

## Navigating Nigeria's Media Landscape Through Information Law: The Journalists' Perspectives

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### Abstract:

### Purpose:

This study navigates Nigeria's media landscape through information law from the journalists' perspectives. The researcher embarked on this study basically to examine the perceptions and experiences of journalists regarding the role of information law in shaping media practices in Nigeria and to explore the challenges faced by journalists in navigating Nigeria's media landscape due to information laws. Based on the objectives of this study, two research questions were formulated to serve as a guide for this study.

### Methodology:

This study is anchored on the libertarian theory, and data were collected through interviews. Findings from the study show that information law has a significant impact on the legislation and regulations on press freedom. The legal framework, including the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and laws governing defamation, libel, and slander, often shapes journalists' ability to access and disseminate information.

### Findings:

Journalists operate within a legal environment that can either facilitate or hinder their work, with restrictive laws and regulations acting as potential barriers to free and independent journalism. The study concludes that there is an urgent need for legal reforms aimed at strengthening press freedom, safeguarding journalists' rights, and enhancing public access to information.

### Implication:

Such reforms are essential for fostering a vibrant media environment that serves as a watchdog, holding government and other institutions accountable to the people. Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that policymakers and legislators should prioritize legal reforms aimed at enhancing press freedom, protecting journalists' rights, and promoting transparency in Nigeria.

## INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's media landscape is as dynamic and diverse as its population. With over 200 million inhabitants, the media sector plays a critical role in shaping public opinion, influencing policy-making, and providing a platform for debate and discourse. However, the environment in which journalists operate is fraught with complexities, especially when it comes to the legal framework that governs information dissemination. Nigeria boasts a vibrant and diverse media landscape comprising print, broadcast, and digital platforms. However, the exercise of journalism in Nigeria is not without its hurdles, many of which are rooted in the legal framework that governs the media sector. Information law, encompassing legislation, regulations, and judicial decisions concerning access to information and press freedom, significantly influences how journalists operate and navigate the media landscape in Nigeria.

Adebayo (2018) noted that one of the primary challenges faced by journalists in Nigeria is the restrictive nature of information laws. The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) of 2011 was a significant step forward in promoting transparency and accountability by guaranteeing access to public records. However, implementation remains a challenge, with many government agencies reluctant to comply with the provisions of the law. Journalists

often encounter bureaucratic hurdles and delays when seeking information from government sources, hindering their ability to perform their watchdog role effectively.

Censorship and government interference pose another significant challenge to press freedom in Nigeria. The government, both at the federal and state levels, has been known to censor media content, harass journalists, and enact laws that stifle dissenting voices. The threat of legal repercussions, including defamation lawsuits and criminal charges, looms large over journalists, leading to self-censorship and a reluctance to report on sensitive issues.

Onah (2020) noted that Nigeria's Constitution guarantees freedom of expression and the press, but this freedom is not absolute. The media in Nigeria is regulated by various laws and regulations that have a direct impact on journalism practice. These include the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC) Act, the National Press Council (NPC) Act, the Cybercrimes Act, and the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act, among others. Navigating this legal maze requires journalists to be well-versed in the rights and limitations imposed by these laws. The role of the Freedom of Information Act (FOI) 2011 is particularly noteworthy. It was heralded as a significant step towards transparency and accountability, granting the public the right to access information held by public institutions. However, the implementation of the FOI Act has been met with both successes and challenges. Journalists often rely on this legislation to gather information for their reports, yet they face bureaucratic hurdles and sometimes outright denials, which hinder their work (Ezeani, 2019).

Oyeyemi (2017) opined that one of the most contentious issues in the media landscape is the balance between national security and freedom of the press. The government often justifies restrictions on media freedom in the name of national security, which can be a legitimate concern in certain contexts. However, journalists argue that these restrictions are frequently overbroad and serve as a pretext to stifle dissent and control the narrative. Despite these challenges, journalists in Nigeria recognize the importance of information law in promoting transparency, accountability, and democracy. Access to information is crucial for investigative journalism, holding public officials accountable, and exposing corruption and human rights abuses. Journalists view information law as a tool for challenging government opacity and demanding greater transparency in governance.

Moreover, the digital revolution has expanded the opportunities for journalists to disseminate information and engage with audiences. Social media platforms and online news websites provide alternative channels for news dissemination, bypassing traditional media gatekeepers and reaching a wider audience. However, digital journalism also brings its own set of challenges, including the spread of misinformation and the erosion of traditional journalistic standards.

**Statement of the Problem.** In Nigeria, navigating the media landscape can be a challenging task for journalists, especially with the implementation of information laws that often restrict press freedom. The media plays a crucial role in society by disseminating information, holding leaders accountable, and shaping public opinion. However, journalists in Nigeria face numerous obstacles when it comes to accessing, producing, and distributing information due to restrictive information laws. Many proponents of the law have greeted the enactment of the FOI law in Nigeria as a step in the right direction. Media practitioners believe that the Freedom of Information, as a communication phenomenon plays an essential role in placing Nigeria on the right track of development. It also increases the people's participation in government programmes and policies as well as translates to the enthronement of accountability and good governance. While the FOIA has many promises, its workability in a country like Nigeria, where there is a penchant for violating laws with impunity, tends to puncture its potential directed toward effective media practice.

Maximizing the potential of the FOIA in Nigeria depends on how well the media practitioners are acquainted with its provisions. Not many journalists are fully aware of the provisions of the FOIA, thereby limiting their push for information in the custody of the government, as well as other public institutions. Moreso, whether the emergence of the FOIA signals an era of freedom with or without responsibility, media practice remains an issue of great concern. Similarly, it is a problem that since some media practitioners are yet to be well acquainted

with the provision of the Act, it becomes difficult to make the most of it. Moreover, the argument that the emergence of the FOIA signals an era of freedom without responsibility, as well as its threat to national security, remains an issue of great concern.

Furthermore, the safety and security of journalists in Nigeria is a pressing concern. Journalists are often subjected to harassment, intimidation, and violence, especially when reporting on sensitive and controversial issues. The lack of protection for journalists not only restricts their ability to report freely but also has a chilling effect on the entire media landscape. Journalists should be able to work without fear of reprisal and should be protected by the law when carrying out their duties.

#### **Objectives of the Study.**

- i. To examine the perceptions and experiences of journalists regarding the role of information law in shaping media practices in Nigeria.
- ii. To explore the challenges faced by journalists in navigating Nigeria's media landscape due to information laws.

#### **Research Questions.**

- i. What are the perceptions and experiences of journalists regarding the role of information law in shaping media practices in Nigeria?
- ii. What are the challenges faced by journalists in navigating Nigeria's media landscape due to information laws?

**Understanding Information Law.** Information law in Nigeria refers to the legal framework governing the acquisition, dissemination, and protection of information. It encompasses various statutes, regulations, and judicial decisions that regulate the flow of information within the country. The concept of information law is crucial for upholding the right to freedom of expression, promoting transparency and accountability, and protecting individuals' privacy rights. Odekunle (2012) noted that in Nigeria, information law is primarily anchored in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, which guarantees the right to freedom of expression and access to information. Article 39 of the Constitution recognizes the right of every person to freedom of expression, including the freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference. This constitutional provision forms the basis for other laws and regulations that govern information dissemination in the country.

One of the key statutes governing information law in Nigeria is the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), enacted in 2011. The FOIA provides a legal framework for accessing public records and information held by public institutions. It empowers citizens to request information from government agencies and obligates public institutions to disclose certain categories of information upon request, subject to specified exemptions. The FOIA enhances transparency, accountability, and public participation in governance by ensuring access to government-held information.

Additionally, Nigeria has laws that address specific aspects of information law, such as libel and defamation. The Penal Code and Criminal Code contain provisions on defamation and libel, which regulate the dissemination of false information that could harm an individual's reputation. These laws seek to strike a balance between the right to freedom of expression and the protection of individuals' reputational rights (Lawal & Akinpelu, 2018).

Furthermore, Nigeria's cybercrime legislation, such as the Cybercrime (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Act of 2015 regulates online activities and addresses offenses related to the misuse of information and communication technologies. These laws aim to combat cybercrimes such as hacking, identity theft, and online fraud while also safeguarding freedom of expression and privacy rights in the digital sphere.

Lawal & Akinpelu (2018) highlighted the following as some of the key aspects of information law in Nigeria;

- **Data Privacy:** Data privacy laws regulate how organizations collect, use, store, and share personal information. These laws aim to protect individuals' privacy rights by establishing guidelines for data handling and requiring organizations to obtain consent before collecting personal data.
- **Cybersecurity:** Cybersecurity laws focus on safeguarding digital information and systems from unauthorized access, use, or disclosure. These laws often require organizations to implement security measures to protect sensitive information and may impose penalties for data breaches.
- **Intellectual Property:** Intellectual property laws protect creations of the mind, such as inventions, artistic works, and trade secrets. These laws include copyright, patent, trademark, and trade secret laws that grant creators exclusive rights to their creations and outline how others can use or reproduce them.
- **Freedom of Information:** Freedom of information laws grant individuals the right to access government records and information. These laws promote transparency and accountability in government by allowing citizens to request and receive information held by public authorities.
- **Electronic Commerce:** Electronic commerce laws govern online transactions, digital contracts, electronic signatures, and other legal aspects of conducting business over the Internet. These laws ensure the validity and enforceability of electronic transactions and protect consumers engaging in online commerce.
- **Regulatory Compliance:** Information law also includes regulations that require organizations to comply with specific standards and practices to protect information and uphold individuals' rights. Non-compliance with these regulations can result in legal penalties and reputational damage.
- **International Considerations:** Information law often has international implications, as data flows across borders and jurisdictions. International agreements and frameworks, such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in the European Union, aim to harmonize data protection standards and facilitate cross-border data transfers.

Overall, information law plays a crucial role in shaping the legal landscape of the digital age, balancing the benefits of information sharing and technological innovation with the need to protect individuals' rights and information security. As technology continues to advance, information law will continue to evolve to address new challenges and ensure the responsible use of information in society. In essence, information law in Nigeria plays a vital role in safeguarding freedom of expression, promoting transparency and accountability, and protecting privacy rights. While existing legal frameworks provide a foundation for information governance, efforts are needed to address implementation challenges and ensure that journalists can navigate Nigeria's media landscape in adherence to legal standards and principles of press freedom.

**Role of Information Law in Shaping Media Practices in Nigeria.** Information law plays a significant role in shaping media practice in Nigeria by providing a legal framework that governs the acquisition, dissemination, and regulation of information. This legal framework encompasses various statutes, regulations, and judicial decisions that guide media practitioners in their professional conduct. Information law, particularly constitutional provisions and statutes such as the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), safeguards the right to freedom of expression, including the freedom of the press (Okoye & Ezeaku, 2017). Article 39 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria guarantees the right to freedom of expression, while the FOIA enhances transparency and accountability by facilitating access to public information. These legal provisions enable media practitioners to report news and express opinions without undue interference from state or non-state actors. The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) is a critical legislation that guarantees the right of access to information held by public institutions in Nigeria. It provides journalists with the legal tools to demand transparency and accountability from public institutions, enabling them to fulfill their watchdog role in society. Additionally, understanding the legal framework for defamation, libel, and slander is crucial for journalists to navigate the boundaries of free speech and responsible journalism.

Garba (2013) noted that information law in Nigeria regulates media content to ensure compliance with legal and ethical standards. Statutes such as the Nigerian Broadcasting Code and the National Broadcasting Commission



Act empower regulatory bodies like the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) to monitor and enforce broadcasting standards. These regulations cover aspects such as hate speech, incitement to violence, obscenity, and defamation. By setting standards for media content, information law promotes responsible journalism and protects the public interest. Information law protects the rights of journalists and media organizations, including their right to gather and disseminate information without undue interference or harassment. Provisions in the Nigerian Constitution and statutes, such as the Criminal Code Act and the Cybercrime Act, safeguard journalists from harassment, censorship, and arbitrary arrest (Herawati et al., 2022). Additionally, legal frameworks on defamation and libel strike a balance between freedom of expression and the protection of individuals' reputational rights.

With the emergence of new media and digital platforms, information law in Nigeria also extends to online communication channels. Legislation such as the Cybercrime Act regulates cyber activities and addresses offenses such as hacking, cyberstalking, and online fraud. The legal framework seeks to protect users' rights and maintain the integrity of online communication while combatting cybercrimes and misinformation. Information law complements professional codes of conduct and ethical guidelines in promoting responsible journalism practices. By upholding legal and ethical standards, media practitioners contribute to public trust and credibility in the media. Ethical considerations such as accuracy, fairness, balance, and impartiality are integral to media practice and are reinforced by legal obligations to adhere to the law.

The concept of information law is critical in shaping the freedom of expression and press freedom, two essential components of democracy. Information law sets the legal framework within which journalists operate, defining the rights and responsibilities of both the media and the public. Information law plays a crucial role in protecting the rights of journalists to gather and disseminate information. This protection is essential for maintaining a vibrant and independent media landscape, where journalists can freely report on matters of public interest without facing censorship or reprisals. Information laws, such as Freedom of Information Acts, ensure that journalists have access to government records and other sources of information that are necessary for investigative reporting and holding those in power accountable.

Furthermore, information law provides legal protections for journalists against defamation, libel, and other forms of legal harassment. By defining the boundaries of what can and cannot be published, information law helps journalists navigate ethical dilemmas and avoid legal pitfalls in their reporting. In cases where journalists face legal threats or harassment, information law can serve as a shield, allowing them to defend their work in court and uphold the public's right to know.

Moreover, information law promotes transparency and accountability in government and other institutions by ensuring the public's right to access information. Journalists play a key role in disseminating this information to the public, helping to expose corruption, abuse of power, and other wrongdoing. In this way, information law strengthens democracy by empowering journalists to act as watchdogs and serve the public interest. In essence, information law plays a crucial role in shaping media practice in Nigeria by protecting freedom of expression, regulating media content, safeguarding journalists' rights, regulating new media, and promoting ethical journalism. By providing a legal framework that balances freedom of expression with societal interests and ethical considerations, information law contributes to a vibrant and responsible media landscape in Nigeria.

**Challenges of the Freedom of Information Act in Nigeria.** The Freedom of Information Act has not been satisfactorily utilized by journalists in Nigeria (Dunu & Ugbo, 2014; Abone & Kur, 2014). It throws up the question of what factors could be behind the trend. These factors are highlighted as follows:

- **Legal Factor:** It has been pointed out that some legal factors have hampered the implementation of the FOI Act. The framing and provisions of the Act itself are a factor here. A study by Apuke (2017) reveals that the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act "contains more exemption sections and clauses than sections that grant access to information. It means that some mischievous public officers can use these sections for unjust and mischievous purposes". Onwubere (2013) also observes this shortcoming when he notes that the Act

"contains more exemptions on the very crucial areas of public interest than the general areas of need [which] is definitely not in favor of public interest." Another observed weakness in the FOI Act is that it has no provisions specifically addressing the interest of journalists. Onwubere (2013) noted that the lack of immunity or any specific right or protection for journalists makes the provisions of the Act incomplete. The Act clearly jeopardizes the aspirations of the journalists for a free press. The sections on exemption (Sections 12, 13-15, 16-18, 28 & 29) are the main areas of press interest, particularly Section 29, which further emphasizes the secrecy of "the classified documents. Also, of adverse effect on the full functionality of the FOI Act is the issue of the existence of some other media laws that tend to negate the spirit of the FOI Act. Instances include the Official Secrets Act, Evidence Act, the Public Complaints Commission Act, the Statistics Act, and the Criminal Code Act, which all have provisions that tend to contradict the very goals aimed by the FOI Act (Apuke, 2017). Instructively, a study by Nsereka and Ammanah (2014) found that "the Freedom of Information Act has the potency to engender effective media practice, but it can only function effectively when anti-press laws are either expunged or amended."

- **Political Factor:** Optimal realization of the benefits of the FOI Act fundamentally requires the cooperation of the political class and all public servants who have custody of public records. In other words, there is a need for political will on the part of the officers of the state for this piece of legislation to experience effective implementation. Omotayo (2015) thus laments the "pervasive" rate at which requests for access to information are turned down by public officers and how public institutions who respond to requests do that beyond the statutory seven-day limit provided for by the FOI Act. For instance, when the Right to Know (R2K) made a request to the Attorney-General of the Federation for copies of all the annual FOI compliance reports that have been submitted to that office and a copy of the annual report submitted by the AGF to the National Assembly pursuant to the sections 29 (7) and (8) of the FOI Act, it took over a month to receive the response. Consequently, the political will to implement the FOI Act on the part of the leadership and the state bureaucracy is critical.
- **Judicial Factor:** The fact that an application can be made to court when a request for information is turned down brings the judiciary into the very core of the operation of the FOI Act. Consequently, the transparency, efficiency and speed with which the judiciary disposes of such applications will be critical to the realization of the envisaged benefits of the Act. Thus, it becomes worrisome that the court processes in Nigeria are everything but fast. Omotayo (2015) observes that the cumbersome and time-consuming process of dragging requests for information through the Courts has a potentially negative effect on the utility of the information requested because of the time value of information. Apart from the length of time, it would take for litigations and appeals, there is also the considerable expense of the entire legal process, from the High Courts to the Court of Appeal and Supreme Court, the monetary implication which may be far beyond the reach of many ordinary Nigerians. It will discourage citizens from making requests under the FOI Act. Again, corruption in the judiciary is another hindering factor. Not only will it deprive people of their due right to information when they request such, but it will also discourage people from making such request in the first place, given their negative perception of the courts who should be the final arbiter in the event of the request being turned down (Ajibade, 2017).
- **Poor Culture of Investigative Journalism:** Utilisation of the FOI Act thrives more within the culture of investigative journalism. Journalists who request information that is not ordinarily in the public domain typically do that as a matter of an investigation process. Consequently, there is a fundamental relationship between investigative journalism and Freedom of Information law (Abone & Kur, 2014). However, in Nigeria, the culture of investigative journalism is, for some reason, weak. This state of affairs has been admitted by Garba (2013) when he laments that painstaking investigative journalism has been replaced in the country with armchair reliance on press releases and news briefings. This practice, he notes, does not synchronize with the media's watchdog role in society. It has been noted in this regard that the poor culture of investigative

journalism in Nigeria would negatively affect the utilization of the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act among media practitioners in the country. Uzoma & Onwukwe (2012), in this vein, observe that without constant practice of investigative journalism, practitioners would hardly have any serious need for this sort of information that is kept away from the public view and which the journalist should make a request for its release (Adha et al., 2023). The implication will be that the FOI Act will seem useless to the practitioner, meaning that the goals of the Act are not being realized.

**Theoretical Framework.** This study finds expression in the Libertarian theory. The theory, also known as the free press theory, prescribes that an individual or organization, including the press, should be free to publish and express information freely (Umechukwu, 2001). The central tenets of the libertarian theory are located in John Milton's notion of the "self-righting process of the free marketplace of ideas." It means that good ideas would drive out bad ones if all ideas were guaranteed free expression (McQuail, 1987). Also, the ideas of John Stuart Mill were the central foundation of this theory. Mill noted that the peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is that it is robbing the human race of posterity as well as the existing generation; those who dissent from the opinion are even more than those who hold it. If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth; if wrong, they lose what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth produced by its collision with error (McQuail, 2005).

The ideas of John Milton and John Stuart Mill are in consonance with the principles of the press as a "free marketplace of ideas," first put forward in 1918 by an American judge (DeFleur, 2010). This theory is a necessity in a democratic environment since it is important in itself as a core principle of democracy. It explains why many democratic countries incorporate in their Constitution the principles of liberty, freedom of speech, freedom of expression and freedom of the press. The main principles of the theory are expressed by McQuail (1987) as follows:

- Publication should be free from any prior censorship by any third party.
- The act of publication and distribution should be open to a person or group without a permit or license.
- Attack on any government official or political party (as distinct from attacks on private individuals or treason and breaches of security) should not be punishable, even after the event.
- There should be no compulsion to publish anything.
- Publication of "error" is protected equally with that of truth in matters of opinion and belief.
- No restriction should be placed on the collection, by legal means, of information for publication.
- There should be no restriction on export or import or sending or receiving "messages" across national frontiers.
- Journalists should claim a considerable degree of professional autonomy within their organization.

In relation to this study, the libertarian theory explains that the Freedom of Information Act is intended to guarantee freedom of expression, freedom of speech and freedom of the press. It is because the Act is aimed at making information freely accessible to whoever needs it. This is the case, especially with the sixth principle of the theory. Similarly, the theory is necessary in a democratic society like Nigeria. In other words, Nigeria, a democratic country, cannot do without a press, which is expected to be guaranteed by the Freedom of Information Act. The findings of this study will, therefore, express the extent to which the Freedom of Information Act is predisposed to guarantee a free press in Nigeria.

**Empirical Review.** Chukwu (2018) conducted a study titled "The Challenges of Implementing the Freedom of Information Act by the civil society organizations in Lagos State, Nigeria." The study assessed the challenges civil society organizations in Lagos State encountered whilst implementing Nigeria's Freedom of Information Act 2011 (FOIA). The study, amongst others, indicated many challenges bedeviling the implementation of the FOIA.

Similarly, Chukwu (2019) conducted another study titled "The Challenges of Implementing the Freedom of Information Act by the Journalists in Lagos State, Nigeria." The study assessed the challenges journalists

encountered whilst implementing Nigeria's Freedom of Information Act 2011. The study, amongst others, also indicated that many challenges exist that hampered the implementation of the FOIA.

Instructively, too, Chukwu, O.J (2025). conducted a study on Interrogating Civil Society Organisations and Journalists' Advocacies on Flattening the Curve of Covid-19 Vaccine Hesitancy in Nigeria. The study, amongst others, revealed that the extent of the CSO's and journalists' advocacy campaign against COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy is very low. The study also finds that the majority of the CSOs and journalists, as well as the media establishments, did not embark on an advocacy campaign against COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy in Nigeria.

Further, Chukwu, O.J. (2022) studied Citizens' remonstrance's constitutionality in Nigeria and the role of social media: a metaphorical appraisal of #EndSars police brutality protest. The study, amongst others, revealed that the right to protest is firmly expressed in Nigeria's Constitution, as well as in her corpus juris. The above indicates that Nigerian citizens are legally imbued with the right to protest against the policies of the government.

Also, Rueben and Chukwu (2021) conducted a study on CSOs and Broadcast Media's advocacies against police brutality in Rivers State. They found, amongst other things, that the advocacies carried out by the CSOs and the Broadcast media were high.

## METHODS

The study adopted a qualitative research approach. The interview schedule was utilized to elicit responses from Twenty-four (24) journalists from Twelve (12) media establishments, purposively selected based on reach, visibility and impact on Nigerian citizens. The mix of private and government-owned media was also taken into cognizance whilst selecting the media establishments. The media establishments selected are regarded as the most visible and with wider coverage.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study presents numerous challenges and complexities for journalists, often affecting their ability to fulfill their role as watchdogs and informers. Findings from the interview conducted among journalists shed light on the practical implications of information laws and regulations on their professional activities, as well as the broader landscape of media freedom in Nigeria. One of the key findings of navigating Nigeria's media framework through information law is the significant impact of legislation and regulations on press freedom. The legal framework, including the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and laws governing defamation, libel, and slander, often shapes journalists' ability to access and disseminate information. Journalists operate within a legal environment that can either facilitate or hinder their work, with restrictive laws and regulations acting as potential barriers to free and independent journalism.

Furthermore, journalists navigating Nigeria's media framework through information law often face challenges related to transparency and access to public information. Despite the provisions of the FOIA, accessing official records and information from public institutions can be met with resistance or delays, hindering journalists' ability to hold government authorities accountable and conduct investigative journalism effectively. The findings underscore the need for greater compliance with information laws, as well as a more transparent and responsive approach from public institutions.

Another significant finding pertains to the legal risks and challenges journalists encounter when reporting on sensitive issues. The theoretical framework of defamation, libel, and slander laws in Nigeria, while aiming to protect individuals from false and damaging statements, can also be used to intimidate and silence journalists. The fear of legal repercussions often leads to self-censorship and undermines the capacity of journalists to report on issues of public interest and hold powerful actors accountable. This finding highlights the pressing need for legal



reforms that strike a balance between protecting individuals' reputations and upholding the public's right to information (Sambo et al., 2023).

Moreover, findings from the journalist's perspective also point to the importance of media literacy and public awareness of information law. Journalists recognize a need to not only navigate legal and regulatory frameworks themselves but also to educate the public on their rights to information and the crucial role of the media in promoting transparency and accountability. Building public awareness can foster a supportive environment for journalism and counteract misinformation and misconceptions about the media's rights and responsibilities.

Additionally, the findings highlight the role of international human rights mechanisms and advocacy in shaping the media landscape in Nigeria. Journalists often turn to international human rights standards and global advocacy networks to challenge repressive laws and advocate for greater press freedom in the country. International support can provide journalists with solidarity, resources, and legal expertise in navigating Nigeria's media framework and addressing human rights violations. The findings for navigating Nigeria's media framework through information law from the journalist's perspective underscore the multifaceted challenges and opportunities inherent in the legal and regulatory environment. Press freedom and the right to information are crucial components of a vibrant democracy, and the findings emphasize the need for greater compliance with information laws, legal reforms, increased media literacy, and international support to create an enabling environment for journalism in Nigeria. The findings ultimately highlight the importance of advocating for a legal framework that respects and protects the rights of journalists and the public's right to access information.

## CONCLUSION

This study sheds light on the intricate dynamics of navigating Nigeria's media landscape through information law, as perceived by journalists. Through qualitative interviews, we have gained valuable insights into the challenges, opportunities, and implications faced by journalists operating within the framework of information law in Nigeria. Findings underscore the significant obstacles encountered by journalists, including restrictive legislation, censorship, and government interference, which hamper their ability to access and disseminate information freely. Despite these challenges, journalists recognize the pivotal role of information law in promoting transparency, accountability, and democracy within Nigerian society.

Furthermore, the study highlights the urgent need for legal reforms aimed at strengthening press freedom, safeguarding journalists' rights, and enhancing public access to information. Such reforms are essential for fostering a vibrant media environment that serves as a watchdog, holding government and other institutions accountable to the people. Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between media, law, and democracy in Nigeria. By amplifying journalists' voices and perspectives, we aim to advocate for a more conducive legal environment that empowers journalists to fulfill their crucial role as agents of transparency, social change, and democracy within Nigerian society.

As Nigeria continues its journey towards democratic consolidation and societal progress, it is imperative to uphold and protect the principles of press freedom and access to information, ensuring that journalists can navigate the media landscape with confidence and integrity. Through collaborative efforts between journalists, policymakers, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders, we can strive towards a media landscape that fosters transparency, accountability, and inclusive democratic governance in Nigeria.

**Recommendations.** Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made;

- i. Policymakers and legislators should prioritize legal reforms aimed at enhancing press freedom, protecting journalists' rights, and promoting transparency in Nigeria. These reforms should include amendments to existing information laws to remove restrictive clauses and ensure greater access to information for journalists. Additionally, the government should enact new legislation that safeguards journalists from

- harassment, intimidation, and arbitrary arrests, thereby creating a conducive environment for media professionals to operate.
- ii. Stakeholders, including media organizations, civil society groups, and international partners, should invest in capacity-building initiatives to empower journalists with the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate Nigeria's media landscape effectively. Training programs on media ethics, investigative journalism, digital literacy, and legal rights can help journalists better understand their roles and responsibilities in promoting transparency and accountability. Furthermore, collaborations between media outlets and legal experts can provide journalists with legal support and guidance when dealing with information law-related issues, strengthening their ability to uphold press freedom and protect the public's right to know.

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