidar konumundaki kişilerin finans dışı aktivitelerini gün ışığına çıkarmakta ve Twitter'dan yürüttüğü asenkronize iletişim ile geleneksel medyanın aksine düzenli bir biçimde araştırmalarını haberleştirmektedir. Diğer yandan Soyombo'nun gerçekleştirdiği asenkronize iletişim pandemide meydana gelen olaylar ile birlikte düşünüldüğünde gazetecinin çok sayıda soruyla karşılaşması sonucunu meydana getirirken, gazeteci tarafından verilebilen cevapların sayısı azalmaktadır. Buna rağmen bu çalışma, öne çıkan soruların pandemi sonrasında yapılabilmesi muhtemel gelecekteki gazetecilik araştırmalarının çıkış noktasını oluşturabileceği sonucunu ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Fisayo Soyombo, Twitter, COVID-19, Nijerya, Araştırmacı Gazetecilik

Introduction

Investigative journalism is related to the social responsibility theory of the press, which entails surveillance and watchdog activities (Asemah & Asogwa, 2012). It is an aspect of the watchdog role of the media. As watchdogs, the media are the backbone of democracy, since all reporting entails investigation to varying degrees (Hume & Abbott, 2017; Nee, 2013) and democracy thrives on an informed and aware citizenry. Specialized investigative journalism, however, becomes necessary when there are issues of corruption where people use public resources for private gain or abuse [public] trust (Johnston, 2005). Similarly, when people cover up wrongdoing in order to save their face, investigative journalism also comes in handy (Onyenankeya & Salawu, 2012). In a disruptive period, such as a pandemic, more is expected of public office holders than their regular duties and public trust is a currency that they need to safeguard through a demonstrated sense of responsibility. The citizenry wants to be assured that their leaders are handling the situation competently and are not being high-handed and/or discriminatory or prejudicial in the process. To be sure that this is the case, investigative journalists have to observe with keen interest the activities of stakeholders and also possess the usual readiness to probe when there are questionable developments. This paper is about the investigative reports of a Nigerian journalist who seizes the opportunity of asynchronous communication on twitter to detail the irregularities he investigated during the COVID-19 lockdown in the country.

Investigative Journalism in Nigeria

In Nigeria's checkered political history, journalists as watchdogs have performed both guerrilla (Ojebode, 2011) and investigative roles (Olorunyomi, 2013; Yusha'u, 2009). Their focus, as noted by Yusha'u (2009), has been majorly corruption, and rightly so. Nigeria, like many other African countries, has had to contend with a corrupt political class for decades (Hoffmann & Patel, 2017). From civilian administration to military rule, corruption has always been the bane of Nigeria's

existence. Investigative journalists have thus always had their work cut out for them and their preferred media used to be the press and the radio (Ojebode, 2011). Understandably their media of choice, while being occasioned by available technology per time, was also informed by the tendency to mix investigative journalism with development journalism (Musa, 1997). Young democracies like Nigeria have to juggle the challenges of good governance with those of development, especially considering that the two are intertwined. Development is about inclusion and so it occupies a central position in developing economies which are new to democracy. Such young democracies often contend with the problem of corruption and Nigeria is no exception, having transitioned from military to democratic rule in 1999 (Jebril, Loveless & Stetka, 2015; Suleiman, 2017; Voltmer, 2013).

The social responsibility theory of the press suggests that for the main reason of making government accountable and checking corruption—even in young democracies—the media have to constantly conduct investigations into government affairs since they owe their allegiance to the public (Onyenankya & Salawu, 2012). In their quest for representative governance, the public in Nigeria, as in many other African countries, has been inadvertently drawn into a political culture where the ruling class flouts its disregard for the law. The media have been pointing out this foolhardiness through their constant attention to corruption in a country which was once said to have the freest press in Africa (Dare, 2011; Oso, 2013). Resultantly, government, the media and the generality of the Nigerian society is immersed in a political culture that is preoccupied with the concept of corruption (Suleiman, 2017). An examination of this culture shows that corruption in Nigeria is considered to occur in various forms, including abuse of power, nepotism, bribery, financial crime etc., all of which are promoted in the neopatrimonial state structure where the chief executive thrives in a political system of patronage and dependency (Adebanwi & Obadare, 2011).

As Johnston (2005) rightly observes, money is almost always the motivation for corruption. It is to be expected then that even though corruption exists on both large and small scales, in Nigeria it is usually the large-scale ones involving large sums of money and highly placed officials that find their way into the news where the citizens learn about them (Suleiman, 2017). As such, corruption scandal stories and narratives of corruption are commonplace in the media, particularly the press. Narratives of corruption are not about any particular event but are generic discourses on corruption. Scandal stories deal with details of specific events, while follow-up stories apply to both narratives of corruption and scandal stories (Suleiman, 2017). The broadcast media also feature news stories, but for them and their press counterpart, most of these stories originate from government agencies saddled with the responsibility of fighting corruption (Suleiman, 2017). Now, however, the younger generation of investigative journalists is increasingly turning to the social media to engage with the citizenry and publish original investigative reports (Abdenour, 2017). Fisayo Soyombo is one of such journalists; hence the need to study his works, particularly in the period of the pandemic when regular type investigative journalism was curtailed by the restrictions of the period. With investigative journalism entailing a lot of pavement pounding, interviews and sometimes even stealth, it is necessary to unravel the change and transformation in the investigative reporting of a time when Nigeria, a country noted for corruption, was on lockdown.

Investigative Journalism and the Social Media

In the current era of fake news and post-truth (Hume & Abbott, 2017; Kalpokas, 2019), journalists are torn in their appreciation of the social media, which are notorious for starting and spreading fake news just as they are known for assisting journalists in identifying potential and worthy news stories (Avery, Lariscy, & Sweetser, 2010). Hume and Abbott (2017) note that tech platforms in general, including the social media, “are both part of the problem and part of the solution to such issues as cross-border corruption and xenophobia” (p. 6). Such paradox is also reflected in Rosenthal’s (2011) summation that for investigative journalists who need their stories of unearthing wrongs to reach as many people as possible, it is advisable that they not use the social media to access information but rather share their works on them [social media]. Like every other person, a journalist who wishes to have a dedicated audience to share their work with on social media has to be consistent in seeing and being seen, contributing their share to driving conversations and working the network (Choi, 2015).

Once a journalist has an established network on social media, it then becomes an unending supply of tips, information and ideas for them—although the choice of which to take up may be constrained by how sensitive or controversial it is (Gearing, 2014). While international organizations such as the Global Investigative Journalist Network (GIJN), the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) and the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) promoting investigative journalism do not interact with their audience on social media, instead merely keeping them up to date with the organisation’s activities (Hume & Abbott, 2017), individual investigative journalists engage their audience on social media and sometimes even share aspects of their investigative stories on this medium (Hart, 2011). Abdenour’s (2017) study among TV investigative reporters in the USA indicated that this crop of investigative journalists used the social media frequently in doing their jobs, although this did not translate into higher efficiency. He therefore questioned the utility of social media for a more efficient investigative journalism, especially since a majority of the respondents who had won awards for their works or had been nominated for awards reported that they would rather not rely on the social media for story ideas. This is not surprising as veterans expectedly hardly ever willingly adjust to the use of new technologies (Gearing 2014; Reed, 2012; Reich, 2013).

Nonetheless, the adoption of digital tools in the practice of journalism suggests a global outlook and orientation wherein investigative journalists make use of all the weapons in their arsenal, including networking on social media, to tackle challenges that are of global relevance (Berglez, 2013; Hume & Abbott, 2017). Although the stories that journalists cover may be local, they are often interconnected with local events in other places, particularly considering that the global society is digitally networked and interconnected. Investigative journalists particularly have to depend on a social network as a means of supporting one another in their risky endeavor. The use of the social media is therefore necessitated not just by the utility of it but also by the constraint occasioned by the globalized, networked society of which virtually every country is a part (Gearing, 2014). In Nigeria, the study of investigative journalism has been mainly focused on the print media and their veteran practitioners (e.g. Ojebode, 2011; Olorunyomi, 2013); little has been said about the new generation of journalists who disseminate their works via the social media. The pandemic period showcases the globalised nature of the world and Soyombo’s investigative reports on Twitter showcase the transformations the pandemic has brought to investigative reporting in Nigeria.

Methodology

The index COVID-19 case came into Nigeria in February 2020 and thereafter infected other people. The government ordered a lockdown of the nation on 21 March and thus began the definitive period of the pandemic experience in the country. Soyombo's consent was secured via personal communication with him on Twitter and so his tweets of 1 April to 30 June, 2020 relating to the COVID-19 pandemic were harvested from his eponymous Twitter handle. The tweets were accessed in early July, copied and pasted on Microsoft Word where they were later studied. The Twitter Advanced Search option was employed to access the earlier April tweets which could not be accessed automatically due to the time frame. The relevant tweets were identified by pointer words like "COVID-19", "lockdown", "isolation", "contact tracing", "social distancing", "personal protective equipment (PPE)" etc.

The tweets were coded as follows: Non-investigative reports: (NI); Scandal stories: (S); Follow-up stories: (FU); and Narratives: (N). All in all, 1018 tweets were harvested. Of the 1018 tweets, 364 made up 46 threads while 654 were single entries. Soyombo tagged most of the threads "#fisayosocovid19series" and this made them more readily identifiable in the course of data gathering. Threads on twitter are multiple tweets that are linked together to make for one fairly extended narrative. Threads come about when people have more to say than the 150-character limit that a single-entry tweet can take. For this study threads are treated as one tweet so that cumulatively, a total of 700 tweets (654 single entries plus 46 threads) made up our sample. Of the 700 tweets, 255 were not about investigation; therefore 445 tweets only were considered for analysis.

Data presentation

The table below gives a summary of the tweets

Table 1: Breakdown of COVID-19 Investigative Tweets on Soyombo's Handle (1 April-30 June, 2020)

S/N	Tweets	Frequency	Percentage
1	NI	255	36%
2	S	80	11.43%
3	FU	172	24.6%
4	N	193	27.6%
	Total	700	100%

Investigative journalistic reports are often lengthy narratives about occurrences that have been thoroughly investigated and whose facts have been uncovered and are being shared in the report. Given the unusual situation of a pandemic, however, the investigation is more about the unfolding events rather than past events and truths being uncovered, although issues belonging to this category usually also have a bearing on the present. Nonetheless, in keeping with the extended narratives of investigation and considering the constraints of the Twitter space, Soyombo made use of threads comprising several tweets to relay his narratives. For stories whose narratives were not so lengthy, he wrote them in single tweets and focused on several aspects of the pandemic. The Global Investigative Journalism Network (2020) highlights government preparedness, hospital readiness, the supply of equipment (such as

masks), whether or not officials are telling the truth, and commercial exploitation as the themes that dominate investigative COVID-19 reportage. Similarly, Soyombo's accounts were riddled with such core concerns driving the investigation. This provided a running commentary on the state of affairs during the pandemic. In addition to the themes noted by the GIJN, Soyombo touched on issues of highhandedness of uniformed/powerful people and also citizens' level of compliance with government-established COVID-19 preventive measures. Going by Suleiman's (2017) categorizations, I identified narratives of corruption, actual [scandal] stories and follow-up stories in the tweets.

Narratives of Corruption

The questions that investigative journalists raise drive their investigation and lead them to ask further ones as they progress. Expectedly, Soyombo's readers were not privy to the questions that he asked in the course of his investigation, but they caught a glimpse when he used questions to drive his reportage on Twitter. Many times, he asked series of questions and ended up answering only some or even none of them. On such occasions, he admitted to his readers that he could not provide [all] the answers. The narratives of corruption, which often appeared as threads on Soyombo's Twitter handle, many times reflected his personal opinion and conjectures. However, he was careful to make this known either overtly or covertly. Some excerpts from two threads as presented overleaf demonstrate this.

Table 2: Some Tweets on Corruption. Source: Fisayo Soyombo's Twitter Handle (Harvested 7 July, 2020)

S/N	Tweet	Date	Time
1	Back to Cross River, lots of questions need to be answered if the Ben Ayade government must convince us all that the state is indeed COVID-19-free: 8/15	May 26, 2020	4:39 pm
2	Seven of the 8 samples collected so far are from the UCTH. What about other hospitals in Calabar & the rest of the 18 LGAs of the state? Does it mean that in a state of 4million people, not more than 1 person met the COVID-19 case definition outside UCTH in 3 months? 9/15	May 26, 2020	4:39 pm
3	Why does it ALWAYS take the Cross River State epidemiologist so long to turn up when informed of the need for sample collection for a possible Coronavirus case? Half of the samples were collected post-mortem because of delayed response. Why is this delay a pattern? 10/15	May 26, 2020	4:39 pm
4	Why is there, similarly, a pattern of delayed sample submission? There is no sample that was collected in Cross River and sent for testing within 24 hours. Not one. All the samples spent the night in Calabar; all stayed a minimum of 24 hours in the state. Why? 11/15	May 26, 2020	4:39 pm
6	Why is sample collection and submission for testing shrouded in such first-class secrecy? 5. Why is there an increase in deaths from COVID-19-like symptoms? It doesn't matter that they're in aliquots, unlike what was witnessed in Kano. 13/15	May 26, 2020	4:39 pm
7	COVID-19-like deaths are occurring but they're not confirmed to be COVID-induced, then what's the cause of the deaths? 6. Why are there very classical COVID-19-like chest x-rays, even if the results are coming back negative? 14/15	May 26, 2020	4:39 pm

In the tweets above which are extracted from a thread, he lamented, in about five interrogative statements, the lackadaisical attitude of the Cross River State epidemiologist and the delayed

COVID-19 test activities in the state. His inability to provide answers led him to conclude that the state could not be considered to be COVID-19 free if the questions remained. The rhetorical questions and some of the other unanswered ones directed the thoughts of his readers to neglected, critical and germane issues of the pandemic. More often than not though, the core questions he raised got answered even if in a speculative manner. When he asked why the Kogi State government would wish to hide COVID-19 deaths, he provided three possible and logical reasons for this, including the fact that none of the three isolation centres in the state was ready for use.

Table 3: Tweets Containing Speculative Answers. Source: Fisayo Soyombo’s Twitter Handle (Harvested 2 July, 2020)

S/N	Tweets	Date	Time
1	Why would the [Kogi] state govt want to hide COVID-19 cases? There may be many reasons but I’m sure of three, so far: 1. None of the 3 isolation centres — at SDG/FAREC Clinic, the Kogi State Diagnostics Centre & the Maimuna and Usman Yahaya Foundation Hospital — is ready for use. 9/17	May 5, 2020	10:39 am
2	2. I understand the state has no money to give the people as lockdown palliatives, should there be the need to restrict their movement. But many in Kogi aren’t asking for palliatives; they just want their salaries, which the government is making moves to halve. 12/17	May 5, 2020	10:39 am
3	3. For whatever reason, the state government believes the NCDC has politicised COVID-19 cases such that if samples are sent, they will automatically return +ve. It is a reason that defies logic, actually, but it exists all the same. 15/17	May 5, 2020	10:39 am

Scandal Stories

In relaying the scandal stories, Soyombo often gave descriptions and refrained from mentioning names; rather employing the threat of “naming and shaming” (Suleiman, 2017). His threat of naming and shaming was targeted at highlighting the shortcomings and negligence of people in power and authority and guiding his readers to reach the same conclusions about such people’s conduct. In doing this, he raised questions of morality and ethics for immediate and future referencing, thereby holding “powerful” people accountable. In the case of public/government-owned facilities, the names of the establishments were mentioned but not the names of the actors. For private establishments, he refrained from mentioning the names of the facilities as well as the names of the offenders. Understandably, government facilities were more represented at the forefront in the pandemic than private facilities. Notably, instances of naming and shaming comprised initial threads where he established the story and hinted at mentioning names at a later date, and the follow-up threads where the issues were somewhat resolved and he decided to either eventually mention names or let go. Rather than name and shame initially, he used descriptive labels, e.g. “professor-of-medicine-friend”, “Indian-owned hospital”, “Lebanese-owned hospital”, “Indian patient”.

The professor of medicine at the University of Ilorin Teaching Hospital (UIH) who carelessly and impudently brought in his suspiciously sick relative for treatment as well as the Indian hospital that admitted patients exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms are examples of this. Initially, on April 4,

Soyombo reported on the COVID-19 death at the UITH and how it would not make it to the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control's (NCDC) official count "because the powers that be did everything to cover it up. The bigwigs at the University of Ilorin Teaching Hospital (UITH) knew. The state govt did, too. A grand cover-up." In this initial thread, he went into the details of how a professor of medicine invited his sick friend to the hospital from Lagos after the latter's self-isolation upon his return from the UK, and how, despite receiving treatment, he eventually died at the Accident and Emergency ward of the UITH. The hospital personnel who attended to him were later placed on chloroquine prophylaxis and put in isolation. Soyombo concluded that 'may "man know man" not kill us in this country', seeing as two professors were involved in the handling of the case and the consequent exposure of hospital staff to COVID-19. After the UITH issued a statement on the incident, Soyombo prevailed on the institution to name the erring professors and state the penalty they would face, and asked, rather sarcastically, if the university would like him to do the naming for them. In his estimation, it was not enough that the UITH admitted that they (the professors) behaved in a 'HIGHLY UNETHICAL' way; the onus was on the UITH to name the culprits as a way of making clear that as an institution it was not complicit in the negligence and it also condemned the irresponsible behavior of its staff.

Some scandal stories could be more sensitive than average as we see in the case of the supposed death of the former governor of Oyo State. In such instances of issues under contention, Soyombo was careful to express opinions in a self-referential manner, even though he provided proof to back up his claims. Rather than say, for instance, that Nigeria had lost one of its politicians, his announcement that former governor of Oyo State had died of COVID-19 complications was made in a precautionary manner where he stressed the reliability of his source first before launching into the essence of his tweet:

A source who has never failed me in six years of knowing him has just confirmed to me the death, in Lagos today, of Abiola Ajimobi, former Governor of Oyo State, due to underlying health conditions worsened by the Coronavirus. May his soul rest in peace.

9:12 PM • Jun 18, 2020

Source: Fisayo Soyombo's Twitter Handle (Harvested 10 July, 2020)

Soyombo also tagged individuals and institutions whom he considered pertinent when tweeting investigative reports. The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control's twitter handle (@NCDCgov) was expectedly frequently tagged. He sometimes indicated that some of the scandals were resolved due to the active engagement of his readers who "escalated" the tweets. He would often tell them that he was tweeting about events so as to get some "escalation" (i.e. retweeting to create more awareness) from his readers. He stressed that "All of you who retweeted the initial post, you made it happen!" and thanked them when he reported that the authorities had taken up the case of the Indian-owned hospital which admitted two patients with COVID-19 like symptoms without alerting the authorities.

Follow-up Stories

Both the narratives of corruption and the scandals had follow-ups. In the case of the narratives, they were usually *incidences* and not *incidents*. In the narratives, related incidents were linked up to make for cohesion as we see in the tweets about unexplained deaths in Kano and Kogi States. As for scandals, the follow-up stories gave further details about specific, individual incidents already mentioned in previous [scandal] tweets such as we see in the cases of the UITH, the Indian-owned hospital and the cases in Ekiti State.

The narrative about the strange deaths in Kano began with a thread on 30 April where Soyombo relayed that “A few people have asked me to find out what is happening in Kano. Two questions were common to all the enquiries: (i) Are reports of mass deaths real? (ii) Are they linked to COVID-19?” He had previously tweeted about the single incident of the index COVID-19 case in the state being an elderly ambassador who acted rather irresponsibly by hiding his travel history from doctors. However, his tweets about Kano from 30 April started making inferences from deaths from all over the state, deducing that they were COVID-19 deaths, despite the governor’s claim to the contrary, and linking various incidents to make for an incidence. On 1 May he relayed his conversation with “a very senior medical expert” and their report of the tell-tale signs of COVID-19 from chest x-ray results. He even went as far as noting how this helped to quickly identify a case in Warri, Delta State, which was later confirmed for COVID-19. He noted that some 11 people who had died in Kano underwent chest x-rays which showed these signs. Although COVID-19 tests were not conducted on them, Soyombo ended his tweet by stressing “the importance of not sweeping these deaths under the carpet”. Similarly, regarding Kogi State government’s attempt at denying the occurrence of COVID-19 in the state, Soyombo linked incidents to question this claim in his tweets on 5, 7, 9 and 28 May. He ended with speculation on the government’s stand: the fact that the isolation centre “listed [by the government was] unfit for use for any purpose, much less for patients.”

In Ekiti State, a woman lost her baby due to the fact that medical workers had no PPE to don in order to attend to her. Although she presented with fetal distress, she also had a fever and so was suspected to have COVID-19. She was to undergo a Caesarean Section but when this was not done for five hours, the baby died and then the woman fell into respiratory distress. Soyombo chronicled the events of this case and identified the bureaucracy involved in health workers accessing PPE at the hospital. On 1, 3 and 12 May, Soyombo updated his readers as events unfolded. He noted that the woman was later receiving better treatment, but linked her experience with that of a diabetic woman who died at the same hospital without being attended to because the healthcare workers feared that she was presenting with COVID-19 and they had no PPE to use. The governor ordered an investigation into the diabetic woman’s death due to the open letter written to him by the deceased’s son. However, “despite the incontrovertible evidence, including a video [of the deceased gasping for breath for about 73 minutes], referenced by Oluwadero [the deceased’s son]”, the result of the investigation “was that there was no shortage of PPE or oxygen at EKSUTH and there was no delay in attending to the patient.” Soyombo lamented that such “shoddy” investigation would “whittle down your [the governor’s] standing among the masses.”

Sometimes the follow-up stories lasted for days and at other times he updated stories more than once a day. In order to see his stories to a logical end while at the same time updating his readers, he tweeted on new developments. The UITH tweets first appeared at 1:27pm on 4 April. The tweeting continued at 11:23am on 5 April with the letter written by the UITH management, which, according to Soyombo, “validated [his] tweets about the grand cover-up of a COVID-19 case in Ilorin”. By 3:57 p.m. on 6 April, Soyombo told his readers the name of the index COVID-19 case at UITH, stressing that his wife had also tested positive and contact tracing was ongoing. By 7:12 pm, he told his readers the names of the two erring professors and implored Nigerians to demand sanctions against them. By 9:50 pm, he confirmed that one of the professors, the friend of the deceased, had been suspended by the hospital for his “unethical conduct in the admission, management and eventual release of the corpse”. Soyombo named and shamed the UITH management because it was not proactive in handling the case. In the case of the Indian hospital, he came short of mentioning the name, rather giving a detailed description of the location of the hospital and closing the story at the point when consumer right protection authorities decided to take up the case. The story first appeared on his Twitter handle at 4:23 pm on 5 April when he was “giving this hospital a 48-day grace to transfer this patient to Lagos’s isolation centre”. He said he would “have no choice but to NAME them” if they refused to do the needful by then. By 7:00am on 6 April, he was ‘happy’ to inform his readers that the “Indian-owned hospital” had discharged “the two Indian patients with symptoms suspected to be COVID-19-related” and the authorities had indicated interest in the case, so that “this means the patients will eventually be linked up with the NCDC for testing; their true COVID-19 statuses will be established in the end”. At this point, it was no longer necessary to mention the name of the hospital and so he did not.

Discussion and Conclusion

In line with the submissions of the Global Investigative Journalism Network (2020), in reporting on the COVID-19 pandemic, Soyombo dwelt on themes of government preparedness, hospital readiness, the supply of equipment, whether or not officials were telling the truth, and commercial exploitation. Already, observers had expressed fear about the possible collapse of the ill-equipped health care systems in sub-Saharan Africa under the weight of the pandemic and so the disheartening things that Soyombo had to say on Twitter only served to buttress this observation (Lone & Ahmad, 2020). All in all, his tweets indicated that government in Nigeria, while relatively prepared at the federal level, was not at all prepared at several state levels.

It is not unusual for journalists to withhold names in investigative reports—usually names of sources (Abdenour, 2017; Rosenthal, 2011). Such sources are verifiable and proven so as to ensure that investigative reports do not turn out to be mere rumors or urban legends that needlessly damage people’s reputations (Syed & KAS Media Program, 2016). In Soyombo’s COVID-19 tweets, however, the names/identities of offending people were also [temporarily] withheld. As is evident in the tweets, he did this to give the affected party time to right their wrongs.

Indeed, investigative journalism is beyond reportage and more about calling people to the action of at least raising questions, and, in this case, taking an active part in mitigating the spread of the corona virus (Starbird & Palen, 2011). Soyombo preempted his readers in raising such questions and he went ahead to voice them, often in a flurry. The flurry indicates the urgency of the matter and the need to tackle it head on. While investigative journalists need to be sure that they ask the right questions so as to get the needed answers, periods of personal reflections afford them the opportunity to think out loud and voice their train of thoughts. They are expected to ask pertinent questions of sources and interviewees (Hume & Abbott, 2017), but nobody begrudges them asking series of rhetorical questions that culminate into the ones they ask of others. Soyombo many times had follow-up tweets that showed the progression of his line of thought from his initial tweets and questions. Unlike the usual investigative reporting in Nigeria, Soyombo's tweets raised and answered questions of ethics and morality in general and not necessarily those of corruption in particular (Yusha'u, 2009). These questions, alongside the entirety of the narratives, helped in reifying the pandemic and helping people to come to terms with it. Especially as the object of Soyombo's interest was still unfolding, the tweets voiced and addressed people's fears in such a way as to address the despair and panic created by the pandemic. The asynchronous nature of the tweets brought about a practice of investigative journalism that was many times inconclusive, often very reflective of the yearning of the people and was not bounded by time.

Investigative journalism by nature is time consuming. However, time becomes a luxury that cannot be afforded in the unfolding trauma of the pandemic; hence the questions which ought to be answered in the course of investigation but which are otherwise posed in the reportage. Investigation thus becomes documentation and a case of temporarily raising the core questions which are crafted in different manners for different purposes. As seen with Soyombo, in a crisis situation such as a pandemic, investigation and investigative reporting that is disseminated on a social media platform is short and question-riddled. The questions, however, offer a starting point for detailed investigations once the crisis is over. The gains of the short-lived investigations can be immediate as offending people, faced with actual "naming and shaming", or the threat thereof, are made to retrace their steps without delay. However, in spite of the immediacy of a crisis situation, journalists in general have to be careful not to peddle unverified information in order not to aggravate an already tense situation. This was a possible pitfall that Soyombo had to constantly navigate as he often referred to his sources—although the references were sometimes vague.

Importantly though, Soyombo's investigative reporting ensured that more voices were heard and more issues were covered about the pandemic in Nigeria (Gearing, 2014). This he did by initiating investigations and not relying on the reports of government agencies like Suleiman (2017) found out about investigative journalists and investigative reports in Nigerian newspapers. Similarly, his investigative reports were expectedly not about financial scandals like his press counterpart dwelt on, but about the sense of duty and responsibility or lack thereof demonstrated by stakeholders during the pandemic. By this, we understand that investigative journalism in Nigeria can focus on non-financial corruption. Subsequent studies can therefore look into investigative reports in Nigeria that cover scandals that are neither about financial gains nor corruption.

References

- Abdenour, J. (2017). Digital gumshoes: investigative journalists' use of social media in television news reporting. *Digital Journalism*, 5(4), 472-492. DOI: 10.1080/21670.811.2016.1175312
- Adebanwi, W. & Obadare, E. (2011). When corruption fights back: Democracy and elite interest in Nigeria's anti-corruption war. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 49(2), 185 – 213. DOI: 10.1017/S0022278X11000012
- Asemah, E. S. & Asogwa, C. (2012). Investigative journalism, corruption and sustainable development in Nigeria: a critical overview. *Journal of Research in National Development*, 10(2), 282-289.
- Avery, E., Lariscy, R. & Sweetser, K.D. (2010). Social media and shared-or divergent-uses? A coorientation analysis of public relations practitioners and journalists. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 4(3), 189–205. DOI: 10.1080/1553118X.2010.489501
- Berglez, P. (2013). *Global journalism: Theory and practice*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Choi, S. (2015). The two-step flow of communication in Twitter-based public forums. *Social Science Computer Review*, 33(6), 696-711. DOI: 10.1177/089.443.9314556599.
- Dare, S. (2011). *The rise of citizen journalism in Nigeria: A case study of Sahara Reporters* (Fellowship paper). Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford.
- Gearing, A. (2014). Investigative journalism in a socially networked world. *Pacific Journalism Review*, 20(1), 61-75.
- Global Investigative Journalism Network. (2020). Investigative journalism on the COVID-19 crisis. Retrieved April 30, 202 from <https://gijn.org/2020/03/25/investigative-journalism-on-the-COVID-19-crisis>
- Hart, A. (2011). Social media in investigative reporting: A conversation with CIR's Meghann Farnsworth. *InvestigateWest*. Retrieved June 25, 2020 from <http://www.invw.org/content/social-media-in-investigative-reporting-a-conversation-with-cir%E2%80%99s-meghann-farnsworth>
- Hoffmann, L.K. & Patel, R.N. (2017). *Collective action on corruption in Nigeria: A social norms approach to connecting society and institutions*. London: Chatham House Africa Programme Report.
- Hume, E. & Abbott, S. (2017). The future of investigative journalism: global, networked and collaborative. Retrieved September 17, 2020 from https://cmds.ceu.edu/sites/cmcs.ceu.hu/files/attachment/article/1129/humeinvestigativejournalismsurvey_0.pdf
- Syed, N., & KAS Media Programme (Eds.). (2016). *Investigative Journalism Manual (IJM)*. Singapore: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Media Programme Asia.
- Jebril, N., Loveless, M., & Stetka, V. (2015). Media and democratisation: Challenges for an emerging sub-field. *Media Studies*, 6(11), 84-98.
- Johnston, M. (2005). *Syndromes of corruption: Wealth, power, and democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kalpokas, I. (2019). *A political theory of post-truth*. Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lone, S.A. & Ahmad, A. (2020). COVID-19 pandemic—an African perspective. *Emerging Microbes & Infections*, 9(1), 1300-1308. DOI:10.1080/22221.751.2020.1775132.
- Musa, B. (1997). Uses and abuses of development media theory in sub-Saharan Africa: Critique of a quasi-descriptive/prescriptive theory, *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies*, 18(1), 132-147.
- Ojebode, A. (2011). Nigerian former guerrilla journalists ten years into democracy: Reformists and revolutionaries. *Fort Hare Papers*, 18, 19-40.
- Olorunyomi, D. (2013). Democracy challenges Nigerian investigative journalism. *The Investigative Reporters and Editors Journal*, Winter 2013, 28-29.

- Onyenankeya, K & Salawu, A. (2020). On bended knees: Investigative journalism and changing media culture in Nigeria. *Media Watch*, 11(1), 97-118. DOI: 10.15655/mw/2020/v11i1/49758.
- Oso, L. (2013). Media and democracy in Nigeria: A critique of liberal perspective. *New Media and Mass Communication*, 10, 13-22.
- Reed, S. (2012). American sports writers' social media use and its influence on professionalism. *Journalism Practice* 7(5), 555–571. DOI:10.1080/17512.786.2012.739325.
- Reich, Z. (2013). The impact of technology on news reporting: a longitudinal perspective. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 90(3), 417–434. DOI: 10.1177/107.769.9013493789.
- Rosenthal, R. (2011, September 16). *New investigative reporting models: Opportunities and challenges*. Paper Presented at Back to the Source Conference, Sydney.
- Starbird, K. & Palen, L. (2011, May). 'Voluntweeters:' Self-organizing by digital volunteers in times of crisis. *Proceedings of CHI 2011* (pp. 1071-1080). Vancouver, BC. DOI: 10.1145/1978.942.1979102
- Suleiman, A.S. (2017). *Investigative reporting and press coverage of corruption in Nigeria (1999-2012)* (Unpublished PhD Thesis). University of East Anglia, Norwich.
- Voltmer, K. (2013). *The media in transitional democracies*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Yusha'u, M.J. (2009). Investigative journalism and scandal reporting in the Nigerian press. *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies*, 30(2), 155-174.