

Cost–Benefit Analysis of Investigative Journalism in Insurgency-Affected Northern Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the advantages and disadvantages of investigative journalism in Northern Nigeria, where journalism practice has changed due to ongoing insecurity and inadequate institutional frameworks. Structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews were used to gather data from 120 investigative journalists, editors, and media professionals as part of a mixed-method research design. The trade-offs between the institutional, social, and economic aspects of investigative reporting were measured using descriptive statistics and cost-benefit ratio analysis. The findings show that the biggest expenses for journalists working in the area are security threats, a lack of institutional support, and budgetary limitations. With a cost-benefit ratio of 1.06:1, it was determined that the advantages, especially in raising public awareness, accountability, and transparency, outweighed these disadvantages. The results highlight the paradox of risk and value that investigative journalism entails: in spite of the risks involved, the practice produces quantifiable public benefits like democratic oversight and conflict resolution. The study comes to the conclusion that even though investigative journalism is still financially and personally taxing, its benefits to society warrant ongoing funding and institutional safeguards. To increase the sustainability and efficacy of investigative reporting in Nigeria's conflict-prone areas, it suggests better safeguards for journalists, increased cooperation between the media and security forces, and focused donor assistance.

Keywords: Investigative journalism, cost–benefit analysis, insurgency, Northern Nigeria, accountability, media economics.

1.0 Introduction

Since 2009, Boko Haram and its affiliates have been at the forefront of a protracted insurgency in northern Nigeria, especially in the North-East, which has caused severe economic disruption, mass displacement, and numerous humanitarian crises. Tens of thousands of people have been killed and over two million have been displaced by the insurgency, which has also caused community instability and weakened public confidence in government institutions (Dunn, 2018; Reuters,

2024). In addition to the direct human cost, the conflict has had a cascade of socioeconomic repercussions, such as the breakdown of local markets, the loss of livelihoods, and the reduction in agricultural output and the provision of essential services. Due to these factors, local economies have been weakened and the capabilities of the public and private sectors have been limited, making investigative reporting more difficult and possibly more important in exposing poor management and promoting accountability (Adelaja, George, & Yusuf, 2019).

In Nigeria, investigative journalism works in a complicated and frequently hostile environment that is marked by a lack of institutional support, insufficient funding, and threat exposure. Investigating delicate subjects like corruption, power abuse, and human rights abuses frequently exposes journalists to intimidation, arbitrary detentions, and legal repercussions. Physical insecurity, logistical limitations, and psychological trauma from exposure to violent conflict all increase these risks in areas affected by insurgencies (Onyenakeya, 2020; Aondover, 2024). As a result, the cost of investigative journalism in these fields goes beyond just money; it also includes risks to one's personal safety, psychological suffering, and institutional vulnerability.

Investigative journalism continues to be a vital component of social justice and democratic accountability in spite of these formidable obstacles. It offers a way to record violations of human rights, expose corruption in the administration of security and humanitarian aid, and give voice to those who are marginalised. Investigative reports have occasionally revealed inefficiencies in aid distribution, misappropriation of military budgets, and disregard for internally displaced people (IDPs) in Northern Nigeria, which is impacted by insurgency. Such reporting promotes openness, encourages discussion among the public, and could lead to policy changes (Petersen & Reuben, 2021). However, many media organisations reduce or avoid investigative work in high-risk contexts because the tangible and intangible costs of this type of journalism frequently outweigh the immediate financial returns.

The need for a methodical cost-benefit analysis of investigative journalism in conflict-prone areas is highlighted by the conflict between the high expense of such reporting and its possible social benefits. The true worth and sustainability of investigative reporting in Northern Nigeria will be revealed by a thorough evaluation of the economic and non-economic aspects, including risk to life, institutional capacity, psychological toll, and social impact. To support independent journalism, improve information resilience, and encourage accountability in the face of insecurity, editors, legislators, and donor organisations can create evidence-based strategies by taking these trade-offs into consideration.

The broad objective of this study is to examine the costs and benefits of investigative journalism in insurgency-affected Northern Nigeria, with a view to assessing its economic, social, and institutional value as a tool for accountability, transparency, and conflict mitigation. Specifically, the study aimed to:

- i. identify and categorize the direct and indirect costs associated with investigative journalism in insurgency-affected areas of Northern Nigeria.
- ii. evaluate the tangible and intangible benefits derived from investigative reporting within conflict-affected Northern communities.
- iii. assess how security risks and operational challenges influence the quality, frequency, and scope of investigative journalism in the region.

- iv. determine the extent to which the benefits of investigative journalism justify its associated costs in insurgency-affected environments.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Clarifications

2.1.1 Investigative Journalism

Investigative journalism is a niche subset of journalism that focuses on thorough, methodical, and critical investigation of topics of public interest that are frequently hidden or misrepresented. Investigating corruption, power abuse, human rights abuses, and other socially significant issues goes beyond simple news reporting (Houston, 2010; de Burgh, 2008). In contrast to traditional reporting, investigative journalism places a strong emphasis on tenacity, confirmation, and the use of evidence-based analysis to reveal wrongdoing. Investigative journalism has developed as a tool for fostering accountability and transparency in Nigeria, particularly in the areas of public finance management and governance (Onyenakeya, 2020). However, its use is limited by institutional flaws, security risks, and a lack of resources, especially in areas affected by conflict where information access is restricted and sources may be intimidated (Aondover, 2024).

2.1.2 Insurgency and Conflict Reporting

An organised, armed uprising against a governing authority, frequently spurred by political, ideological, or religious grievances, is commonly referred to as an insurgency (Kilcullen, 2013). Since 2009, the insurgency in Northern Nigeria, spearheaded by Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), has caused extensive destruction, displacement, and fatalities (Dunn, 2018). In these situations, conflict reporting entails covering events in areas marked by propaganda, insecurity, and limited access to trustworthy information. Among the many difficulties faced by journalists covering insurgency-affected regions are psychological trauma, censorship, and threats to their lives (Frère, 2019). Investigative journalism in these kinds of situations necessitates striking a balance between ethical considerations, personal safety, and the possibility of false information.

2.1.3 Cost–Benefit Analysis (CBA)

Cost-benefit analysis (CBA) is an economic evaluation method that entails methodically weighing the projected financial and non-financial benefits of a project, policy, or activity against its total expected costs (Boardman et al., 2018). It offers a method for figuring out if an intervention's advantages outweigh the risks and expenses incurred. A cost-benefit perspective in journalism looks at the trade-offs among the institutional, social, and political advantages of investigative reporting and its operational, financial, and human costs (Petersen & Reuben, 2021). Investigative journalism in Northern Nigeria affected by insurgency can be evaluated systematically for overall value, sustainability, and long-term effects on social cohesion and governance by applying CBA.

2.1.4 Media Freedom and Press Safety

The right of journalists and media organisations to function freely from excessive intervention by the government, businesses, or other influential parties is known as media freedom (McQuail, 2010). It is a prerequisite for investigative reporting and a basic element of democratic governance. Nonetheless, Nigerian press freedom is still precarious, especially in conflict-ridden regions where state and non-state actors frequently target journalists for disclosing private information (Freedom House, 2023). As a result, one of the main factors influencing journalistic output is press safety. Threats like physical violence, detention, and harassment make conducting an investigation much more expensive and deter comprehensive reporting (Aondover, 2024). Evaluating the cost structure of investigative journalism in Northern Nigeria requires an understanding of the connection between journalist safety, media freedom, and investigative performance.

2.1.5 Public Accountability and Governance

The duty of people and organisations entrusted with public resources to act in the public interest and to answer for their choices and actions is known as public accountability (Schedler, 1999). By revealing inefficiencies, corruption, and policy shortcomings, investigative journalism plays a critical role in advancing accountability, which in turn promotes transparency and civic engagement (Ettema & Glasser, 1998). Accountability systems are frequently deficient in fragile states or conflict situations, and people mainly depend on the media for information and supervision. As a result, investigative journalism turns into an indirect form of governance that forces institutions and public servants to behave responsibly. But in Northern Nigeria, where there is an insurgency, the potential advantages of journalistic investigations are frequently undermined by inadequate institutional responses and restricted access to justice, which lessens their policy impact (Adelaja et al., 2019).

2.2 Theoretical Literature

2.2.1 Social Responsibility Theory

The Social Responsibility Theory of the press emerged as a response to the limitations of the Libertarian Theory, emphasizing that media freedom must be balanced with a sense of duty toward society (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956). According to the theory, while the press should be free to gather and disseminate information, it must also act responsibly by ensuring accuracy, fairness, and sensitivity to the public good. The theory advocates that journalists should function as watchdogs over those in power, exposing corruption, injustice, and abuse (McQuail, 2010). In the context of insurgency-affected Northern Nigeria, investigative journalism embodies this social responsibility role by uncovering issues such as misappropriation of humanitarian aid, military misconduct, and the plight of displaced persons. However, the high cost and personal risk associated with such reporting raise important questions about how journalists can fulfill these responsibilities sustainably. The theory, therefore, provides a moral and ethical framework for evaluating the benefits of investigative journalism relative to its risks and costs.

2.2.2 Public Sphere Theory

The Public Sphere Theory, developed by Habermas (1989), conceptualizes the media as a space for rational-critical debate where citizens can engage in discussions about matters of collective interest. The theory underscores the role of journalism in facilitating dialogue between the state and society, thereby contributing to democratic participation and accountability. In conflict-prone environments, investigative journalism functions as a mechanism for expanding the public sphere by giving voice to marginalized communities, exposing institutional failures, and promoting informed decision-making. Through its revelations, it helps citizens and policymakers understand the complexities of insurgency, humanitarian crises, and governance lapses (Ettema & Glasser, 1998). However, insecurity, censorship, and propaganda in Northern Nigeria restrict the media's ability to serve as an effective public sphere. Evaluating the cost and benefit of maintaining such journalistic functions under these adverse conditions is, therefore, vital to understanding the sustainability of investigative practice in fragile contexts.

2.2.3 Conflict Theory

Rooted in the works of Karl Marx, Conflict Theory posits that societies are characterized by inequalities that generate conflict between dominant and subordinate groups over resources, power, and information (Collins, 2019). From this perspective, the media—including investigative journalism—serves as a tool through which social inequalities are exposed and contested. Investigative journalism reveals how power structures exploit public resources, marginalize vulnerable populations, and perpetuate systemic injustice (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). In Northern Nigeria, where insurgency thrives on poverty, state neglect, and corruption, investigative journalism can illuminate the socio-economic roots of violence and the misuse of counter-insurgency funds. Yet, such exposures often provoke retaliation from powerful actors, increasing operational risks and costs for journalists. Conflict Theory thus offers a lens for understanding the inherent struggles between journalists seeking truth and elites seeking control, making it relevant for analyzing the trade-offs involved in pursuing truth under threat.

2.2.4 Political Economy of the Media Theory

The Political Economy of the Media Theory examines how economic structures, ownership patterns, and funding mechanisms influence media content and operations (Mosco, 2009). It posits that media outputs are not produced in a vacuum but are shaped by financial pressures, ownership interests, and state controls. In Nigeria, limited advertising revenue, concentration of media ownership, and dependence on donor funding have significant implications for the sustainability of investigative journalism (Onyenakeya, 2020). In insurgency-affected regions, these financial constraints are compounded by the high costs of safety training, field logistics, and post-trauma care for journalists. Applying this theory helps to contextualize the economic side of the cost-benefit analysis—highlighting how structural inequalities in media funding and market incentives affect the viability of investigative reporting in insecure environments.

2.2.5 Agenda-Setting Theory

The Agenda-Setting Theory, developed by McCombs and Shaw (1972), posits that the media influences the public agenda by determining which issues receive attention and how they are framed. Investigative journalism plays a critical role in this process by bringing hidden or

neglected issues to the forefront of public and policy discussions. In the case of insurgency-affected Northern Nigeria, investigative reports on corruption in military procurement, abuse of displaced persons, or mismanagement of humanitarian aid can set the agenda for policy reform and civic advocacy. However, the extent to which such agenda-setting translates into tangible change depends on the balance between journalistic courage and institutional resistance, as well as on the resources available for sustained coverage (Petersen & Reuben, 2021). This theory, therefore, complements the cost–benefit framework by illustrating how the outcomes (benefits) of investigative journalism are mediated through public and political attention.

2.3 Empirical Literature

In a seminal study, Houston (2010) examined the operational dynamics and professional challenges of investigative journalism across several democratic societies. The study focused on the theme of journalistic accountability and evidence-based reporting, using a qualitative content analysis of investigative case studies from the United States, South Africa, and Nigeria. Through interviews and document analysis, Houston found that investigative journalism serves as a key mechanism for promoting transparency and exposing corruption. However, the study noted that the cost of investigative reporting—such as time, financial expenditure, and personal risk—often outweighs its immediate financial rewards. Houston concluded that although investigative journalism is indispensable to democratic governance, its sustainability depends heavily on institutional support, legal protection, and funding stability.

de Burgh (2008) conducted a comparative inquiry into the practice and structure of investigative journalism in developing countries, emphasizing the relationship between institutional culture and journalistic effectiveness. The research employed a mixed-method design combining surveys of journalists, newsroom observations, and case study analysis of leading investigative outlets in Asia and Africa. Findings revealed that political pressure, weak regulatory frameworks, and lack of financial independence constrain investigative reporting. The study concluded that without economic viability and editorial autonomy, the public interest function of investigative journalism cannot be fully realized.

In a study focusing on Nigeria, Onyenakeya (2020) explored the challenges facing investigative journalism in the country's democratic landscape. Using qualitative interviews with senior editors, reporters, and journalism trainers across Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt, the study identified poor remuneration, lack of institutional support, and legal intimidation as major obstacles to investigative work. The findings showed that investigative reporters are often demotivated by the absence of professional insurance and the threat of violence from political actors. The study concluded that until Nigerian journalists are provided with adequate security and enabling working conditions, the practice of investigative journalism will remain limited in depth and frequency.

Aondover (2024) examined conflict journalism and the survival strategies of reporters in insurgency-affected Northern Nigeria. The study employed ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth interviews with twenty journalists who had covered the Boko Haram conflict between 2015 and 2023. Using a phenomenological approach, it assessed how journalists balance professional ethics with personal safety in conflict zones. The findings indicated that most reporters rely on informal safety networks, self-censorship, and limited mobility to minimize risk. Aondover concluded that while journalists play an essential role in informing the public about insurgency, the personal and

psychological costs are severe, warranting institutionalized safety mechanisms and trauma support.

Adelaja, George, and Yusuf (2019) focused on the economic implications of the Boko Haram insurgency on agricultural productivity and livelihoods in Northern Nigeria. Though not directly about journalism, the study provides context for understanding the socio-economic environment in which investigative reporters operate. Employing a panel data analysis covering 2005–2017 across six North-Eastern states, the authors found a significant negative impact of insurgency on agricultural output and household income. They concluded that prolonged conflict erodes local economies, increases poverty, and reduces access to information—conditions that indirectly heighten the cost and complexity of investigative reporting.

In a cross-national study, Petersen and Reuben (2021) analyzed the cost–benefit dynamics of investigative reporting in fragile and post-conflict states. Using a cost–benefit modeling framework applied to data from 11 developing countries, the study assessed the financial inputs, risks, and societal outcomes of investigative journalism projects supported by international donors. Results revealed that while the monetary returns on investigative reporting were modest, the social and policy impacts—such as exposure of corruption and institutional reform—were substantial. The authors concluded that donor funding remains essential to sustain investigative journalism in environments where commercial incentives are weak and state support is minimal.

Frère (2019) investigated the risks and ethical dilemmas faced by journalists reporting from conflict zones in Africa, with specific attention to Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Somalia. The study adopted a qualitative comparative design, relying on structured interviews and media content analysis. It found that African journalists frequently operate under severe resource constraints and face heightened threats from both insurgents and state actors. The study concluded that without robust press freedom protections and safety training, the benefits of conflict reporting are often overshadowed by personal harm and professional burnout.

Ekeanyanwu and Obianigwe (2012) examined the state of investigative journalism and media ethics in Nigeria using a descriptive survey design. Questionnaires were distributed to 120 journalists in Lagos, Abuja, and Enugu to evaluate their perceptions of investigative standards, institutional integrity, and funding challenges. The findings indicated a decline in the culture of in-depth reporting due to commercialization pressures and editorial interference. The study concluded that strengthening professional ethics, transparency in funding, and capacity building are necessary to revitalize investigative journalism as an agent of accountability.

Uko and Omoera (2020) conducted an empirical study on media coverage of insecurity and insurgency in Northern Nigeria using content analysis of major Nigerian newspapers between 2010 and 2019. The study assessed the frequency, tone, and thematic focus of conflict-related reports. Findings showed that coverage was largely event-driven rather than investigative, with limited follow-up stories or exposure of root causes. The study concluded that the high risks and costs associated with reporting from conflict zones discourage journalists from pursuing deeper investigative angles, leading to superficial coverage of critical security issues.

Pate and Ibrahim (2019) explored the role of media and communication strategies in countering violent extremism in Nigeria. Employing a qualitative design involving focus group discussions and stakeholder interviews, the study found that investigative journalism can play a preventive role

by exposing extremist recruitment networks and security lapses. However, it also observed that journalists often face censorship and reprisals when their reports implicate state security agencies. The authors concluded that promoting collaborative frameworks between media organizations, civil society, and government agencies could enhance the safety and effectiveness of investigative journalism in counterinsurgency communication.

2.3.1 Research Gap

Existing studies on investigative journalism in Nigeria have largely focused on professional challenges, ethical concerns, and press freedom (Onyenankeya, 2020; Ekeanyanwu & Obianigwe, 2012), while others have examined media coverage of conflict and insecurity in the North (Uko & Omoera, 2020; Aondover, 2024). Although these works provide valuable insights into the constraints faced by journalists, they rarely quantify or systematically evaluate the trade-offs between the costs incurred and the benefits achieved through investigative reporting. Similarly, cross-national studies such as Petersen and Reuben (2021) have assessed the economics of investigative journalism in fragile states but without specific attention to the peculiar security, institutional, and socio-economic dynamics of Northern Nigeria's insurgency environment.

This study fills this gap by applying a cost-benefit analytical framework to investigative journalism in insurgency-affected Northern Nigeria. It integrates both financial and non-financial dimensions—such as safety risks, social impact, and policy outcomes—to determine whether the societal benefits of investigative reporting justify its associated costs. By doing so, the study contributes empirical evidence to a largely underexplored dimension of media and conflict scholarship in Nigeria.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design that integrates both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive assessment of the costs and benefits of investigative journalism in insurgency-affected Northern Nigeria. The mixed-method design is particularly suitable because it enables triangulation of data from multiple sources, thereby strengthening the validity and reliability of findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

3.2 Population of the Study

The population of the study comprises investigative journalists, media editors, security correspondents, and media policy experts working in or reporting on insurgency-affected states such as Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa. These groups represent the key actors who possess direct or indirect experience with the economic, social, and institutional implications of investigative journalism in conflict zones.

3.3 Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select respondents who are professionally involved in investigative reporting and have firsthand experience in covering insurgency-related issues. From this population, a sample of 120 respondents was drawn, ensuring representation across public and private media houses, including print, broadcast, and online platforms.

2.4 Nature of Data and Instrument

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire complemented by in-depth interviews. The questionnaire captured quantitative indicators of costs (financial expenditures, security risks, and institutional constraints) and benefits (policy outcomes, public engagement, and social awareness). The interviews provided qualitative insights into contextual factors influencing investigative journalism in conflict areas. Secondary data were sourced from academic journals, policy reports, and institutional documents published by organizations such as the Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development (CJID), the Premium Times Centre for Investigative Journalism (PTCIJ), and the Nigerian Guild of Editors.

3.5 Method of Data Analysis

were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, and mean scores) were used to summarize respondents' characteristics and perceptions, while inferential analysis employed cost–benefit ratio estimation to determine the relationship between costs incurred and benefits derived. Qualitative data were analyzed through thematic content analysis to identify recurring patterns and narratives relevant to the study objectives.

To ensure validity and reliability, the research instruments were reviewed by senior academics in media and conflict studies. Ethical considerations such as voluntary participation, confidentiality, and informed consent were strictly observed throughout the research process.

4.0 Results and Discussion

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of respondents, including gender, age, years of experience, and media affiliation. The results show that the majority of respondents (68.3%) were male, reflecting the gender imbalance that characterizes journalism practice in conflict zones. Most participants (54.2%) were between 31–40 years old, indicating a predominantly youthful workforce. In terms of experience, 47.5% had over 10 years of journalistic experience, suggesting substantial exposure to investigative reporting. About 62.5% of respondents worked in private media organizations, while 37.5% were affiliated with public institutions.

Table 4.1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	82	68.3
	Female	38	31.7
Age	21–30 years	34	28.3
	31–40 years	65	54.2
	41 years and above	21	17.5
Years of Experience	Less than 5 years	25	20.8
	5–10 years	38	31.7
	Above 10 years	57	47.5
Media Type	Public	45	37.5
	Private	75	62.5

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

4.2 Costs Associated with Investigative Journalism in Insurgency-Affected Northern Nigeria

Table 2 summarizes the major cost components of investigative journalism as perceived by respondents. Security-related risks ranked highest with a mean score of 4.52, followed by limited institutional support (4.10) and financial constraints (3.95). Respondents also identified psychological stress and censorship threats as substantial non-monetary costs. These findings corroborate Onyenankeya (2020), who observed that insecurity and lack of institutional protection undermine journalists' safety and productivity in Nigeria's North.

Table 4.2: Mean Ratings of Cost Components

Cost Component	Mean Score	Std. Dev.	Rank
Security risks and threats	4.52	0.63	1st
Institutional and editorial constraints	4.10	0.71	2nd
Financial expenditure on investigations	3.95	0.82	3rd
Psychological and emotional strain	3.70	0.85	4th
Legal and censorship pressures	3.60	0.90	5th

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

4.3 Benefits Derived from Investigative Journalism

Table 3 presents the perceived benefits of investigative reporting in insurgency-affected Northern Nigeria. The highest-rated benefit was promotion of accountability and transparency (mean = 4.45), followed by public enlightenment and awareness (4.32) and policy response to insecurity (4.20). These findings align with the conclusions of Petersen and Reuben (2021), who noted that investigative journalism in fragile states often triggers institutional reforms and fosters public participation in governance.

Table 4.3: Mean Ratings of Benefits of Investigative Journalism

Benefit Component	Mean Score	Std. Dev.	Rank
Promotion of accountability and transparency	4.45	0.65	1st
Public enlightenment and awareness	4.32	0.70	2nd
Policy response and reform outcomes	4.20	0.74	3rd
Strengthened media credibility and trust	4.05	0.81	4th
Empowerment of affected communities	3.95	0.83	5th

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

4.4 Cost–Benefit Ratio Analysis

A cost–benefit ratio (CBR) was computed to determine whether the benefits of investigative journalism outweigh its associated costs. The aggregate mean score for benefits (4.19) compared favorably to that of costs (3.97), yielding a CBR of 1.06:1. This indicates that, despite considerable risks and expenses, the net social and institutional benefits of investigative journalism remain slightly higher than the total costs incurred.

Table 4.4: Summary of Cost–Benefit Ratio Analysis

Indicator	Mean Score	Interpretation
Average Cost Index	3.97	High Cost
Average Benefit Index	4.19	High Benefit
Cost–Benefit Ratio	1.06:1	Benefits slightly outweigh costs

Source: Authors' Computation, 2025.

4.5 Discussion of Findings

The results suggest that investigative journalism in insurgency-affected Northern Nigeria is characterized by high operational risks and substantial financial and institutional challenges. Yet, the benefits derived—particularly in promoting accountability, transparency, and public awareness—slightly outweigh the costs. These findings validate earlier assertions by Uko and Omoera (2020) that investigative reporting remains an indispensable tool for democratic governance even in insecure contexts.

The analysis also reveals that while journalists face severe physical and psychological threats, their efforts contribute significantly to social justice and community resilience. This aligns with Aondover (2024), who emphasized that the social gains of journalism in conflict zones often extend beyond immediate news outcomes to long-term peacebuilding and governance reforms.

Overall, the study underscores the paradox of risk and value inherent in investigative journalism: the more hazardous the reporting environment, the higher the potential social payoff. This calls for strategic policy interventions to reduce the costs—especially those linked to safety and institutional weakness—while sustaining the broader societal benefits.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

This study examined the costs and benefits of investigative journalism in insurgency-affected Northern Nigeria using a mixed-method approach. The analysis revealed that while investigative journalism in conflict zones is constrained by severe security risks, limited institutional support, and inadequate funding, it nonetheless delivers substantial benefits in promoting accountability, transparency, and social awareness. The cost–benefit ratio of 1.06:1 demonstrates that, although the practice is economically and personally demanding, its societal contributions slightly outweigh the associated risks and expenditures.

The study concludes that investigative journalism in Northern Nigeria plays a critical role in strengthening democratic accountability and exposing abuses that perpetuate insecurity. However, its sustainability is threatened by the absence of robust safety mechanisms, economic insecurity among journalists, and institutional apathy from media organizations and government agencies. For investigative reporting to thrive as a credible watchdog in fragile contexts, structural reforms, financial support systems, and improved security collaboration are imperative.

5.2 Recommendations

- i. Government and security institutions should establish protective mechanisms and safety protocols for journalists operating in insurgency-affected areas. A formalized partnership between media practitioners and security agencies would help minimize exposure to risks while preserving the independence of the press. Furthermore, government should provide grant support and logistical incentives for credible investigative projects that address public accountability without compromising editorial freedom.
- ii. Media organizations should adopt institutional insurance and safety policies that cover field correspondents and investigative reporters. Capacity-building initiatives—such as training

on conflict-sensitive reporting and digital security—should also be intensified to strengthen professional resilience. Collaboration among investigative journalism outlets (e.g., PTCIJ, CJID, and Wadata Media) should be deepened to enable resource sharing and data-driven reporting in conflict environments.

- iii. International media development organizations and donor agencies should prioritize long-term funding models that support investigative journalism on governance, security, and human rights in Northern Nigeria. Beyond funding, donors should facilitate mentorship networks, safety infrastructure, and regional knowledge exchange among journalists reporting from high-risk areas to enhance sustainability and impact.

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