

PROPAGANDA IN JOURNALISTIC INVESTIGATION

Author: AKIRI, IFEANYI OKECHUKWU

ABSTRACT

This research looked at propaganda in journalistic investigations, focusing on its scope, methods, and the efficiency of ethical and regulatory frameworks in modern media systems. The study was founded on the Propaganda Model Theory and the Framing Theory, which provided a conceptual framework for understanding how media structures and narrative creation processes affect news production and interpretation. A qualitative content analysis study approach was used, and chosen news pieces from print and online media channels were thoroughly investigated for their relation to investigative journalism and propaganda-related issues. The findings show that propaganda has a considerable impact on journalistic research through framing bias, selective coverage of subjects, and dependence on official sources. The study also demonstrates that propaganda functions via interrelated processes such as media ownership control, editorial gatekeeping, economic reliance on advertising income, strategic political communication, and digital media amplification. Furthermore, the study discovered that while ethical norms and regulatory frameworks exist in the media sector, their efficacy in combating propaganda is limited due to lax enforcement, political meddling, and the growing power of digital platforms. The study suggests that propaganda is fundamentally ingrained in modern journalism, influencing both the creation and interpretation of news material. To protect the integrity of investigative journalism, it advocates for stronger media independence, improved regulatory enforcement, and increased professional training for journalists.

Keywords: Propaganda, Journalistic Investigation, Framing Theory, Content Analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

Propaganda, as a systematic form of persuasion, has been around for millennia, but its contemporary conceptualisation originated in the early twentieth century amid times of world strife and tremendous media development. Historically, propaganda was not considered with the bad meaning that it has now; rather, it was recognised as organised efforts to sway public opinion. During World War I, governments in Britain, Germany, and the United States used propaganda to mould public opinion, rally support for the war effort, and dominate narratives about the enemy (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2019). The British War Propaganda Bureau and the United States Committee on Public Information are examples of early institutionalised propaganda systems that showed how information might be carefully generated and delivered to affect public opinion.

In the early development of media theory, researchers such as Walter Lippmann believed that public opinion is primarily moulded by "manufactured realities" conveyed through the press, emphasising audiences' sensitivity to mediated information. Later, Edward Bernays, widely considered as the founder of public relations, elaborated on this concept, clearly stating propaganda as a vital instrument for organising public opinion in democratic nations (Bernays, 1928). These seminal works show how propaganda was profoundly ingrained in the creation of contemporary journalism and mass communication, especially when newspapers and broadcast media became major sources of information.

As journalism evolved into a professional discipline based on ideas of truth, impartiality, and accountability, a conflict arose between investigative journalism and propaganda. Investigative journalism strives to reveal hidden facts, expose wrongdoing, and hold authority accountable, whereas propaganda frequently seeks to selectively portray or distort information in order to accomplish certain political, economic, or ideological goals. This dynamic was particularly obvious during the Cold War, when both the Western and Eastern blocs deployed media systems to promote opposing ideological narratives, frequently blurring the boundary between reporting and strategic communication (Herman and Chomsky, 2002).

Propaganda has changed dramatically in the digital era, thanks to the emergence of social media platforms, algorithm-driven content distribution, and artificial intelligence. Unlike traditional top-down propaganda, which is primarily controlled by states or elite institutions, modern propaganda operates in decentralised and networked environments, allowing governments, political actors, corporations, and even individuals to generate and spread persuasive content at unprecedented speeds and scale. This phenomena has impacted journalistic research, as journalists must now manage misinformation, disinformation, and algorithmically amplified narratives that can obfuscate factual reporting and skew public perception (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

Today, propaganda is not just a political tool, but also an economic and technological one, with roots in advertising systems, influencer culture, and digital media ecosystems. As a result, journalistic research has become more important than ever, acting as a protection against manipulated information and a means of validating truth in an increasingly complicated information world.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Propaganda has evolved into a more sophisticated instrument in today's media and information world, with substantial implications for how news is created, perceived, and consumed. The key issue in journalistic inquiry is the increasing difficulty of differentiating between factual, evidence-based reporting and intentionally created narratives aimed to affect public opinion. While investigative journalism is intended to serve as a watchdog for society by uncovering truth and holding authority responsible, it is increasingly under threat from propaganda interwoven in political communication, media ownership interests, and digital information ecosystems. This condition affects journalism's credibility and lowers public faith in news reporting.

To address these difficulties, many actions have been implemented at both the institutional and global levels. Media regulatory authorities, journalistic codes of ethics, fact-checking organisations, and investigative journalism training programs have all been formed to enhance accuracy,

openness, and accountability in news reporting. In addition, digital platforms have developed content moderation standards, misinformation labelling systems, and algorithmic changes to restrict the dissemination of manipulative or misleading material. International organisations and civil society organisations have also backed media literacy projects to assist people critically evaluate information sources and recognise propaganda methods.

Despite these treatments, the condition persisted and was only partially remedied. One key reason is that propaganda has evolved to fit the digital era, becoming more decentralised, fast-paced, and algorithmically amplified via social media platforms. Unlike older media systems, which could be more readily regulated, today's information ecosystem allows almost anybody to create and transmit convincing or deceptive material with no monitoring. Furthermore, political and commercial interests continue to shape media narratives, undermining the independence of journalistic organisations itself. Weak enforcement of media rules, a lack of media literacy among the general people, and the rapid dissemination of disinformation all contribute to the problem's persistence.

As a result, investigative journalism continues to work in a difficult context in which propaganda not only coexists with factual reporting, but frequently competes directly for audience attention and credibility. This persistent dilemma needs a more in-depth analysis of how propaganda influences journalistic investigations, particularly in terms of truth, accountability, and democratic government. This circumstance necessitates the following research aims.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this study is to examine propaganda in journalistic investigation in contemporary media practice.

The specific objectives are to:

1. To assess the extent to which propaganda influences journalistic investigation and news reporting in contemporary media systems.

2. To examine the mechanisms through which propaganda affects investigative journalism and news production.
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of existing ethical, professional, and regulatory measures in curbing propaganda in journalistic investigation.

4. CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Propaganda

Propaganda has developed substantially throughout time in terms of meaning and use. The term comes from the Latin "propagare," which means "to spread" or "to disseminate," and was first institutionalised in 1622 with the formation of the Catholic Church's Congregatio de Propaganda Fide, which was in charge of spreading religious teachings (Bolin & Kunelius, 2023). At this early period, propaganda was not inherently bad; rather, it referred to organised attempts to transmit information and opinions.

However, the definition of propaganda shifted considerably during the twentieth century, notably during World Wars I and II, when governments employed mass media to shape public opinion, mobilise individuals, and legitimise political acts. From this point on, propaganda was associated with manipulation, persuasion, and ideological control, particularly via mass media systems (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2019).

Early communication academics supplied essential concepts that continue to shape current knowledge. Harold Lasswell (1927) famously described propaganda as the "management of collective attitudes by the manipulation of significant symbols," emphasising the psychological and symbolic effect it has on mass audiences. Similarly, Walter Lippmann (1922) suggested that public opinion is heavily influenced by "manufactured images" generated by elites and conveyed through the media, implying that individuals frequently rely on mediated realities rather than direct experience.

Edward Bernays (1928), often considered as the inventor of public relations, broadened the definition by publicly defining propaganda as a

vital instrument in democratic countries for organising public opinion and maintaining social order. These early viewpoints demonstrate propaganda as an effective tool for altering perception and regulating public conversation.

Propaganda is no longer seen of primarily as state-controlled warfare communication. Instead, it is viewed as a bigger and more complicated phenomena entwined with political, economic, technical, and communication systems. According to Jowett and O'Donnell (2019), propaganda is planned, systematic communication that aims to shape perceptions, alter cognitions, and influence behaviour in order to produce a favourable reaction for the source.

Recent research has enhanced this knowledge in response to the digital media environment. According to Wardle and Derakhshan (2017), modern propaganda thrives in a "information disorder" ecology, in which misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation spread quickly via social media platforms. In this setting, propaganda is created not just by governments, but also by political actors, companies, interest groups, and people.

Similarly, Howard, A. O. I., et al. (2023) define computational propaganda as the use of algorithms, automation, artificial intelligence, and human curation to purposefully disseminate compelling or deceptive material online. This type of propaganda is especially effective since it uses digital technologies like bots, micro-targeting, and data analytics to affect targeted audiences at scale.

Recent experts argue that propaganda in the digital age has grown more decentralised, adaptable, and harder to police. Lin (2024) contends that digital propaganda is not merely conventional propaganda transported to digital environments, but rather a changed system created by platform algorithms, data-driven communication, and networked audiences. This implies that propaganda is now built into the core design of digital communication systems, with material exposure being controlled by engagement-driven algorithms rather than journalistic verification.

Furthermore, current study shows that propaganda is rapidly overlapping with misinformation and disinformation, making it harder to discern between purposeful manipulation and unintended dissemination of misleading information. Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) refer to this as part of a larger "information disorder," in which truth and deception coexist in highly polarised media contexts.

Key Features of Propaganda

Across classical and modern perspectives, propaganda shares several defining characteristics:

Intentional influence: It is deliberately designed to shape attitudes or behavior.

Selective information: It often emphasizes certain facts while omitting others.

Emotional appeal: It frequently uses fear, patriotism, or identity to influence audiences.

Symbolic communication: It relies on slogans, imagery, and narratives rather than balanced analysis.

Power-driven messaging: It typically serves political, ideological, or economic interests.

These characteristics show that propaganda is not confined to incorrect information; rather, it encompasses any strategic communication intended to impact perception in a biased way.

Propaganda has grown from a neutral phrase meaning "to spread ideas" to a complicated notion involving persuasion, manipulation, and ideological impact. While classical theorists emphasised on the function of state-controlled media in moulding public opinion, modern researchers emphasise its decentralised character in digital settings dominated by algorithms, data analytics, and social media platforms. Propaganda is best understood in modern communication systems as a strategic and often nuanced kind of influence that cuts over political, economic, and technical boundaries.

Journalistic Investigation

Journalistic investigation, also known as investigative journalism, is a specialised form of journalism that entails conducting a systematic, in-depth, and sustained investigation into issues of public interest with the goal of uncovering hidden facts, exposing wrongdoing, and holding powerful individuals or institutions accountable. Unlike ordinary news reporting, which focuses on current events and surface-level facts, investigative journalism goes beyond official pronouncements to verify information using evidence-based research, document analysis, interviews, and data verification.

The origins of investigative journalism may be traced back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the United States, when muckraking was at its peak. Journalists like Ida Tarbell and Upton Sinclair revealed corporate wrongdoing and societal injustices, illustrating journalism's effectiveness as a watchdog for society. This history developed investigative journalism as a democratic weapon for openness and accountability, notably by exposing abuses of power in both public and private organisations (Aucoin, 2005).

Scholars have offered a variety of definitions that emphasise the breadth and aim of journalistic investigation. According to de Burgh (2008), investigative journalism is "a process of inquiry that seeks to uncover matters that are deliberately concealed by those in power." This concept emphasises secrecy and responsibility as key components.

Similarly, Houston (2010) defines investigative journalism as a type of reporting that necessitates original investigation and tenacity, frequently employing public documents, whistleblowers, and data analysis to uncover material that is not easily available through official means. This sets it apart from conventional journalism, which might rely primarily on press releases and mundane occurrences.

More recent viewpoints take the notion even farther into the digital era. According to Franklin and Carlson (2021), investigative journalism has evolved into a data-driven and multimedia practice in which journalists

analyse large datasets using digital tools, open-source intelligence (OSINT), and computational methods to expose complex systems of corruption or misinformation.

Core Features of Journalistic Investigation

Across scholarly definitions, investigative journalism is characterized by several key features:

In-depth inquiry: It involves extensive research beyond surface-level reporting.

Public interest focus: The aim is to serve society by exposing issues affecting citizens.

Evidence-based reporting: Findings are supported by verifiable facts and documentation.

Accountability-driven: It seeks to hold individuals, institutions, or systems responsible.

Original reporting: It relies on independently gathered information rather than secondary sources.

These features distinguish investigative journalism from routine reporting and opinion-based journalism.

Process of Journalistic Investigation

Investigative journalism typically follows a structured process that includes:

1. **Identifying a story idea or issue** often based on leads, whistleblowers, or public concerns.
2. **Conducting background research** using archives, public records, and previous reports.
3. **Gathering evidence** through interviews, fieldwork, and data collection.
4. **Verifying facts** to ensure accuracy and credibility.

5. **Analyzing findings** to identify patterns of wrongdoing or systemic issues.
6. **Publishing the report** in a structured and ethically responsible manner.

This approach necessitates time, money, and editorial independence, making investigative journalism one of the most difficult types of media activity.

Journalistic research is fundamental to democratic government and social responsibility. It serves as a monitor for government agencies, corporations, and other powerful entities. Investigative journalism promotes openness and reform by exposing corruption, abuses of power, and social injustices.

According to Aucoin (2005), investigative journalism enhances democracy by informing individuals about the acts of their elected officials. In modern civilisations, it also plays an important role in combating disinformation and propaganda by confirming facts and disputing false narratives.

Journalistic investigation has changed dramatically in the digital era. The proliferation of digital databases, social media platforms, and open-source information has increased the tools accessible to journalists. According to Franklin and Carlson (2021), contemporary investigative journalism is increasingly reliant on data journalism, collaborative cross-border investigations, and digital verification tools.

However, this growth has generated new issues, such as information overload, digital disinformation, and propaganda operations that impede verification procedures. As a result, investigative journalists must now navigate a very complicated information landscape in which speed, accuracy, and trustworthiness must all be carefully balanced.

Propaganda in Journalistic Investigation

Propaganda in journalistic investigation is the deliberate or indirect infiltration of biased, misleading, or strategically framed information into

investigative reporting processes with the goal of shaping public perception in favour of specific political, economic, ideological, or institutional interests. It happens when investigative news information is produced, selected, framed, or disseminated based on external or internal constraints that distort truth rather than evidence and objective investigation.

In its ideal form, journalistic investigation is founded on accuracy, independence, and accountability. However, propaganda provides a competing logic of persuasion and influence, in which information is selectively manipulated to support predefined goals. Thus, propaganda in journalistic research distorts journalism's watchdog role, undermining its ability to serve as an unbiased arbiter of truth in society.

The link between propaganda and journalism has long been investigated in communication studies. Herman and Chomsky's (2002) propaganda model explains how structural influences inside media institutions, such as ownership, advertising, source, flak, and prevailing ideology, filter news content to match it with elite goals. In this sense, propaganda is not necessarily overt or deliberate, but it can be incorporated in institutional structures that determine investigation goals and conclusions.

Similarly, Lasswell (1927) defined propaganda as the "management of collective attitudes by the manipulation of significant symbols," which explains how language, framing, and imagery in investigative reports may subtly influence audience understanding. These theoretical viewpoints demonstrate that propaganda may act as both an external influence on journalism and an internalised process within media institutions.

Forms of Propaganda in Journalistic Investigation

Propaganda within investigative journalism can manifest in several interrelated forms:

Framing manipulation: Investigative stories may be structured to emphasize certain viewpoints while downplaying or excluding opposing evidence.

Selective reporting (gatekeeping bias): Editors or media owners may determine which investigations are published or suppressed based on political or economic interests.

Source dependency bias: Overreliance on official or elite sources can lead to the reproduction of state or corporate narratives within investigative reports.

Disinformation contamination: False or misleading information may be introduced into investigative processes, intentionally or unintentionally, affecting conclusions.

Agenda-driven investigation: Investigations may be initiated or shaped to support pre-existing political or ideological goals rather than independent inquiry.

These examples show that propaganda may be interwoven in the investigation process itself, as well as in overt message.

Propaganda enters journalistic investigations via a variety of techniques. Media ownership is one of the most important, since owners may influence editorial direction to match reporting with their political or financial objectives. Advertising pressure is also a factor, since media organisations may avoid enquiries that may jeopardise significant sponsors.

Furthermore, political pressure and access journalism can influence investigation findings, with journalists softening or avoiding critical reporting to keep access to government leaders or powerful institutions. In the digital age, algorithmic amplification worsens the issue, since sensational or emotionally charged storylines, which are frequently associated with propaganda, outperform balanced investigative information in online contexts (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

The existence of propaganda in journalistic investigations weakens fundamental journalistic norms including integrity, independence, and public accountability. It undermines the credibility of investigative reporting and adds to public distrust of the media. When people believe

investigative journalism is biased or politically motivated, its efficacy as a democratic watchdog is dramatically decreased. Furthermore, propaganda undermines the public domain by obscuring the distinction between factual reporting and persuasive communication. This makes it more difficult for individuals to tell the difference between verifiable investigative results and intentionally manufactured narratives.

Recent research indicates that propaganda in journalistic inquiry has gotten more sophisticated in the digital age. Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) characterise the current information environment as one of "information disorder," in which misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation coexist and spread swiftly across digital platforms.

Furthermore, computational propaganda powered by automation, artificial intelligence, and data analytics has exacerbated the problem for investigative journalism. Political actors and organisations may now customise narratives to specific audiences, making it more difficult to produce widely trusted investigative reports (Howard et al., 2023).

As a result, propaganda is no longer an external threat to journalism, but rather an integral part of the modern media ecology in which investigative journalism thrives.

Propaganda in journalistic inquiry is the existence and effect of biased, strategic, or controlled communication in investigative journalism processes. It works through structural media systems, editorial decisions, economic constraints, and digital technology to influence how investigative stories are created and understood. While investigative journalism seeks truth and accountability, propaganda brings distortion and persuasion, resulting in a continual conflict that calls into question the integrity of modern media.

Interaction Between Propaganda and Journalistic Investigation

Propaganda and journalistic inquiry have a complicated relationship that is frequently characterised by conflict, overlap, and rivalry. Propaganda is mostly focused on influencing perception and furthering certain interests, whereas journalistic research is founded on the quest of truth, accountability, and evidence-based reporting. Both have an impact on the

creation, selection, and interpretation of information when they function in the same media context.

Setting the agenda is a crucial aspect of communication. By elevating some concerns while downplaying others, propaganda can affect the subjects that are covered by the media. This influences investigative journalism by establishing editorial priorities and deciding whether topics are deemed deserving of in-depth research. Because of this, certain important social issues may be thoroughly examined while others are disregarded because of political or financial factors (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

Framing is another important aspect of engagement. The presentation of results can reveal minor persuasive factors, even in cases where investigative journalists depend on factual facts. The reporting's word choice, tone, emphasis, and structure can influence how viewers comprehend the problem. In this sense, propaganda can function inside investigative journalism by influencing interpretation rather than directly changing facts, although it does not necessarily replace it (Entman, 1993).

Information sources are another way that the contact takes place. Insider information, institutional sources, and government documents are frequently used in investigative journalism. Information from these sources could already be influenced by the objectives of strategic communication. Propaganda may therefore infiltrate investigative reporting at the source level, influencing the development of stories from the start. This is explained by Herman and Chomsky's (2002) propaganda model, which demonstrates how news information may be systematically filtered in favour of dominant interests by relying on elite sources.

The relationship is also influenced by institutional forces and ownership systems. Editorial independence may be impacted by political, commercial, or ideological influences on media organisations. Investigative reports that clash with strong interests may be altered, postponed, or suppressed as a result of these pressures. Propaganda and investigative journalism can therefore coexist in the same institutional structure (Herman & Chomsky, 2002).

The level of contact has increased in the context of digital media. Through algorithmic amplification, false information, and emotionally charged material, propaganda spreads quickly throughout social media platforms. Investigative journalism frequently finds it difficult to keep up with this pace since it necessitates time and verification. Propaganda narratives may therefore take center stage in public discourse prior to the complete dissemination and comprehension of investigation results (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

Notwithstanding these difficulties, journalistic inquiry also acts as a counterbalance to propaganda. It seeks to reveal manipulation and dispel false narratives through fact-checking, verification, and in-depth reporting. However, the size, speed, and complexity of contemporary propaganda networks frequently restrict this role's efficacy.

In general, the relationship between propaganda and journalistic inquiry illustrates an ongoing conflict between power and the pursuit of the truth. Although they both function in the same communication area, they have distinct goals, which leads to a constant conflict that influences how society produces and uses information.

5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Framing Theory and the Propaganda Model Theory serve as the foundation for this investigation. These ideas offer a useful foundation for comprehending how information is created, presented, and perceived in modern media contexts as well as how propaganda affects journalistic inquiry.

Propaganda Model Theory

Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky created the Propaganda Model in 1988 to explain how mass media companies might support the goals of political and economic elites even if they operate in democracies. According to the hypothesis, structural variables that affect what information is presented, how it is produced, and whose interests are ultimately served frequently determine news content.

The notion states that media organisations are not totally autonomous. Rather, they function within political and economic frameworks that place restrictions on the creation of news. Before information reaches the general public, it travels via five main filters, according to Herman and Chomsky. Media ownership, advertising, source, flak, and prevailing ideology are some of these. The power wielded by people or businesses that own media organisations is referred to as media ownership. One source of income that might influence editorial choices is advertising. Sourcing draws attention to how dependent journalists are on government representatives, businesses, and other influential organisations for information. While dominant ideology reflects existing political and social attitudes that influence public discourse, flak is criticism or pressure aimed at media organisations that oppose dominant interests.

This theory's description of how propaganda might be included into journalistic research makes it pertinent to the current study. The Propaganda Model identifies systemic factors that might affect whether investigations are conducted, how evidence is understood, and how conclusions are communicated to the public. Investigative journalism is supposed to reveal hidden facts and expose injustice. Investigative journalism may thus be susceptible to institutional, political, or commercial interests that influence public opinion and narratives.

The Propaganda Model is still applicable in the modern digital era since information is increasingly filtered through corporate-controlled communication networks, digital platforms, and algorithms. Thus, the idea offers a helpful perspective for analysing how propaganda might impact journalistic independence and investigative reporting.

Framing Theory

Framing Theory was developed by Erving Goffman in 1974 and later expanded by communication scholars to explain how media organizations select, organize, and present information in ways that influence audience interpretation. According to the notion, the media actively creates meaning by highlighting some elements of reality while downplaying or omitting others, rather than just reporting occurrences.

A frame is a viewpoint that is used to convey information. Journalists use framing to identify topics for viewers, highlight certain aspects of a narrative, and give context. Because of this, the same event might be understood differently depending on how it is presented. By focusing attention on specific causes, effects, remedies, or moral assessments, framing affects public perception.

Framing becomes a potent technique for influencing public opinion in the context of propaganda. In order to further preconceived objectives or agendas, propaganda frequently presents facts within certain interpretative frameworks. Media material has the power to shape viewers' perceptions of political events, social concerns, and institutional actors through strategic language, story creation, and selective emphasis.

Because investigative journalism strongly depends on the presentation and interpretation of information, the idea is especially pertinent to this subject. Even if the material in investigative reports may be correct, the way the results are presented can affect how the public responds and comprehends them. Therefore, propaganda may infiltrate investigative journalism by framing articles in ways that promote certain interests in addition to manipulating facts.

Additionally, the importance of framing has increased due to the growth of digital media. Content is frequently promoted by social media platforms, online news sources, and algorithm-driven communication systems depending on visibility and interaction. The potential impact of propaganda on investigative journalism is increased by this setting, which promotes the employment of narratives that are carefully structured and emotionally attractive.

In order to understand the connection between propaganda and journalistic inquiry, the Propaganda Model Theory and Framing Theory work in tandem. Framing Theory describes how information is packaged and presented to audiences, whereas the Propaganda Model concentrates on the institutional and structural factors that influence media content. When taken as a whole, they offer a thorough foundation for comprehending how propaganda may affect investigative journalism throughout both the production and presentation phases.

The Propaganda Model provides an explanation of the external factors, such as ownership interests, political influence, and financial limitations, that may have an impact on investigative reporting. Conversely, Framing Theory describes how research findings can be presented in ways that affect public opinion and audience perception. Combining these viewpoints allows the research to look at the methods by which propaganda influences public perception as well as the sources of propaganda inside journalistic inquiry.

Because they offer a clear explanation of how propaganda functions within media systems and how it might influence the practice and results of journalistic research, these theories are deemed suitable for the study.

6. EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Propaganda continues to pose a serious threat to investigative journalism, especially in modern media environments marked by corporate interests, political influence, and digital communication technologies, according to empirical studies on the subject. Scholars have studied how propaganda affects public perception, alters news creation, and hinders investigative journalists' attempts to find and share accurate facts. These studies show that a variety of strategies, such as media ownership, political pressure, information manipulation, and deliberate framing of news content, are used by propaganda.

Boyd-Barrett (2004) made one of the first empirical contributions by using the propaganda model to analyse media coverage of the Iraq War. The research examined major news organisations' reporting patterns and discovered evidence of direct or indirect cooperation between media outlets and government propaganda goals. The results showed that journalists frequently depended significantly on official sources, which led to the marginalisation of critical investigations and other points of view. This reliance hindered the efficacy of journalistic investigation and aided in the public's exposure to propaganda (Boyd-Barrett, 2004).

Kennis (2015) examined CNN and CNN en Español's reporting on the Iraq War in order to further investigate propaganda in news coverage. The study discovered through content analysis that during times of conflict,

media outlets often mirrored official governmental stances. The study showed that agenda-setting, news framing, and source selection are all impacted by propaganda. By limiting access to different viewpoints and critical analysis of government actions, such practices have the potential to undermine investigative journalism (Kennis, 2015).

The influence of propaganda on journalistic inquiry was also empirically demonstrated by research on media capture. Governments, political elites, and influential interest groups frequently try to influence media content through ownership structures, financial incentives, and regulatory constraints, according to Prat and Strömberg's (2015) assessment of research on media capture. The results demonstrated how media capture impairs investigative reporting and diminishes journalistic independence by promoting self-censorship and favourable portrayal of powerful players. As a result, propaganda gets ingrained in media systems, making it more challenging for investigative journalists to carry out their watchdog duties successfully (Prat & Strömberg, 2015).

Zollmann (2019) looked into how news media and propaganda interact in liberal democracies. By analysing theoretical and empirical research, the study discovered that because mainstream news organisations rely on government sources and institutional frameworks, they may unintentionally replicate propagandist narratives. The study made clear that corporate and state entities frequently use strategic communication techniques to influence media content, leading to news stories that support prevailing ideological viewpoints. The results imply that in order to stop propaganda from affecting the public's comprehension of important topics, investigative journalists should constantly examine government narratives (Zollmann, 2019).

By identifying particular propaganda strategies inside journalistic texts, Da San Martino et al. (2019) have created a detailed study of propaganda in news pieces in 2019. Their results showed that subtle kinds of propaganda, such as emotional appeals, loaded language, hyperbole, and selective fact presentation, are common. In order to guarantee that individuals obtain accurate and impartial information, the study highlighted

the significance of investigative journalism in detecting and exposing these tactics (Da San Martino et al., 2019).

In a similar vein, Barrón-Cedeño et al. (2019) created the Proppy method to identify propaganda in online news. According to the study, journalists may find propagandistic content in vast amounts of digital data with the use of computer technologies. The researchers came to the conclusion that technology advancements can support investigative journalism by offering real-time methods for identifying propaganda and false information (Barrón-Cedeño et al., 2019).

A thorough evaluation of organisational propaganda in digital contexts was carried out more recently by Lock and Ludolph (2020). According to their results, organisations are using digital platforms more and more to spread persuasive messages intended to change the attitudes and actions of the general public. According to the study, propaganda frequently uses unethical communication techniques including disinformation, selective information disclosure, and public discourse manipulation. The researchers also noted that propaganda efforts have become more widespread and successful thanks to digital media, which presents new difficulties for investigative journalists trying to confirm facts and reveal covert objectives (Lock & Ludolph, 2020).

All things considered, empirical data shows that propaganda has a substantial impact on journalistic inquiry by influencing news production procedures, forming media narratives, and restricting journalistic autonomy. However, research also indicates that investigative journalism continues to be an essential instrument for exposing misinformation and encouraging accountability in democracies, reinforced by digital verification tools and strict professional standards.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used a content analysis research design. Content analysis is a methodical and objective research approach that examines communication resources to uncover patterns, meanings, and repeating

themes. It is deemed relevant for this research because it allows for a critical analysis of how propaganda is represented in journalistic investigations and news coverage. This approach allowed the researcher to classify, analyse, and evaluate chosen media information in order to better understand the scope and processes of propagandist influence in journalism.

Area of Study

The research focuses on selected print and internet media firms in Nigeria's media landscape. These media platforms were chosen because they are prominent news sources that routinely produce stories on politics, government, security, and public affairs, all of which are frequently influenced by propaganda. The chosen media outlets also offer a fair representation of mainstream journalism in both conventional and digital modes.

Population of the Study

The study's population includes all news items, investigative pieces, and opinion-based journalistic content produced by the identified media outlets throughout the evaluation period. This includes publications about political events, government actions, policy concerns, and other public-interest topics where propaganda may be included. The population thus reflects the entire body of relevant journalistic information from which the sample was selected.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The study used a purposive sample strategy to pick relevant news articles for analysis. This approach was deemed appropriate since it allows the researcher to purposefully choose media texts that are directly relevant to propaganda and investigative journalism. News items were chosen for their importance to political reporting, governance challenges, and investigative stories. The study sample consisted only of items that clearly indicated topics connected to propaganda influence.

Method of Data Collection

The data for this study were gathered through a documented assessment of chosen newspapers and internet news sources. The researcher meticulously evaluated published news items and investigation reports, identifying important information that illustrates journalism's propagandist tendencies. During the data gathering process, emphasis was placed on detecting framing strategies, language use, source selection, and narrative patterns that suggest propagandist impact in journalistic research.

Method of Data Analysis

The study used qualitative content analysis to analyse the acquired data. The selected news content was methodically examined, categorised, and organised into subject groups based on the study goals. The investigation aimed to find trends about the level of propaganda impact, the methods by which propaganda functions, and the efficacy of ethical and regulatory measures in restraining propaganda in journalism. The interpretation of the findings was influenced by reoccurring themes seen in the data.

Validity and Reliability

To guarantee validity, the study used respectable and well-known media sources, ensuring that only relevant and legitimate journalistic materials were included in the analysis. This helped to ensure that the findings were accurate and relevant. Reliability was achieved by using identical coding processes to all selected information, reducing bias and ensuring uniform interpretation of propaganda indicators across the research.

7. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis is founded on a thorough evaluation of media outputs and scholarly interpretations of journalistic methods. The findings are arranged around the three research goals that guide the study, concentrating on the magnitude of propaganda influence, the processes by which it functions, and the efficiency of ethical and regulatory restrictions.

Extent to Which Propaganda Influences Journalistic Investigation and News Reporting

Framing Bias in News Reporting

According to the content analysis, propaganda has a big impact on how news stories are presented in modern media systems. Numerous reports exhibit blatant framing bias, in which certain institutional or political interests are favoured in the way events are reported. Positive language is frequently used to describe government-related actions, whereas negative or suspicious language is used to describe opposition or critical viewpoints. This selective framing shows that, rather than objective reporting, journalistic research is often influenced by underlying ideological perspective.

Selective Coverage of Issues

The results also demonstrate that the selection of noteworthy events is influenced by propaganda. Some topics receive little or no coverage, especially those that deal with elite responsibility or delicate political concerns. Government-sponsored narratives, on the other hand, typically garner greater prominence and ongoing attention. This selective visibility implies that propaganda influences both the tales that are reported and the topics that are deemed worthy of reporting in the first place.

Dependence on Official Sources

The excessive dependence on official sources, including press briefings, government announcements, and institutional reports, is another prevalent characteristic. Although independent verification and field research are desirable for investigative journalism, the assessed material mostly relies on official narratives. This makes it more likely that uncontested propaganda will be passed off as true news.

Examining the Degree of Influence

Overall, the results show that propaganda has a moderate to significant impact on news reporting and journalistic inquiry. Framing patterns, story selection, and source procedures are the areas where this impact is most apparent, indicating that propaganda is no longer only an external

interference but has instead become ingrained in regular journalistic operations.

Mechanisms Through Which Propaganda Affects Investigative Journalism and News Production

Media Ownership and Editorial Control

Investigative journalism is significantly shaped by media ownership, as the content analysis demonstrates. The political or financial interests of its owners are often reflected in media organisations. Because of this, editorial choices are frequently in line with ownership interests, which limits journalistic freedom and the depth of investigations into delicate subjects.

Gatekeeping and Editorial Filtering

Another important tool of propagandist impact is editorial gatekeeping. The stories that are published, changed, or removed are decided by editors. According to the research, investigation findings are frequently filtered to make sure they don't contradict with political sensitivities or institutional interests. The final news output is greatly influenced by this filtering process.

Economic Pressure and Advertising Dependence

Economic dependency also serves as a mechanism through which propaganda operates. Media organisations that rely heavily on advertising revenue tend to avoid investigative stories that could offend major advertisers or sponsors. This economic influence results in self-censorship, thereby limiting the scope of investigative journalism.

Strategic Political Communication

The study further identifies strategic communication by political actors as a key mechanism of propaganda dissemination. Governments and political institutions often package information in ways that are easily adopted by journalists with minimal critical interrogation. This results in the reproduction of controlled narratives that may lack investigative scrutiny.

Digital Media and Algorithmic Influence

Through coordinated online campaigns and algorithm-driven content exposure, digital platforms also aid in the spread of misinformation. Emotionally charged or politically motivated information is amplified in social media platforms, sometimes overshadowing confirmed investigative reporting. As a result, viewers are drawn to quick-witted propaganda stories rather than in-depth investigative journalism.

Discussion of Mechanisms

The results show how interrelated structural processes, such as ownership control, editorial screening, economic dependence, political communication tactics, and digital amplification, are used by propaganda. Together, these mechanisms limit investigative journalism and have an impact on how news is produced.

Effectiveness of Ethical, Professional, and Regulatory Measures in Curbing Propaganda

Existence of Ethical and Professional Standards

The content analysis attests to the presence of moral standards in journalism. These criteria place a strong focus on responsibility, objectivity, fairness, and accuracy. However, different media companies use these concepts in different ways.

Inadequate Regulation Enforcement

Regulatory agencies in charge of keeping an eye on media material are not very successful in stopping propaganda. According to the report, enforcement is frequently ineffective, reactive, and occasionally impacted by political factors. As a result, regulatory bodies are less able to adequately penalise unethical reporting methods.

Challenges of Digital Media Regulation

The effectiveness of regulations has been further undermined by the growth of digital media. Propaganda information may spread quickly

through online networks without the conventional monitoring of journalists. Regulatory organisations now find it challenging to uphold professional standards and information veracity in the media.

Professional Limitations and Ethical Adherence

Time limits, job uncertainty, and editorial influence are just a few of the major professional limitations that journalists frequently face. These circumstances make it more difficult to fully adhere to ethical norms and lead to compromised investigation procedures. Journalists may occasionally turn to self-censorship in order to prevent negative effects on their careers or political standing.

Discussion of Effectiveness

The results imply that ethical and legal frameworks are only partially successful in preventing propaganda in investigative journalism. Although they offer crucial expert advice, the media industry's structural difficulties, digital change, and lax regulation restrict their influence.

The content analysis shows that through framing bias, selective coverage, and dependence on official sources, propaganda has a major impact on journalistic inquiry. Ownership control, editorial screening, economic dependence, political communication, and digital amplification are some of the structural factors through which it functions. Furthermore, despite the existence of ethical and legal frameworks, propaganda-driven journalism cannot be completely prevented by them.

CONCLUSION

This study looked into propaganda in journalistic research, concentrating on how much of an impact it has on news reporting, how it works, and how well ethical and legal measures work to reduce it. The study concludes that propaganda continues to have a major influence on modern journalistic practice based on the results of the content analysis.

The study comes to the conclusion that propaganda has a significant impact on journalistic inquiry and news reporting, especially when it comes to how news material is framed, how events are covered

selectively, and how official or institutional sources are relied upon. Instead of doing strictly objective research, these approaches frequently reflect political, economic, and institutional objectives in affecting public opinion.

The study also finds that a number of interrelated processes, such as media ownership structures, editorial gatekeeping, economic reliance on advertising, strategic political communication, and the increasing power of digital media platforms, are used by propaganda. When taken as a whole, these mechanisms limit the depth and objectivity of investigative reporting while also restricting journalistic independence.

The study's final conclusion is that, despite the existence of professional standards, ethical codes, and regulatory frameworks in the media sector, their efficacy in preventing propaganda is erratic and restricted. The practical efficacy of these regulatory tools is diminished by lax enforcement, political meddling, the growth of digital media, and financial strains on media companies. Overall, the study comes to the conclusion that propaganda has permeated contemporary media, impacting both the creation and understanding of news. The principles of investigative journalism, which are often based on truth, accountability, and objectivity, are called into question by this reality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following suggestions are offered to improve investigative journalism practices and lessen the impact of propaganda on news production in light of the results and conclusions of this study on propaganda in journalistic investigation:

1. **Strengthening Media Independence:** By limiting undue influence from owners, politicians, and advertising, media organisations can improve editorial independence. To guarantee that investigative journalism is directed by professional standards rather than outside influence, there should be a clear division between ownership interests and editorial decision-making.

2. **Improving Editorial Accountability and Gatekeeping Standards:** In order to encourage fair reporting and lessen selective framing of topics, newsrooms should implement more robust internal editorial regulations. To avoid biased information filtering, editorial gatekeeping procedures should be open and provide a clear rationale for the inclusion or deletion of investigative reports.
3. **Encouraging Professional Training and Capacity Building:** Journalists should get ongoing instruction in media ethics, propaganda detecting methods, and investigative journalism. Journalists who receive this kind of training will be better able to recognise propaganda tactics, successfully confirm sources, and fend off manipulation when producing news.
4. **Strengthening Regulatory Institutions:** Legal and institutional changes that provide independence, accountability, and enforcement authority should be implemented to enhance media regulatory organisations. Political meddling should not affect the consistent application of sanctions against unethical or propaganda-driven reporting.
5. **Improving Ethical Compliance in Journalism Practice:** Professional associations for journalists should use oversight, accreditation, and disciplinary actions to more firmly enforce ethical standards. A fundamental prerequisite for ongoing professional work in the media sector should be ethical compliance.
6. **Regulating Digital Media and Online Information Flow:** Online platforms should be included in regulatory frameworks due to the proliferation of digital propaganda. Monitoring false information, coordinated propaganda efforts, and the dissemination of manipulative content requires cooperation with IT firms.
7. **Encouraging Independent Investigative Journalism:** Independent investigative journalism should receive financial assistance, subsidies, and institutional protection from the government, civil society groups,

and foreign partners. This will lessen reliance on political sponsorship and commercial advertising, which frequently increase the power of propaganda.

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