

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Social justice journalism incorporates a variety of practices and methods that seek to address social inequalities by investigating the underlying causes and effects of societal disparities such as poverty, racial discrimination, gender inequality, economic disparities, access to education and healthcare and environmental degradation through in-depth reporting, analysis and narratives. It also advocates for marginalised communities or individuals by amplifying the voices and experiences of silenced individuals and groups. Through empathic and human-centred storytelling, social justice journalists provide a platform for marginalised perspectives and narratives frequently excluded or underrepresented in mainstream media (Klugman, 2016). Also, this form of journalism promotes fairness and equity in society as its journalists are committed to holding power structures accountable and fostering a more just society. They do so by investigating and exposing corruption, violations of human rights and abuses of power in an effort to promote transparency, accountability and systemic change (Waisbord, 2018; Ferrucci & Canella, 2023). At its foundation, social justice journalism is motivated by the desire to shed light on systemic injustices and promote positive social change.

In social justice journalism, the investigative approach is a standard technique (Lasisi et al., 2023). That is, journalists who investigate social justice go beyond superficial reporting by conducting exhaustive research, interviews, data analysis and fact-checking. Frequently, their work entails unearthing intricate networks of power and privilege, thereby disclosing links between societal structures and the perpetuation of inequality. According to List (2023),

social justice journalists provide evidence-based narratives that challenge the status quo and empower readers to take action by means of their rigorous investigative reporting. This is the style of journalism that Agba Jalingo and ‘Fisayo Soyombo, two Nigerian investigative journalists practise. While Agba Jalingo’s journalistic activities are more popular and situated in Cross River State, Nigeria, ‘Fisayo Soyombo’s journalistic activities are more prominent in Southwest Nigeria, though he explores issues of socio-political injustices that involve the Federal Government of Nigeria and her ministries.

When individuals are unable to freely express their opinions or share information critical of powerful individuals or politically exposed people without fear of retribution, the vibrant exchange of ideas required for a healthy democracy is hampered (Massaro & Norton, 2020). This makes such a society a shrinking or closing civic space for social justice journalism, especially those whose journalism style is activist. Hossein et al. (2018) describe a shrinking civic space as the deterioration of the environment in which individuals and groups can not exercise their civil rights, engage in public discourse, and participate in civic activities for fear of reprisal. In a shrinking civic space, for instance, threats to the safety of journalists are a significant concern, as journalists who investigate and report on corruption, human rights violations and other controversial topics may be subject to physical violence, intimidation and harassment (Hossein et al., 2023). These hazards may, therefore, discourage journalists from pursuing critical stories and investigations that challenge powerful interests. For example,

in July 2016, journalist Jones Abiri was arrested on charges bordering on terrorism but some strongly believe his arrest was connected with some of his writings on government; in August 2019, journalist Agba Jalingo was arrested over an article he wrote about corruption in which he criticised the Governor of Cross River State, Benedict Ayade; in September, Murtala Tijjani, a student of Bayero University Kano, was arrested and detained for 59 days for criticising a legislator on Facebook; in October, Joseph Israel

was expelled from Taraba State University for criticising Governor Darius Ishaku of Taraba State on Facebook (Ojebode, 2019:3).

These Nigerians are either alternative media journalists or are using alternative media to advocate social justice. Sadly, some of the governors who arrested these Nigerians hid(e) under the guise of the Cyber Crime Act to shrink Nigeria's civic space.

In the midst of these challenges faced by journalists whose interest is social justice journalism which is hardly provided by the mainstream media, the journalists resort to alternative journalism practice. They resort to this form of journalism because alternative media outlets play a crucial role in advancing social justice journalism by providing platforms for marginalised perspectives, challenging dominant narratives and addressing issues that are frequently ignored by mainstream media (Ciszek, 2016; Tshabangu, 2019). That is, these media entities operate outside the confines of conventional media structures, allowing for a variety of perspectives and insights.

Moreover, alternative media entities actively challenge the dominant social narratives. They challenge the status quo by questioning established power structures, ideologies and conventional wisdom and by offering critical perspectives (Runhanya, 2014; Ataman & Çoban, 2018). In doing so, they provide a necessary counterbalance to the mainstream media and encourage audiences to query dominant narratives and investigate alternative interpretations. Alternative journalism also addresses neglected issues, for alternative media have the autonomy and flexibility to cover topics that the mainstream media may neglect or underreport (Holt, Ustad Figenschou & Frischlich, 2019). For instance, alternative media entities prioritise numerous topics such as social inequality, environmental justice, human rights violations, discrimination and grassroots activism. When alternative media journalists draw attention to these neglected societal issues, they increase public awareness and stimulate public debate and action.

Studies (e.g., Sandoval & Fuchs, 2010; Fuchs, 2010; Mihailidis, 2018; Alemany, 2020; Van Leeckwyck, 2019) have indicated that alternative media are essential in situations when social inequalities, conflicts and violence exist in social environments, for such media are vital instruments for the attainment of peace, accountability in governance, citizen empowerment, social change and participatory collectivism. Its potential to also achieve social change earns it the description of critical media (Fuchs, 2010).

In Jeppesen's (2016) submission, for example, alternative media demystify different power hegemonies that try to stifle citizens' freedom to be heard. Although it is true that there are underlining ideologies among journalists who practise alternative journalism, alternative media have been empirically proven to be worthwhile in reporting civil rights violations, mass protests in defence of good governance and social justice, alongside advocacy on government policies (Jeppesen, 2016). In fact, Apuke and Tunca's (2019) study reflects the significance of alternative media—the alternative medium they used for their empirical enquiry shows that the medium gave more prominence to reports about internally-displaced people in Nigeria than the conventional medium they compared. This result affirms that alternative media is a voice of the voiceless, and citizen media for citizens who have become aliens in their fatherland, economically and socio-politically. Alternative media, in this wise, become communication spaces for these voices (Spitulnik, 2017).

Therefore, conducting research on the roles of alternative media in promoting social justice journalism in Nigeria is of utmost importance as it will provide valuable insights into the evolving dynamics of the Nigerian media landscape, civic engagement, and social justice advocacy in the country. Specifically, studying the roles of alternative media in promoting social justice journalism in Nigeria will enhance our understanding of their impact on social justice advocacy in this country.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

As conventional media platforms often struggle to provide comprehensive coverage of marginalised voices and underrepresented issues, alternative media channels have filled this void by amplifying the voices of the unheard; thus, alternative media have emerged as a powerful catalyst for promoting social justice, heralding a new era of information dissemination and grassroots mobilisation.

Many scholars across the globe have conducted different studies on the intersection among alternative media, social justice and social journalism practice from varying conceptual, theoretical and methodological perspectives. Some areas covered by these scholars include new media roles in the changing journalism landscape in Europe (Andresen, Hoxha & Godole, 2017), the roles of alternative media, challenges and counter-surveillance in Turkey, Hong Kong, Zimbabwe, Chile and elsewhere (Barnes, 2015; Ataman & Çoban, 2018; Harlow, 2019; Tshabangu, 2019; Alemany, 2020; Robertson & Mourão, 2020; Erkmen, Ataman & Çoban, 2022; Harlow, 2022; Thorbjørnsrud & Figenschou, 2022; Luna, Toro & Valenzuela, 2022), activist use of digital media for democratisation (Bosch, Wasserman & Chuma, 2018) and social justice framing (Chiumbu, Reddy, Bohler-Muller, Gumede & Mtshengu, 2018), divergence and convergence between alternative and mainstream media (Cushion, McDowell-Naylor & Thomas, 2021; Aslan Ozgul & Veneti, 2021; Funk, Schultz & Landreville, 2023) as well as the interplay among social movement, mainstream and alternative media (Mak, 2022).

More studies have also focused on how mainstream and alternative media frame justice as well as represent social justice and social justice news (Moernaut, Mast, & Pepermans, 2018; Su, 2019; Steinke & Belair-Gagnon, 2021; Santos & Ndlovu, 2022), on principles of alternative media practice as witnessed in Taiwan (Chen, 2018), strategies employed by

alternative media organisations in shrinking civic spaces (Uiterkamp, 2021), agenda-setting functions of alternative and mainstream media in Norway, Sweden and Denmark (Nygaard, 2020) and China (Xu, 2022), alternative media and audiences' news consumption motives (Schwarzenegger, 2021) alongside alternative news production in a fragile democracy (Sarmiento, 2019).

From the above studies, three essential gaps are identified. One, none of the cited researchers investigated how alternative journalism is being practised or is promoting social justice in Nigeria, although a study by Lasisi et al. (2023) examined how 'Fisayo Soyombo's investigative and social justice journalism practice is impacting on social justice in Nigeria. It has been observed through the journalistic activities of some alternative media journalists in Nigeria (e.g., 'Fisayo Soyombo) alternative media in the country is empowering individuals and communities to challenge the status quo, expose social injustices, and foster a more inclusive and equitable society. The second gap is that none of the studies investigated how alternative media journalists utilise their media platforms to challenge power imbalance, represent dissenting voices and promote the socio-political empowerment of citizens. For the third gap, methodological, none of the identified studies combined qualitative content analysis with survey and in-depth interviews despite that some studies adopted a mixed method research approach. Those studies that used a mixed method only combined interviews with qualitative content analysis; ethnography with interviews or content analysis; case studies with interviews; interviews with participant observation; interviews with archival analysis; participant observation with interviews and critical discourse analysis among others.

Therefore, to fill these gaps identified in the literature, this study adopts a mixed-method approach to investigate how two investigative and social justice journalists in Nigeria, Agba

Jalingo and ‘Fisayo Soyombo, have used their investigative and social justice stories to promote social justice in Nigeria despite instances of shrinking civic space in the country.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

This study is driven by the following three research questions:

- i. How have Agba Jalingo and ‘Fisayo Soyombo used their platforms to challenge power imbalances in Nigeria?
- ii. How have Agba Jalingo and ‘Fisayo Soyombo used their platforms to represent or promote dissent in Nigeria?
- iii. How have Agba Jalingo and ‘Fisayo Soyombo promoted citizens’ empowerment through their practice?

### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

Generally, this study seeks to examine the role of alternative journalism in promoting social justice in a shrinking civic space, using the journalistic practices of two alternative media and investigative journalists in Nigeria, Agba Jalingo and ‘Fisayo Soyombo as cases. Specifically, however, the following key objectives aim:

- i. To evaluate how Agba Jalingo and ‘Fisayo Soyombo have used their platforms to challenge power imbalances in Nigeria.
- ii. To examine how Agba Jalingo and ‘Fisayo Soyombo have used their platforms to represent or promote dissent in Nigeria.
- iii. To investigate how Agba Jalingo and ‘Fisayo Soyombo have promoted citizens’ empowerment through their journalism practice.

## **1.5 Significance of the Study**

In several ways, it is hoped that the findings of this study will be beneficial to journalists and media practitioners, especially those who adhere to the principles of alternative journalism; advocates of social justice; communications researchers, knowledge production and media policy regulators.

Firstly, understanding the roles of alternative media in promoting social justice journalism can inform media practices and strategies in Nigeria. Journalists, media professionals and practitioners can benefit from the insights gained through the study, as it can provide guidance on effective approaches, best practices, and innovative methods employed by alternative media outlets. By incorporating these findings into their work, more alternative media practitioners can amplify marginalised voices, challenge dominant narratives and address neglected issues more effectively.

Secondly, for advocates of social justice, this study provides valuable evidence-based information that can empower their efforts in promoting social justice. By examining the specific contributions and impacts of the two journalists and their alternative media platforms, advocates of social justice will be provided with the knowledge that can inform and enhance their activities, especially those related to campaigns against social injustice, poor governance, human rights violations, corruption and mismanagement, among others. The findings can also empower social justice advocates with knowledge and evidence to strengthen their campaigns, mobilise support and drive positive social change in Nigeria.

Thirdly, in the realm of communications research, a study on the roles of alternative media in promoting social justice journalism contributes to the scholarly understanding of media dynamics, social justice communication and the Nigerian media landscape. By offering new perspectives, data and analysis, the research enriches theoretical frameworks, methodological



approaches, and research agendas within the field of communication studies. In fact, it serves as a foundation for further studies, enabling researchers to expand the body of literature on alternative media and social justice journalism within the Nigerian context. This, in turn, will foster a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the complex relationship between media, social justice, and civic engagement in Nigeria.

Moreover, it is hoped that the study's findings will influence policy and media regulations. By highlighting the contributions and challenges faced by the two alternative media journalists in focus, the research outcome will serve as an information repository that informs media policy regulators in Nigeria about the need to create an enabling environment for independent media and social justice journalism. Thus, such a move can contribute to policy discussions, advocacy for media pluralism and support for the protection of freedom of expression and access to information that cannot be ordinarily dug by non-investigative journalists. If this significance is achieved, the study can have a tangible impact on the media industry and the regulatory framework that governs it, ensuring that media practices align with social justice objectives.

Lastly, the study will contribute to the academic literature and scholarship on alternative media, social justice journalism, and media dynamics in Nigeria. The outcome of this research which will serve as an additional product to be included in the body of knowledge will enrich the academic discourse and stimulate critical thinking on media practices, civic engagement, and social justice advocacy in Nigeria. Essentially, this research can inspire further exploration and research, creating a foundation for ongoing academic inquiry and analysis.

## **1.6 Scope of the Study**

This study is delimited to forty-two (42) purposively selected investigative and social justice articles of Agba Jalingo and ‘Fisayo Soyombo. Twenty-one articles were selected for each of the journalists. For Agba Jalingo, all the 21 stories had his by-line. For ‘Fisayo Soyombo, however, the majority of the articles were written by him while very few were social justice stories published on his platform, *Foundation for Investigative Journalism (FIJ)*. Also, the articles were selected based on purposiveness and availability. Consequently, the time frame of the selected articles began in 2019 and end in 2023. In addition, based on availability and willingness, the researcher interviewed only ‘Fisayo Soyombo out of the two journalists whose journalistic activities were examined. Finally, the electronic questionnaire for the survey research method was filled out by Nigerian respondents who are familiar with the journalistic activities of Agba Jalingo or/and ‘Fisayo Soyombo.

## **1.7 Limitations of the Study**

There were two key limitations to this study. The first limitation is that one of the interviewees, Agba Jalingo, could not be reached for an interview appointment. Messages sent to his WhatsApp contact were not responded to, though the researcher could not verify whether he read the messages or not. Also, an attempt to call his mobile number proved abortive throughout the data collection period. The second limitation occurred in administering the electronic questionnaire to the real respondents that would strengthen the reliability of the instrument. Reaching out to those who know or/and read the pieces of writing of the two journalists was a herculean task, and the survey data took the researcher a while before he could complete the data gathering.

## 1.8 Operational Definition of Terms

**i. Social Justice:** A fair and equitable distribution of resources, opportunities and privileges in society, aiming to address and rectify systemic inequalities, discrimination and oppression based on factors such as race, gender, socioeconomic status or other marginalised identities.

**ii. Social Justice Journalism:** This is a form of journalism that focuses on reporting, investigating, and analysing news stories through the lens of social justice. It exposes social inequalities, highlights marginalised voices and perspectives and advocates positive social change.

**iii. Alternative media:** The independent media that exist outside the traditional channels of mass communication. They often provide alternative viewpoints, challenge dominant narratives and amplify marginalised voices and perspectives that may be overlooked in mainstream media. They include online publications, blogs, social media, community radio stations, independent documentaries and grassroots media initiatives.

**iv. Activist/radical media:** Another name for alternative media.

**v. Mainstream media:** They refer to the dominant and widely recognised forms of mass communication that reach a large audience, such as major television networks, radio stations, newspapers, and popular online news platforms.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter presents a critical review of some concepts, relevant previous studies and the theoretical framework driving the study. The first concept reviewed is the link among alternative journalism, ideological platforms and dissenting voices while the second concept dwells on four notable attributes of alternative journalism practice: digital social justice and activism, resistance and breach of mainstream journalism ethics, citizen empowerment and the public sphere as well as journalism practice in a fragile civic space. After the conceptual review, the critical social theory is comprehensively reviewed as the study's theoretical framework. The chapter concludes by reviewing relevant empirical studies on alternative media, social justice and shrinking civil space published from 2014 to 2023.

#### **2.1 Conceptual Review**

##### **2.1.1 Alternative Journalism, Ideological Platforms and Dissenting Voices**

The advent of digital technologies and social media has brought about significant changes in the field of journalism, including the rise of citizen journalism and alternative media. Citizen journalism refers to the practice of ordinary individuals, who are not professional journalists, engaging in news gathering, reporting and dissemination through online platforms, while alternative media encompasses non-mainstream media outlets that challenge the dominant narratives of traditional media (Tshabangu, 2019). Some of those traditional media narratives that alternative media challenge, according to the Institute for Integrated Transitions (2021), include polarisation implemented by amplifying divisive narratives, sensationalism, biased reporting, misinformation, disinformation as well as narratives that incite violence and exacerbate conflict. This does not mean that there are no responsible traditional media that manage conflict in polarised societies or even promote balanced and fact-checked reports as

well as contextualise complex issues that can mitigate polarisation and build trust among different ethnoreligious groups.

Put in another perspective, alternative media challenge the hegemonic tendency of the mainstream media (radio, television, newspapers and magazines) and provide critical and independent coverage of socio-political, cultural and economic issues that mainstream media will not ordinarily cover. Alternative media, most times, represents the viewpoints of underrepresented groups such as grassroots activists, social movements, marginalised communities and dissident voices. The content of these media is disseminated via online blogs, websites, social media accounts, online videos, podcasts, community radio and other non-traditional media platforms (Ataman & Çoban, 2018). These alternative media platforms are non-traditional because they offer the independence of ownership, content production and distribution to journalists who rely on the platforms for their journalistic assignments. Corroborating this description is Runhanya's (2014) study which argues that alternative media provide a platform for dissenting voices with a view to challenging the state-controlled media, and promoting democracy by providing critical coverage of opposition parties and their activities. This view—providing critical coverage of opposition parties—may be critiqued by scholars as biased; as such, it is better to rephrase this aspect of his findings to “promoting democracy by providing critical coverage of political parties and their activities.”

Holt, Ustad Figenschou and Frischlich, (2019) in their own submission, used five dimensions to describe alternative media. The first dimension is that alternative media often challenge dominant ideologies and power structures by providing alternative perspectives, narratives and voices that are marginalised, silenced, or excluded by mainstream media. Second, they are independent of the mainstream media and operate outside the dominant media landscape. That is, they always have different ownership structures, funding sources and editorial

policies. Third, the media adopt participatory and adopt citizen-driven approaches to news production and dissemination. That is, they may involve non-professional journalists or citizen journalists in the process of news production, and prioritise community engagement, activism, and civic participation. Four, they adopt unregulated platforms for news dissemination (e.g., online blogs, individual websites, social media accounts, etc.). Lastly, alternative media, most times, embrace alternative values, ideologies and norms that differ from those of the mainstream media. For instance, they may prioritise social justice, equality, sustainability and diversity.

Also, alternative media are ideological platforms where dissenting voices express their opinions, thereby describing the platforms as digital activism media. For instance, Ciszek (2016) asserts that social media platforms, with their ability to facilitate rapid and decentralised communication, have created spaces for dissensus (the presence of diverse opinions and conflicting views within a society or social group) to thrive in the realm of digital activism. Dissensus, promoted by ideological diversity, can therefore become a catalyst for social change, as it disrupts dominant narratives, challenges power structures and provides opportunities for marginalised voices from being heard (Ciszek, 2016). Although Ciszek's argument only emphasised the positive sides of digital activism, he remained silent on the dark sides of online activism.

Likewise, social media has become a prominent platform for dissent and activism, enabling individuals and groups to challenge dominant narratives and engage in counter-public discourse (Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2015). Using the case of #myNYPD (New York Police Department), which was initiated by the NYPD in an attempt to promote a positive image of the police force, as an example of digital activism, Jackson and Foucault Welles (2015) submit that images, stories and commentary that challenged the NYPD's attempts at

positive self-presentation were rapidly shared on Twitter, facilitated by the affordances of social media, such as the ability to share and amplify content. Then, the digital activism showcased some discourse such as critique, humour and storytelling with a view to challenging the dominant narrative of the NYPD. However, the hashtag was quickly hijacked by users who shared images and stories of police brutality and misconduct, transforming it into a platform for dissent and critique of the NYPD.

## **2.1.2 Notable Attributes of Alternative Journalism Practice**

### **2.1.2.1 Digital Social Justice and Activism**

In the era of digital media and globalisation, activism has taken on new forms and has been transformed by the influence of media and technology. The intersection of activism and media has led to the emergence of mediated activism, which refers to the use of media tools and platforms for organising, mobilising and advocating social change (Waisbord, 2018). Thus, one of the fundamental attributes of alternative media is that it is used as a platform for the promotion of online social justice and activism. According to Dowling (2021) who uses the case of *Unicorn Riot*, an alternative medium popular for its live streaming and on-the-ground reporting of social justice movements, protests and direct actions as an example, alternative media operate on the front lines of activism, often risking their safety to capture and disseminate information to the public. They immerse themselves in participatory journalism and are committed to airing the voices and perspectives of the silenced audiences, especially on issues related to social justice.

Through online activism practised by alternative media journalists, the democratisation of the media space is facilitated (Waisbord, 2018). Such media democratisation allows ordinary citizens to access and utilise media tools for activism. Since this media ownership challenges traditional power structures and gatekeeping mechanisms, allowing marginalised groups and

social movements to gain visibility and influence public discourse, democratisation and social change become the agenda-setting of alternative media. Despite these roles, Waisbord (2018) cautions that social media may not be a permanent panacea for activism, as it is subject to corporate control, surveillance and algorithmic filtering, which can shape and limit the visibility of activists'/alternative journalists' messages. Alternative journalists can also face backlash, repression and censorship from governments, as the governments may employ surveillance, disinformation and legal measures to undermine and suppress alternative journalism practices.

Essentially, Treré, Jeppesen and Mattoni (2017) shared their scholarly experience on how digital media shaped collective identities in anti-austerity movements in Greece, Italy and Spain. According to them, digital media facilitate the construction of collective identities in the countries by providing spaces for identity formation, articulation and representation. That is, such media enable activist journalists to construct counter-hegemonic identities that challenge mainstream discourses and create alternative narratives. In Greece, for example, alternative media constructed the identity of “resistant subjects” who challenge the dominant neoliberal ideology. In Italy, on the other hand, the digital counter-publics facilitated the formation of collective identities based on participatory democracy. In Spain, digital media were used to construct the identity of a global movement for social and economic justice (Treré et al., 2017).

#### **2.1.2.2 Resistance and Breach of Mainstream Journalism Ethics**

Another distinctive feature of alternative journalism is resistance coupled with non-adherence to the traditional code of journalism ethics. That is the more reason why alternative journalism is regarded as critical, radical or activist journalism in the literature (Rodríguez, Ferron & Shamas, 2014; Chen, 2018). According to Ferrucci and Canella (2023), activist



journalists engage in resistance journalistic practices, as they challenge established power structures and norms. When journalists follow this route of journalism, they are confronted with different ethical dilemmas and challenges, particularly in the context of the digital media landscape. Such may include the role of fact-checking and source verification in the era of resistance journalism, where speed and immediacy often take precedence over accuracy, and editorial independence alongside the potential conflicts of interest. Despite these challenges, resistance journalism amplifies the voices of the marginalised and holds powerful institutions accountable (Ferrucci & Canella, 2023).

From another scholarly perspective, Holt et al. (2019) view resistance as a form of challenging mainstream media and its dominant narratives. This happens because alternative news media are always associated with progressive, radical or dissenting views that resist mainstream ideologies and power structures. In fact, the ownership structure of alternative media may reflect resistance, thereby countering the concentration of media ownership and corporate control over information dissemination to the mainstream journalism practice.

Wasserman (2019) adds that journalists who practise alternative journalism may resist or challenge external pressures, such as political, economic or technological influences that may compromise journalistic integrity or independence. Instances of resistance forms they frequently adopt include resistance against censorship, government control, corporate interests, or other forms of external interference. When such resistance happens, the journalists, therefore, use their journalism practice to hold power accountable and resist efforts to undermine press freedom and journalistic practices.

Then, Al-Zo'by (2021) argues that alternative media journalists, as they practise resistance journalism, often breach the ethical provisions of traditional journalism. He avers that the ethical dilemmas journalists face in the global media environment are complex and

multifaceted. The fact that these journalists do not want to grapple with conflicting values and principles, such as truth-telling versus national interests or cultural sensitivity versus freedom of expression makes them breach the ethics that ordinarily subject their work to unworthy conversations. Similar to this is Lestari's (2019) work which focuses on the violation of journalistic ethics in online media. According to the researcher, ethical violations that can be observed in journalists using online journalism to practise include misinformation, sensationalism and clickbait. The ethical considerations are not limited to the content produced by these journalists, but also encompass the journalists' behaviours and practices.

### **2.1.2.3 Alternative Media, Citizen Empowerment and Public Sphere**

Social media, being one of the most frequently utilised media by alternative journalists, give people the unflinching opportunity to contribute opinions to the public sphere (Batorski & Grzywińska, 2018). According to Habermas, the public sphere emerged in 18th-century Europe as a realm separate from the state and the market, where citizens could engage in open, inclusive and reasoned deliberation to shape public opinion and influence decision-making. An ideal public sphere is characterised by democratic communication, free from the influence of power, where citizens could engage in public discourse on an equal footing, regardless of their social status or background. Habermas saw the public sphere as a critical space that facilitated the exchange of ideas, opinions and information, fostering rational deliberation, and promoting democratic participation (Bruns & Highfield, 2015). Thus, the democratisation of the public sphere empowers citizens to have free speech, though the freedom may become hate speech (Castelli Gattinara, 2017).

Corroborating Batorski and Grzywińska's (2018) submission, Kruse, Norris and Flinchum (2018) highlight the potential benefits of social media as a space for democratic deliberation, including increased access to information, opportunities for political mobilisation, and its

potential for marginalised voices to be heard. In spite of these positive sides of digital media as a form of alternative media, the polarisation of political discourse, the manipulation of public opinion through targeted advertising, and the erosion of trust in traditional media are some potential challenges of using social media in the political sphere.

Specifically, Sampedro and Avidad (2018) submit that digital media is an alternative and counterhegemonic space in the public sphere that challenges traditional power dynamics, promotes diverse voices and perspectives, and fosters democratic participation. Likewise, Vatikiotis (2017) argues that alternative media challenges conventional communication models and theories that are often centred around mass media and its traditional functions of gatekeeping, agenda-setting and framing. When these traditional models are disrupted by providing diverse, participatory and democratic forms of communication that challenge mainstream media's dominance, citizen/news consumers become empowered.

#### **2.1.2.4 Journalism Practice in a Fragile/Violence-Affected Civic Space**

The concept of civic space refers to the inclusive and enabling environment in which individuals and organisations can exercise their fundamental rights, such as freedom of expression, association and assembly, without undue restrictions or threats (Hossain et al., 2018). Put differently, civic space refers to the freedom of individuals and groups to exercise their rights to express their opinions, participate in public life and engage in civil society activities without fear of harassment, intimidation or repression (Brechenmacher & Carothers, 2019).

However, in recent years, civic space has been shrinking in various parts of the world (Brechenmacher & Carothers, 2019), including South-East Nigeria, where civil society organisations and activists face challenges in carrying out their legitimate activities (Alliances for Africa, 2021). Alliances for Africa's study, for example, reveals that civil

society organisations and human rights activists (including journalists) face the challenges of harassment, intimidation and violence from state and non-state actors. These challenges have led to government restrictions and challenged the country's legal and regulatory frameworks, socio-cultural norms and political dynamics.

In addition, governance is a critical aspect of development, as it influences how power is exercised, decisions are made, resources are allocated, and services are delivered. However, researching governance in difficult times and places, characterised by contexts of conflict, fragility and limited civic space presents unique challenges and requires innovative approaches. When Mohmand and Anderson (2023) provided insights and reflections on their experiences conducting research on governance in four challenging contexts (Mozambique, Myanmar, Nigeria, and Pakistan), they established that power relations, both formal and informal, play a critical role in influencing governance processes and outcomes. Importantly, this finding underscores the importance of understanding power relations and their implications for governance in difficult times and places. To defend civic space, Brechenmacher and Carothers argue that governments and civil society actors adopt certain strategies. Such strategies are legal advocacy, grassroots mobilisation, strategic communication and international advocacy.

In a report by Free Press Unlimited, Uiterkamp (2021) avers that independent/alternative journalism plays a crucial role in holding power to account, promoting transparency, and fostering democratic governance. But in a shrinking civic space, media freedom, freedom of expression and freedom of the press will be restricted. In fact, Governments will promulgate laws and regulations targeted at curtailing media independence. These legal instruments are used to target journalists and media organisations critical of the government. Another challenge (alternative) journalists face in a shrinking civic space is the increasing harassment,

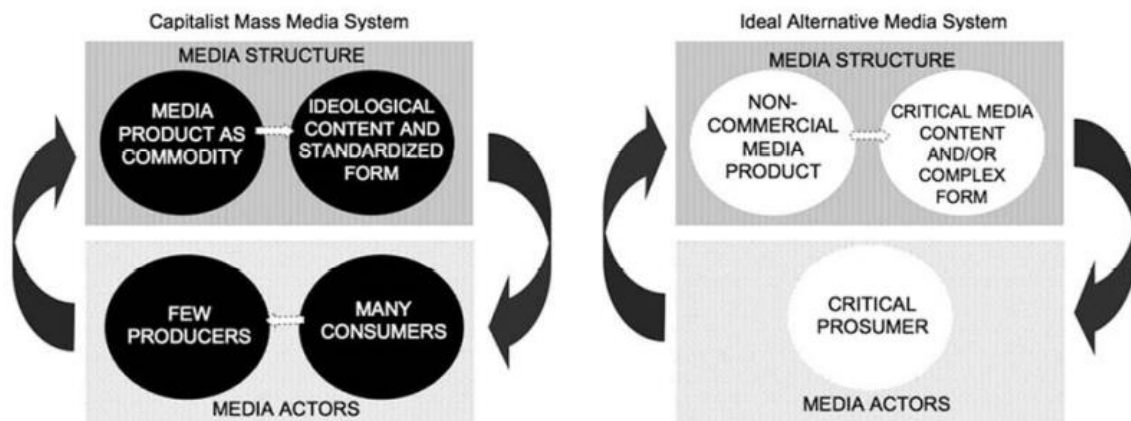
threats and violence against journalists. Journalists who investigate corruption, political malfeasance and human rights abuses are often subjected to intimidation, harassment and even physical assault. However, the author argues that despite these challenges, (alternative) journalists practising in a shrinking civil space adopt advocacy, legal actions, digital innovation, collaboration and building public trust as strategies to protect themselves and their media organisations.

## **2.2 Theoretical Framework: Critical Social Theory**

Historically, critical social theory can be traced to scholars and theorists in the Frankfurt School. It is a multidisciplinary theory with contributions from various scholars and thinkers such as Karl Marx, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, Jürgen Habermas, and Michel Foucault, among others (Ngwenyama, 1991; Bohman, 2005). Fundamentally, the theory assumes that “people have the power to change their world; knowledge of the social world is value-laden; reason and critique are inseparable; theory and practice must be interconnected; reason and critique must be reflexive in practice” (Ngwenyama, 1991:4)

According to Sandoval and Fuchs (2010), a critical social theory of alternative media, however, encompasses three key dimensions: critical, transformative, and emancipatory. The critical dimension involves interrogating the underlying power relations, ideologies and structures that shape media production, distribution and reception. The transformative dimension, on the other hand, emphasises the potential of alternative media to bring about social and political change by challenging dominant discourses and practices. Then, the emancipatory dimension highlights the role of alternative media in promoting social justice, participatory democracy, and grassroots mobilisation. These scholars, using this theory as a foundation, argue that alternative media is expected to go beyond providing an alternative platform for marginalised voices; rather, it should also engage in critical reflection,

transformative practices and emancipatory goals. This theoretical framework challenges the traditional liberal understanding of media as neutral tools for communication and instead posits media as tools of power struggles, ideologies and potential for social change. Figure 1 below captures Sandoval and Fuchs' (2010) position on this theoretical framework.



*Figure 1: Different philosophies of mainstream and alternative media; Sandoval & Fuchs (2010, p.145)*

The Figure indicates that the mainstream media see news production as a product to commodify by a small number of media professionals/producers. They sell ideologies and frames to large heterogenous audiences who are ready to consume the media content. On the contrary, the media structure of alternative media involves not-for-profit media content that is very critical of powerful individuals. The critical information reported by these media is therefore consumed by audiences who are also critical of the powerful individuals. Thus, they stand in solidarity with the critical media on their critical views of public discourse.

In summary, Table 1 below presents scholars' succinct explanations and assumptions of critical social theory as related to alternative media.

**Table 1: Main Assumptions of Critical Media Theory and the Derived Research Questions**

S/N	Theoretical Propositions	Research Questions
1.	Mainstream media is often controlled by a small group of powerful individuals or organisations, and this concentration of power leads to a skewed representation of reality. Alternatively, alternative media challenge these power imbalances and provide a more diverse range of perspectives ( <b>power imbalance</b> ) [Miloni, 2009].	How have Agba Jalingo and ‘Fisayo Soyombo used their platforms to challenge power imbalances in Nigeria?
2.	Alternative media challenge dominant cultural values and ideas and provide a platform for marginalised or dissenting voices ( <b>ideological bias</b> ) [Kenix, 2011a].	How have Agba Jalingo and ‘Fisayo Soyombo used their platforms to represent or promote dissent in Nigeria?
3.	By providing access to diverse perspectives and information, alternative media empowers citizens and promotes greater democracy (citizen empowerment) [Kenix, 2011b].	How have Agba Jalingo and ‘Fisayo Soyombo promoted citizens’ empowerment through their practice?

*Source: Author’s computation, 2023*

### **2.3 Empirical Review**

Alternative media, social justice journalism and journalism practice within shrinking or fragile civic spaces have received different scholarly attention across the globe, especially in the Global North and some countries of the Global South. For example, the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement that emerged in 2011 as a global protest against economic inequality and corporate power was Baysha’s (2014) interest. His study offers a critical examination of how the OWS movement was framed and constructed by the Russian media outlet, *Echo of Moscow*, shedding light on the discursive dynamics between corporate and alternative journalism in covering social movements. Adopting a qualitative content analysis approach to examine the news coverage of the OWS movement by the medium, the researcher found that *Echo of Moscow* employed a complex and multifaceted framing of the OWS movement, incorporating both corporate and alternative journalism perspectives. On

one hand, elements of corporate journalism such as a focus on official sources, a neutral tone and an emphasis on the legality and orderliness of the protests were identified in *Echo of Moscow's* coverage. On the other hand, the framing elements of alternative journalism (such as highlighting the grievances and demands of the protesters, and challenging the dominant narrative of mainstream media) were also identified in the medium's coverage of the protest. Importantly, the medium was able to explore these dual frames because of its position as an independent media outlet operating within a larger media environment characterised by government control and censorship.

In her 2016 study, Jeppesen provides a comprehensive analysis of the power dynamics within alternative media after examining the relationship among concepts such as theory, ideology, content, practice and political action within alternative media, shedding light on how alternative media challenges mainstream media and contributes to social and political change. She acknowledges that alternative media encompasses community radio, independent journalism, social media, and grassroots activism, and is not monolithic in its practices, ideologies, or political orientations. According to her, the content of alternative media, such as its themes, narratives and representations, is shaped by the practices of media practitioners such as their news gathering and dissemination methods, audience interactions and resource negotiations. She also argues that ideologies, such as anti-capitalism, anti-racism, and feminism, influence the content, practices and political actions of alternative media practitioners.

Andresen, Hoxha and Godole's (2017) study explores the changing roles of media in the Western Balkans, particularly in the context of transitional journalism. The authors argue that the media has played a crucial role in shaping the region's democratisation and the European Union (EU) integration process, and highlight the challenges that media professionals face in



navigating the complex political, economic, and social landscapes of the Western Balkans. The authors conducted interviews with media professionals, policymakers, and civil society representatives, as well as analysed media content and legal frameworks in each country. One of their key findings is the persistence of political and economic pressures on media professionals, despite the formal adoption of liberal democratic principles and institutions in the Western Balkans. The authors argue that the region's legacy of authoritarianism, nationalism and corruption continues to shape the media landscape, with media owners often having political affiliations and using their outlets to advance their interests. It was also found that media professionals in the Western Balkans face a range of challenges in carrying out their roles as watchdogs, educators and facilitators of public debate. These include legal restrictions on media freedom, lack of financial sustainability and editorial independence, limited professional development opportunities, and threats to personal safety and job security. However, the emergence of new forms of media such as online news portals and social media platforms were identified. These alternative media offer new opportunities for media pluralism and citizen engagement but present new challenges in terms of quality control and trustworthiness.

In an earlier study, Rodríguez, Ferron and Shamas (2014) highlighted the four major challenges in the field of alternative, radical and citizen media research. The challenges include the lack of consensus on what alternative, radical and citizen media mean and the need for a clear definition; the diversity of alternative media forms and the need for researchers to acknowledge and engage with this diversity; the tension between the goals of alternative media forms and the need for research to be objective and neutral, and the difficulty in measuring the impact of these media forms and the need for new research methods and metrics.

Hafdeh's (2014) examination of the role of social media as an alternative media platform in Turkey reveals that social media has emerged as a powerful tool for activists and citizens in Turkey to challenge the mainstream media's dominance and provide alternative narratives that challenge the government's narrative. This article offers several strengths that contribute to its significance in the field of media studies, particularly in the context of Turkey. One, it thoroughly analyses the potential of social media as an alternative media source. It also effectively showcases how social media has been used as a tool for mobilisation, information dissemination and political engagement in Turkey, particularly during times of political unrest. Also, it presents a detailed understanding of the challenges faced by alternative media in Turkey, such as censorship, surveillance and the digital divide.

Chen, in 2018, explores the concept of civil media in Taiwan, questioning whether it should be classified as alternative or radical media. The article examines the historical and cultural context of civil media in Taiwan, the different approaches and practices of civil media actors, and the challenges and potentials of civil media in Taiwan. According to Chen, Taiwanese civil media refers to media practices driven by civic engagement, independent from commercial interests or state control, and seek to promote democratic participation, social justice and public accountability. He argues that civil media in Taiwan emerged in the 1980s and 1990s as a response to the limitations of mainstream media in addressing social issues and promoting democratic values. One of the key arguments made by Chen is the distinction between alternative and radical media. He defines alternative media as media that provides an alternative perspective or voice to mainstream media, but still operates within the existing media system and may seek reform within the established political and economic framework. On the other hand, radical media challenge the dominant political and economic structures, seek to fundamentally transform the existing media system, and may advocate revolutionary change. However, Chen argues that Taiwanese civil media does not fit neatly into either

category, as it displays characteristics of both alternative and radical media. The challenges of these media include limited resources and funding, censorship, legal restrictions, and social and cultural norms. Despite these challenges, civil media has played a crucial role in shaping public discourse, promoting democratic participation, fostering social change, raising awareness about marginalised issues, amplifying the voices of marginalised groups, and holding those in power accountable.

In another study by Van Leeckwyck (2019), the printed alternative media landscape in French-speaking Belgium was explored. The author notes that alternative media in Belgium emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as a response to the limitations of mainstream media in representing diverse voices, addressing social inequalities and promoting democratic participation. He argues that the French-speaking alternative media in Belgium are characterised by their independent, non-commercial and participatory nature, seeking to provide a counterbalance to the dominant media landscape. He argues that the Belgian alternative media often engage in advocacy journalism, where journalistic practices are intertwined with activist objectives. These media prioritise social justice, political activism and grassroots movements over traditional journalistic norms of objectivity and neutrality.

In Ataman and Çoban's (2018) exploration of the role of counter-surveillance (using encryption tools to protect communication from government surveillance) and alternative new media in Turkey, it was established that counter-surveillance is an important tool for activists and journalists in Turkey, given Turkey's extensive surveillance capabilities and the high level of risk faced by dissents who speak out against the government. The study was able to establish the fact that alternative new media and counter-surveillance promote free speech and challenge the arbitrary powers and control of the government. In fact, alternative media, as argued by the researchers, are essential tools for activists and journalists in Turkey,

as the tools enable them to circumvent censorship as well as surveillance and disseminate information that would otherwise be suppressed had such information passed through the mainstream media.

Another study that used Turkey as a research setting is Erkmen, Ataman and Çoban's (2022). Presenting a critical literature review on the challenges faced by women journalists in Turkey, they explored the increasing threats, harassment and violence experienced by female journalists in the country's alternative news media. The dominant challenges women alternative media journalists confront in Turkey include gender-based violence and harassment, often exacerbated by the government's policies as well as online threats and insults. Therefore, fear of violence and harassment of this nature, according to the authors, can lead to self-censorship, with female journalists avoiding certain topics or refraining from reporting on sensitive issues. This self-censorship will limit the diversity of voices in the media and undermine the journalism role of promoting democracy and human rights.

Away from the above studies, Aslan Ozgul and Venetis' (2021) study on the organisational structures of alternative media and the perspectives of alternative media journalists in Turkey and Greece reveals that alternative media organisations have different organisational structures shaped by factors such as political and economic conditions, cultural norms and technological penetration. The authors argue that understanding the organisational structures of alternative media is important for understanding their ability to challenge mainstream media and promote alternative perspectives. Essentially, alternative media organisations have different organisational structures (e.g., hierarchical, networked, and hybrid structures). The authors argue that these different structures are shaped by various factors, including political and economic conditions, cultural values and the role of technology. However, the argument remains that alternative media organisations face unique challenges in maintaining their

independence and sustainability and that understanding the organisational structures of alternative media can help address the identified challenges.

Moreover, Alemany (2020) used a case study method to examine the role and identity of two alternative media outlets in Hong Kong, Radical HK and WK News. Having conducted a mixed-methods approach that combines content analysis, interviews and participant observation to analyse the websites and social media platforms of both outlets and conduct interviews with their editors and contributors, he found that both Radical HK and WK News are activist-oriented alternative media outlets that seek to provide alternative perspectives on social and political issues in Hong Kong. These media platforms distinguish themselves from mainstream media by focusing on social justice-related issues. They are also willing to challenge dominant narratives, as they rely largely on citizen journalism practice and contributions from the community to produce content. However, the two media promoted different political ideologies in the content they did publish.

In recent years, alternative journalism websites have gained popularity as platforms for expressing diverse opinions and engaging in public discourse. One such website is *New Matilda*, an Australian alternative journalism website that covers a wide range of social, political and cultural issues. Using *New Matilda* as a case, Barnes (2015) qualitatively explored the emotional and affective aspects of commenting on the medium, including the reasons for commenting, the emotional experiences associated with commenting, and the role of commenting in shaping online communities. He conducted semi-structured interviews with 15 regular commenters on the medium. Three key findings emerged. One, commenting on *New Matilda* served as a form of emotional expression, allowing commenters to voice their opinions, frustrations, and emotions about social and political issues. This is a way of participating in public debates and making their voices heard. Two, commenting on the

medium created a sense of community among commenters, for they identified themselves as part of a like-minded group that shared similar values and beliefs. Lastly, commenting was influenced by the emotional responses received from other commenters. That is, positive responses, such as agreement and support, reinforced commenters' emotional investment, while negative responses, such as criticism and hostility, led to emotional distress and frustration.

Mihailidis (2018) argues that in today's digital age, civic engagement requires a new set of literacies that can enable individuals to actively participate in the public sphere. According to him, civic media literacies, which include digital, critical and civic literacies, are needed to support citizens' ability to engage in public discourse, media production and civic action. With these literacies in place, promoting a more participatory democracy and social justice will become feasible. When Steinke and Belair-Gagnon (2020) explored how emotions are constructed and used in social justice news, they argued that social justice journalism involves emotional labour, a concept referring to the management of emotions to create meaningful and impactful news stories. That is, journalists must manage their emotions and their sources' emotions in order to create impactful social justice news stories. According to the two researchers, social justice journalists use a variety of emotional strategies such as the use of affective language, personal stories, and emotional appeals to present their social justice stories.

Using a South African context, Bosch, Wasserman and Chuma (2018) analyse the ways in which the country's activists use nano-media (offline and low-tech communication strategies) and digital media (online and high-tech communication strategies) to advance their political goals. South-African activists place more interest in the use of nano-media and digital media, for they are viewed as critical tools for activists in democratisation conflicts, as these media

forms allow for rapid information dissemination, action coordination and support mobilisation. According to Dowling (2020) whose work explored how Dalit magazines in India served as crucial mediums for mobilisation, awareness and advocacy for the marginalised Dalit community, the magazines were significant for grassroots journalism and activism, providing a platform for people's voices to be heard and raising important questions about caste-based discrimination, social inequality and political resistance.

Also, within the South African context, Chiumbu, Reddy, Bohler-Muller, Gumede and Mtshengu (2018) examined the framing of socioeconomic rights in selected South African newspapers within the purview of qualitative content analysis and found that the South African media shape public perceptions of socioeconomic rights and social justice for the poor. Essentially, three frames were identified by the authors—the welfare frame, the rights-based frame, and the development frame. The welfare frame (50% of the analysis) portrays the poor as passive recipients of aid and charity, while the rights-based frame (23% of the analysis) emphasises the importance of social and economic rights. The development frame (27% of the analysed articles), on the other hand, portrays the poor as a potential economic resource for the country.

In addition, Hossain et al.'s (2018) exploration of the implications of shrinking civic space for development, and the ways in which civil society actors can respond to these challenges reveals a growing global closing of civic space, a situation that restricts citizens' ability to participate in public life and engage with government and civil society organisations, thereby posing enormous threats to development outcomes. Drawing on case studies from Bangladesh, Cambodia, Kenya and Uganda to illustrate the ways in which the closing of civic space has affected development initiatives in these countries. Hossain et al. argue that when citizens are unable to participate in public life and engage with government and civil society

organisations, development initiatives are undermined. Civic participation is an essential ingredient of democracy and a critical component of effective governance and delivery of public services.

Sarmiento's (2019) scholarly article explores the changing landscape of news reporting in Brazil, specifically focusing on the emergence of alternative forms of journalism. He argues that these alternative forms of journalism offer unique perspectives, voices and content that are often marginalised or excluded from the mainstream media. According to him, these alternative news platforms promote civic engagement, participatory democracy and social change in Brazil, as they provide opportunities for citizens to share their opinions, concerns and stories.

When Moernaut, Mast and Pepermans (2018) explored the representation of environmental justice in mainstream and alternative media using a multimodal analysis of media texts, they argued that mainstream media tend to frame environmental issues in ways that prioritise the perspectives and experiences of the dominant, often white and affluent while alternative media tend to provide more diverse and inclusive perspectives that prioritise marginalised groups. For example, they found that mainstream media prioritise the perspectives and experiences of the dominant groups, often framing environmental issues in ways that emphasise the economic costs and benefits of environmental policies. In contrast, alternative media prioritise the perspectives and experiences of marginalised groups, highlighting the ways in which environmental issues intersect with issues of race, class, and gender.

Also, examining the meanings and uses of alternative media within the context of a hybrid audience that engages with both alternative and mainstream media sources, Rauch (2015) argues that alternative media is not a fixed category, but rather a contested and fluid term that is subject to negotiation and reinterpretation by different audiences. With the use of



qualitative interviews, Rauch finds that participants had a range of different understandings of what constitutes alternative media, with some viewing it as a distinct and oppositional category to mainstream media and others seeing it as a complementary or hybrid form of media that combines elements of both alternative and mainstream media. In 2016, the same Rauch explored the relationships between alternative media and mainstream media in a converged environment, arguing that alternative media provide critical voices and diverse perspectives that are often absent from mainstream media. However, alternative media faced additional challenges that mainstream media hardly face. As Rauch notes, convergence has led to the consolidation of media ownership and the homogenisation of news content. As such, this has made it difficult for alternative media to gain visibility and legitimacy in the mainstream media landscape. However, convergence has also created opportunities for alternative media to reach wider audiences through online platforms and social media. This implies that despite the challenges faced by alternative media, they remain an important counterforce to the dominant narratives in mainstream media as they contribute to the democratisation of media and the promotion of social justice.

In addition, the widespread use of social media has transformed the dynamics of news consumption and sharing, particularly during moments of social and political upheaval. The 2019 Chilean uprising, a period of massive protests and social mobilisation in Chile, provides a unique context to study how alternative and traditional media are shared on social media platforms. That was why Luna, Toro and Valenzuela (2022) investigated the patterns of news sharing on social media during the Chilean uprising, using a quantitative analysis of Twitter data. They argued that social media played a significant role in amplifying counter-public spheres, defined as spaces where alternative voices and perspectives are shared, during the Chilean uprising. They further argued that alternative media, characterised by their critical

stance towards the government and mainstream media, were more likely to be shared and amplified on social media compared to traditional media.

Mayerhöffer (2021) conducted a qualitative content analysis study on how Danish right-wing alternative media position themselves against the mainstream by analysing the websites of six Danish right-wing alternative media outlets and their corresponding Facebook pages. The study identifies framing of the mainstream media as biased, elitist and politically correct while positioning themselves as defenders of free speech, truth and the interests of ordinary people as the discursive strategies used by the media outlets. Also, Facebook was viewed as a key platform for these outlets to reach and engage with their audiences, thereby allowing them to bypass traditional media gatekeepers and establish their own media ecosystem. The implication of this finding is that it underscores the significance of social media in shaping the dynamics of alternative media and their relationship with the mainstream media.

In 2019, Harlow argued that digital-native news sites emerged in Latin America as an alternative to mainstream media outlets that had historically been dominated by a small group of powerful corporations. According to her, these digital-native news sites are often run by young, socially and politically engaged journalists who are using new technologies to challenge the dominant narrative of mainstream media. The study reveals how digital technologies facilitate alternative media's emergence in Latin America—digital-native news sites have been able to leverage social media and other digital platforms to reach a wider audience. Although Harlow acknowledges the challenges of these sites as funding constraints and government censorship, she was silent on A detailed analysis of these challenges and their potential impact on the sustainability and effectiveness of the sites.

In Zimbabwe, a country with a history of government censorship and media repression, citizen journalism and alternative media have emerged as important means of expressing

citizen voices and promoting democratic participation. Thus, Tshabangu's (2019) ethnographic study sheds light on the ways in which citizens participate in news production and dissemination, as well as the discourses that shape their practices. The study finds that citizen journalists at *AMH Voices* (a prominent alternative medium in the country) play a critical role in filling the information gap left by mainstream media due to government censorship and repression. Citizen journalists use digital technologies and social media to gather news from diverse sources, including eyewitness accounts, social media posts and local communities, and disseminate it through alternative media channels.

Findings also indicate that citizen journalists at *AMH Voices* used triangulation, fact-checking, source verification and editorial decision-making (such as selecting news stories, framing them, and prioritising their dissemination) as strategies to verify the information they receive. However, the study also reveals that citizen journalists face challenges such as limited resources, lack of professional training, and potential risks to their safety and security, thereby posing ethical dilemmas and raising questions about the reliability and credibility of citizen-generated content. A significant implication of this study is that it points our attention to the fact that citizen participation of this nature, despite its several obstacles, challenges the traditional gatekeeping role of professional journalists and empowers ordinary citizens to become active participants in the news-making process.

Similarly, Pain and Chen (2019) conducted a qualitative study by interviewing 12 citizen journalists with a view to exploring how citizen journalists in India perceive their role in social transformation within the constructs of their motivations, perceptions and experiences. First, the interviewed citizen journalists were motivated by a sense of social responsibility and a desire to make a difference. According to them, they are agents of change, using their platform to raise awareness about social issues, challenge mainstream narratives, and

promote social justice. Second, the journalists perceived their role as complementary to mainstream media, though with the belief that they are filling the gaps left by mainstream media in covering marginalised issues and providing diverse perspectives on public discourse. Third, the journalists faced various challenges in their role as agents of social transformation such as threats, harassment, and censorship from authorities, as well as social stigma and backlash from their communities. Despite these challenges, however, they expressed a strong sense of commitment and passion for their work, viewing it as a meaningful approach to contributing to positive social change.

Furthermore, Uiterkamp's (2021) interest lies in the challenges and strategies of media in Europe that resist shrinking civic space. After analysing the challenges faced by independent media, including threats to press freedom, censorship and attacks on journalists, and examining the strategies employed by media organisations to resist these challenges, he argues that independent media organisations encounter increasing restrictions, including threats to press freedom, censorship and attacks on journalists, which are limiting their ability to function freely and hold power accountable. The strategies employed by media organisations to resist these challenges include legal action, advocacy efforts and collaborations with civil society groups.

Then, Robertson and Mourão's (2020) study delves into the self-presentation strategies employed by websites that are often categorised as purveyors of fake news. The essence of the study was to understand how the alternative news websites construct their online identities and create an illusion of credibility to deceive readers. Through a thorough qualitative content analysis of the content, design, and features of these websites, the authors identify three main self-presentation strategies: mimicking established news organisations, exploiting partisan biases, and utilising clickbait techniques. In mimicking established news

organisations, they used similar design elements, such as professional-looking layouts, logos, and formatting, to create an illusion of credibility and legitimacy and adopt similar language and style, imitating the tone and journalistic conventions of reputable news sources. For partisan biases, the fake alternative media cater to specific ideological or political groups and use sensationalist and emotionally charged language to appeal to the biases of their target audience. Lastly, in using clickbait techniques as a self-presentation strategy, the websites often utilise sensational headlines, exaggerated claims, and provocative images to entice readers to click on their articles. Once readers are drawn in, the sites often present distorted or misleading information, which may lack credible sources or evidence.

Cushion, McDowell-Naylor and Thomas' (2021) longitudinal research on the relationship between mainstream and alternative media in the UK reveals that the political orientation of alternative media outlets influences their critiques of mainstream media. For instance, left-wing alternative media outlets criticised mainstream media for its corporate bias, framing of news events, and lack of diversity while right-wing alternative media outlets criticised mainstream media for its perceived liberal bias and political correctness. In fact, the study gives some hints on the role that the national media system plays to shape the media landscape. Specifically, the UK's media system, which is largely dominated by a few large corporations, limits the diversity of voices and perspectives that are represented in the mainstream media. Therefore, alternative media outlets challenge the dominant practice of the mainstream media.

Another study explores the epistemologies, news consumption patterns and media practices of users of alternative news media (Schwarzenegger, 2021). Her study joins other scholarly arguments which argue that alternative news media provide diverse perspectives and challenge dominant narratives in mainstream media, though the audiences of alternative news

media are criticised for being biased, misinformed and ideologically dependent. In terms of epistemology or the ways in which individuals form beliefs and knowledge, this study submits that alternative news media appeal to individuals who reject mainstream epistemologies and are skeptical of mainstream sources of knowledge shaped by socio-cultural factors such as political affiliation and identity. In terms of media practices and news consumption patterns of alternative news media, however, the media form attracts audiences who seek alternatives to sharing information such as social media.

Similarly, Nygaard's (2020) study, "Boundary work: Intermedia agenda-setting between right-wing alternative media and professional journalism," is an insightful analysis of the dynamics between professional journalism and right-wing alternative media in the US as it explores how these two forms of media interact and influence each other in shaping public discourse, specifically focusing on intermedia agenda-setting. Having adopted two qualitative research methods, findings indicate that the alternative medium, Breitbart, engages in boundary work to establish its legitimacy as a news source by adopting strategies such as attacking mainstream media outlets as biased and elitist, framing issues in a way that is consistent with its ideological perspective, and using social media to bypass traditional gatekeepers and reach its audience directly. Also, the medium succeeded in setting the agenda for mainstream media outlets on special political stories such as the controversy surrounding Hillary Clinton's emails in the 2016 US presidential election. However, the mainstream media often pushes back against the alternative medium's framing of issues and resists being influenced by a media outlet perceived as ideologically extreme and unreliable.

Thorbjørnsrud and Figenschou's (2022) study is an exploration of the relationship between alternative media, fear and mistrust in contemporary society. Arguing that alternative media sources significantly shape individuals' perceptions of reality and strengthen democracy, the

two authors further argue that alternative media sources have become increasingly important in shaping individuals' perceptions of reality, especially on issues related to politics, economics and culture. As previously established, alternative media often appeals to audiences who feel disenchanted with mainstream institutions, especially when they feel that their concerns and perspectives are not represented in the mainstream media. Mistrust, according to them, is often a key reason why audiences turn to alternative media sources for information.

Proposing a normative framework for social justice journalism, Santos and Ndlovu (2022) submit that journalism should be guided by principles of equality, diversity and human rights and that it should work towards challenging power imbalances and promoting social change. Social justice journalism, studies show, promotes social justice by providing a platform for marginalised voices, challenging power structures and promoting social change. According to Santos and Ndlovu, this demands that journalists move beyond the traditional norms of objectivity and balanced reporting to a more critical and engaged reportage.

Furthermore, Mak's (2022) research dwelled on the impact of journalists' mutual attention on the differentiation between traditional and alternative media, using a survey of journalists in Hong Kong. The researcher finds that journalists who pay more attention to social movements are more likely to differentiate between traditional and alternative media. In specific terms, journalists who pay more attention to social movements are more likely to view alternative media as more credible and trustworthy than traditional media. One important significance of this study is that it provides valuable insights into the relationship between social movements and media coverage as it highlights the importance of critical events in shaping the media's framing of issues, and underscores the need for journalists to

pay close attention to social movements with a view to differentiating between traditional and alternative media.

Likewise, Xu (2022) presents a comparative analysis of the ways in which mainstream and alternative media sources shape online mobilisation, using post-colonial Macau as a context. In his submission, alternative media sources facilitate online mobilisation by providing a platform for dissenting voices and enabling media audiences and journalists to bypass mainstream media gatekeepers. *Macau Daily News*, being a mainstream medium, represented a more traditional and conservative approach while *Macau Concealers*, the alternative medium, represented a more critical and dissenting approach. Specifically, *Macau Concealers* was able to shape online mobilisation because it provided a counter-narrative to the dominant discourse of mainstream media sources and was able to mobilise support around the issue of land reclamation by framing it in terms of environmental protection and social justice.

Lastly, the study by Funk, Schultz and Landreville (2023) titled “Taking Alternative Routes? Examining Mainstream and Alternative Media Consumption Based on Political Identity” investigates how political identity influences media consumption patterns among the US population. Specifically, they used a mixed-methods approach to explore the differences in media preferences between the audiences who identify themselves as Democrats or Republicans, and those who consume mainstream or alternative media sources. According to the authors, Democrats were more likely to consume mainstream media sources, such as CNN and The New York Times, while Republicans were more likely to consume alternative media sources, such as Breitbart and Fox News.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This study adopts a mixed-method research design. The methods are Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA), In-Depth Interview (IDI) and Survey. Qualitative Content Analysis was used to examine the textual content of selected investigative and social justice articles written by the two alternative media journalists and/or published on their media platforms. QCA was considered because it enabled the researcher to provide an in-depth evaluation of how the selected journalists use their articles to challenge power imbalances between the powerful and the oppressed. Also, the method allowed the researcher to capture the contexts and meanings of the study's data by uncovering underlying themes, interpreting the implicit meanings, and exploring the socio-political and individual factors that shape the phenomenon being studied (Shava, Hleza, Tlou, Shonhiwa & Mathonsi, 2021). Thus, this method was used to examine how the journalists are using their articles to challenge power imbalance in Nigeria. It was also used to investigate how their articles promote dissenting voices in the country.

Another method employed for this study is In-Depth Interviews (IDI). An IDI session was conducted with 'Fisayo Soyombo with a view to providing a human voice to the analysed QCA data. Specifically, IDI sought the journalist's insights into how he is using alternative journalism through investigative and social justice journalism practice to challenge powerful individuals and politically exposed people and institutions in Nigeria, thereby promoting social justice. The method also enabled the researcher to dwell on how Soyombo has been promoting social justice by representing or promoting the voices of dissent, vulnerable and marginalised Nigerians in his journalistic activities.

The choice of IDI was to provide human voices in the analysed textual data to complement the content analysis. This method also provided insights into the personal experiences of alternative media journalists, provided an opportunity to explore alternative journalism practice in greater depth and provided first-hand accounts and perspectives from the experienced journalists as well as revealed narratives hidden in the news articles. Also, with IDI, the researcher gained more insights from the personal experiences of the journalist. The researcher equally had the opportunity of collecting first-hand accounts and perspectives of alternative journalism practice from the experienced journalist, thereby revealing narratives hidden in his analysed articles.

The last method deployed in this study is survey. This method was used to find out the impact of the journalists' stories on their audiences. The impact was measured by the level of citizen empowerment the audiences had attained after being exposed to the journalists' stories. As such, an electronic questionnaire was designed with close-ended questionnaire items. The researcher resorted to close-ended items because they simplify analysis by supplying structured and quantifiable data, achieve consistency by providing all respondents with the same response options, save time, reduce ambiguity, and simplify data collection, thereby increasing response rates and improving data quality. Close-ended questions also generate quantitative data that can be analysed statistically. In addition, some questions were designed using a Likert Scale approach. The Likert Scale approach helped the researcher quantify respondents' responses to questions, remain consistent in a systematic way, balance respondents' response options as well as achieve easy and flexible interpretation of findings.

### **3.2 Study Population**

The population for the study comprises alternative media journalists in Nigeria alongside their alternative media stories, particularly articles written in their by-lines, pen names or pseudonyms and published on their media platforms or other platforms that resonate with their ideological leaning. It also includes the journalists' alternative media platforms such as news websites and social media accounts (especially Twitter). Specifically, this study limits its data collection to the 42 selected articles of Agba Jalingo and 'Fisayo Soyombo, two investigative and social justice journalists in Nigeria; an interview session with 'Fisayo Soyombo alongside an electronic survey with readers of the journalists' pieces of writing. Who are these journalists? How do their journalistic activities look like?

Agba Jalingo is a Nigerian journalist, human rights activist and publisher of *CrossRiverWatch*, an online news platform. The outlet publishes investigative reports on corruption and human rights abuses in Cross River State and Nigeria. Jalingo's reporting has often been critical of the Cross River State government and its governor, Ben Ayade. In 2019, the journalist was arrested and charged with terrorism after he published an article alleging that Ayade had diverted N500 million (about \$1.2 million) in state funds. He was detained for 179 days before the charges were dropped. In 2022, he was arrested again and charged with cybercrime after he published an article alleging that Ayade's wife, Elizabeth Ayade, had paid someone to take a law school exam for her. He was released on bail after one week in detention. His radical approach to journalism which challenges political powers has been the primary reason for his several arrests.

On the other hand, 'Fisayo Soyombo is a Nigerian investigative journalist and founder of the *Foundation for Investigative Journalism (FIJ)*, a non-profit organisation that investigates corruption and other social ills in Nigeria. He is best known, among other things, for being the Nigerian undercover journalist who spent five days in a police cell as a suspect and eight

as an inmate in Ikoyi Prison — to track corruption in Nigeria's criminal justice system, after which the authorities contemplated arresting him. Soyombo is an advocate for press freedom and freedom of expression. He is a powerful voice for the voiceless and a beacon of hope for journalists around the world who are fighting injustice.

### **3.3 Sampling Techniques**

Three sampling techniques were used for this study. They are purposive, snowball and convenience sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was used to select Agba Jalingo (South-Eastern Nigeria) and 'Fisayo Soyombo (Southwestern Nigeria) whose journalism practices promote citizen empowerment, activism, advocacy, social justice and social change. Agba Jalingo and 'Fisayo Soyombo were purposively selected because of their investigative journalism experiences and experiences in holding the government and the powerful elite accountable as well as their practice in using their news platforms to unmute silenced/marginalised voices. They are both radical journalists whose activism-like journalism practice is dreaded by the political class in Nigeria.

A purposive sampling technique was also used to select 42 of their investigative and social justice articles (21 for each journalist). Articles were selected because they give room for the researcher to evaluate the ideological stance of the selected journalists through their contextual use of language. Two inclusion criteria were used to select their articles. One, the articles must bear their names—real, pseudonyms or pen names. Two, the articles must be published on their websites, social media platforms (Twitter in this context) or/and the websites of their previous employers.

In addition, a purposive sampling technique was used to select 'Fisayo Soyombo for IDI. He was selected because the researcher deemed it significant to complement non-human primary research (GCA) with a human primary data source so that the argument presented in the

findings becomes strengthened. The journalist was also considered because of his experiences in investigative and social justice journalism practice. For the survey method, however, purposive and snowball sampling techniques were adopted to select respondents. It was purposive because only respondents who are familiar with the journalistic activities of the journalists or either of them were eligible to fill out the e-questionnaire. It was snowball because the researcher adopted the principle of referral to collect data from respondents whom he did not contact directly. After using purposive and snowball techniques, the researcher includes convenience sampling, a situation whereby only the respondents willing and available to participate in the survey would be considered.

### **3.4 Sample Size**

Although having a strict sample size figure is not a major consideration in qualitative studies (Guest, Namey & Mitchell, 2013), this study analysed 42 articles written by the two journalists—21 news articles for each journalist. With this number of purposely selected articles, this study attained theoretical saturation (Saunders et al., 2018). Then, only one journalist who has had an experience in alternative media practice was interviewed. However, for survey, since no definite population could be ascertained as readers of the journalists' articles, the researcher adopts Kline's (2005, 2016) and Glenn's (1992) sample size suggestions. According to Kline, a study with normal data distribution requires a sample size of between 100 to 200. However, Glenn states that when there is  $\pm 10\%$  precision level where the confidence level is 95% and  $P=0.5$  for a population of  $>100,000$ , the sample size of 100 suffices. Therefore, a sample size of 101 respondents was drawn for this study.

### **3.5 Instrumentation**

The study's research instruments are a coding scheme, an In-depth Interview (IDI) guide and an electronic questionnaire. The content-analysed categories in the coding scheme and the

items in the IDI guide were inductively designed from the three research questions driving this study.

### **3.5.1 Units of Analysis**

Words, phrases, sentences and contexts in the selected headlines and articles are units of analysis for the formulated content categories.

### **3.5.2 Adopted Instruments**

#### **3.5.2.1 Coding Scheme**

A coding scheme was adopted as the research instrument for Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA). This scheme was designed with Microsoft Excel Sheet while the content categories were conceptualised from emerging concepts in the research questions and evidence from the literature. An inductive approach was used to form twelve (12) content categories. There were three (3) main content categories in the coding scheme, each representing each of the research questions. Under the first main category, there were four (4) sub-categories. The second main category had five (5) sub-categories while the last main category contained three (3) sub-categories. Also, there was a column for relevant quotations in front of each content category. The quotes will be used as textual explications while presenting the data. All the content categories are briefly captured thus:

##### **3.5.2.1.1 Content Analytical Categories**

- a) Amplifying marginalised voices:** Any word, phrase, sentence or context that promotes the voices of cheated/silenced Nigerians.
- b) Challenging authorities:** Any word, phrase, sentence or context that indicates a critical analysis of power structures.
- c) Activism and social change:** Any word, phrase, sentence or context that promotes the need for social change in Nigeria.

- d) Alternative information sources:** News sources where independent researchers, community activists and whistle-blowers are used.
- e) Victims of social injustice:** Any word, phrase, sentence or context that represented cheated Nigerians.
- f) Underrepresented perspectives:** Stories that covered conversations ignored by mainstream media.
- g) Story-sharing:** Stories where ordinary citizens are allowed to share their stories/views on public discourse (citizen activism and inclusion).
- h) Social justice:** Any word, phrase, sentence or context that canvasses social justice for marginalised Nigerians.
- i) Media democratisation:** Any word, phrase, sentence or context showcasing citizen journalism practice.
- j) Challenging mainstream narratives:** Any word, phrase, sentence or context that dwells on evidence-based investigations and exposes (exposing injustice/investigative journalism).
- k) Social mobilisation:** Any word, phrase, sentence or context that calls Nigerians to civic action.
- l) Advocating change:** Any word, phrase, sentence or context that opposes government policies and calls for a policy change.

### **3.5.2.2 In-Depth Interview Guide**

An In-Depth Interview (IDI) guide serves as the instrument to collect data from the journalist. The guide was semi-structured. This enables the researcher to ask the selected journalists follow-up questions as each interview session progresses. The guide starts with an introduction from the researcher and moderator of the IDI. It then contextualises alternative

journalism and alternative media as the study envisages. There are twelve (12) semi-structured questions that will guide the moderator as the interviews progress.

### **3.5.2.3 Electronic Questionnaire**

The questionnaire contained an introductory section where the researcher succinctly explained the focus of the data collection and provided a brief explanation of alternative journalism and alternative media. It also contains cheater questions. The cheater questions were set to differentiate and select the respondents who are familiar with the journalists' journalistic activities from those who are not. Thereafter, key concepts from the third research question (influence of the journalists' pieces of writing on citizen empowerment) were used to formulate questions for the remaining sections of the questionnaire. A 5-point Likert Scale and a Yes/No answering method were used to record responses.

## **3.6 Validity and Reliability of Instruments**

Face, peer review and construct validity were used to validate the semi-structured IDI. The researcher and a peer reviewer double-check that the variables in the research questions, the study's theoretical framework and literature evidence correspond with the formulated IDI questions. This approach was used with a view to promoting truthful and open communication and lowering the possibility of reaction bias or reactivity (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2019). For Qualitative Content Analysis, however, the content categories' reliability was assessed using Cohen's Kappa co-efficient inter-coder reliability test by McHugh (2012). According to him, the value of Kappa between 0-.20 is "None", .21-.39 is "Minimal", .40-.59 is "Weak", .60-.79 is "Moderate", .80-.90 is "Strong" and above .90 is "Almost Perfect". The result of the reliability test is presented thus:



### *Fisayo Soyombo*

#### *Challenging Power Imbalances*

##### Symmetric Measures

	Value	Asymp. Error <sup>a</sup>	Std.	Approx. T <sup>b</sup>	Approx. Sig.
Measure of Agreement	Kappa	.905	.062	8.380	.000
N of Valid Cases	21				

The Kappa coefficient is 0.905;  $p < 0.05$ . This indicates that the agreement level between the two coders on "power imbalances" coding was significant and almost perfect.

#### *Representation of Dissenting Voices*

##### Symmetric Measures

	Value	Asymp. Error <sup>a</sup>	Std.	Approx. T <sup>b</sup>	Approx. Sig.
Measure of Agreement	Kappa	.811	.088	7.327	.000
N of Valid Cases	21				

The Kappa coefficient is 0.811;  $p < 0.05$ , an indication that there was a strong and significant agreement on "representation of dissenting voices" coding between the two coders.

#### *A tool for Socio-political Changes*

##### Symmetric Measures

	Value	Asymp. Error <sup>a</sup>	Std.	Approx. T <sup>b</sup>	Approx. Sig.
Measure of Agreement	Kappa	.932	.067	5.285	.000
N of Valid Cases	21				

The Kappa coefficient is 0.932; $p < 0.05$ . This indicates that the agreement level of "a tool for socio-political changes" between the two coders was significant and almost perfect.

### ***Agba Jalingo***

#### ***Challenging Power Imbalances***

##### Symmetric Measures

	Value	Asymp. Error <sup>a</sup>	Std.	Approx. T <sup>b</sup>	Approx. Sig.
Measure of Agreement Kappa	.887	.074		6.532	.000
N of Valid Cases	17				

The Kappa coefficient is 0.887; $p < 0.05$ , indicating that there was a strong and significant agreement on "challenging power imbalances" coding between the two coders.

#### ***Representation of Dissenting Voices***

##### Symmetric Measures

	Value	Asymp. Error <sup>a</sup>	Std.	Approx. T <sup>b</sup>	Approx. Sig.
Measure of Agreement Kappa	.905	.082		7.542	.000
N of Valid Cases	17				

The Kappa coefficient is 0.905; $p < 0.05$ . This shows that the agreement level between the two coders on "representation of dissenting voices" coding is significant and almost perfect.

#### ***A tool for Socio-political Changes***

##### Symmetric Measures

	Value	Asymp. Error <sup>a</sup>	Std.	Approx. T <sup>b</sup>	Approx. Sig.
Measure of Agreement Kappa	.932	.067		5.285	.000
N of Valid Cases	17				

The Kappa coefficient is 0.932; $p<0.05$ , implying that the agreement level of "a tool for socio-political changes" coding between the two coders is significant and almost perfect. Therefore, these results show that the content-analysed categories in the code book were reliable and suitable for use in the study.

The questionnaire was divided into different sections for construct validity, with each section assessing data for distinct study purposes. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was used to statistically assess the construct validity. In exploratory factor analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkins (KMO) measure of sample adequacy and the Bartlett's test of sphericity are the two basic methods used to evaluate an instrument's validity. To check if the statements that made up each variable's research instrument assessed what was intended, the study used the KMO Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett's Sphericity Tests. The KMO indicates if the items truly measured the study's variables if the result is larger than 0.5. When measuring the variables under research, the Bartlett test of sphericity result of 0.000, which was less than 5%, showed that there was a highly significant association between the variables. The results of the KMO test and Bartlett Test of Sphericity in this study were greater than 5% and less than 5%, respectively, showing that the questionnaire items for each construct accurately reflected what was intended. Table 2 displays the results of the KMO and Bartlett tests for sphericity.

**Table 2: KMO and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Number of Items</b>	<b>KMO</b>	<b>Bartlett test of Sphericity</b>	<b>Average Variance Extracted</b>	<b>Composite Reliability</b>
Impacts of the journalistic writings	7	0.669	0.000	0.637	0.933
Influence on socio-political awareness	7	0.629	0.000	0.637	0.945

**Source: Researcher's Computation (2023)**

Additionally, exploratory factor analysis was used to confirm the research instrument's construct validity. As additional proof of the construct validity of all the variables in the research instrument, the Average Variable Extracted (AVE) larger than 0.05 was employed. Table 3 displays the Cronbach Alpha results for each of the variables.

**Table 3: Internal Consistency/Reliability Result**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Number of Items</b>	<b>KMO</b>
Impacts of journalistic writings	7	0.843
Influence on socio-political awareness	7	0.829

**Source: Researcher's Computation (2023)**

According to Table 2, all the study variables have Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of over 0.70, indicating that the instrument employed for evaluation was quite reliable. As a result, the researcher affirmed that the study's instrument was trustworthy.

It is essential to state that cheater questions were used to ascertain whether the respondents' claim of being readers of Soyombo's or/and Jalingo's articles was true or not. This approach helped the researcher manage respondent reactivity.

### **3.7 Methods of Data Collection**

Data were collected manually for this study. The articles were downloaded from the websites of the journalists as well as the websites of their previous employers (in the case of 'Fisayo Soyombo'). Only articles credited to the journalists were gathered for QCA. The interview data were gathered through a virtual method. Having sought the consent of the interviewee, the researcher sent interview questions to the interviewee which he responded to asynchronously at his convenience. Moreover, data for the survey method were collected via online group and individual contact lists. Then, the researcher commissioned two research

assistants for the online questionnaire distribution and monitoring while another research assistant assisted in re-coding the QCA articles which were used to calculate the intercoder reliability.

### **3.8 Methods of Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the content of the 42 news articles and the In-Depth Interview (IDI). That is, the interview transcript and the content-analysed articles were analysed thematically using Clarke and Braun's (2013) thematic analysis protocols. This includes the researcher familiarising himself with the content of the data with a view to understanding their relationships with the research objectives. After that, codes were generated, and emerging themes are extracted from the codes. The themes were then reviewed and contextualised in line with the three research questions before finalising the analysis. The researcher supported the analyses with an explication of relevant texts/quotes from the data sources. However, descriptive statistics (percentages and frequency counts), coupled with data visualisation using tables, was adopted to analyse the survey research. The Microsoft Excel Sheet was used to analyse and visualise the survey data.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the study's findings within the framework of the three research questions raised. The first question examines how Agba Jalingo and 'Fisayo Soyombo have used their media platforms to challenge power imbalances in Nigeria. The second research question examines how the two journalists have used their platforms to represent or promote dissents in the country. The last question investigates how the journalists have promoted citizen empowerment through their alternative journalism practice. After analysis, the researcher discusses the findings with corresponding evidence from the literature and theory. in the meantime, the findings are presented thematically below:

#### **Research Question One: How have Agba Jalingo and 'Fisayo Soyombo used their platforms to challenge power imbalances in Nigeria?**

In this research question, the focus is to establish how the 42 selected articles of Agba Jalingo and 'Fisayo Soyombo (21 for each) have been used to challenge power imbalances in the country. Four dominant concepts/themes were deployed to analyse how the journalists used alternative journalism to challenge power imbalances in the country. These include *amplifying marginalised voices; challenging authorities; activism and social change, and alternative information sources.*

#### ***Amplifying marginalised voices***

This theme captures the articles where Agba Jalingo and 'Fisayo Soyombo promoted the voices of victims of social injustice in Nigeria. There were six instances of such in Agba Jalingo's articles. In those articles, Agba Jalingo spoke on behalf of the marginalised while

challenging the Cross River State Government under Governor Ben Ayade. For example, when setting an agenda on what the next Governor of Cross River State should focus his governance on, Agba spoke about how marginalised the people of the state are and what the marginalisation may lead to if the marginalised are left unempowered:

There are more and more young Cross Riverians; sharp, brilliant, intelligent, deep, and angry about the stunted growth in our State and have now gained the confidence to speak out. They are blogging their anxieties already, how-ever-be-it. And the tempo will heighten between 2023-2027 (Agba Jalingo, *CrossRiverWatch*, 6/11/22).

In an article titled “Dear Thief, Kindly Steal With A Human Face...”, he also spoke for average Nigerians whose voices may be subdued by powerful political forces. He wrote:

For tens of millions of Nigerians, their desire is to have a system that can work and secure their daily bread for them. There is no man in Nigeria today that needs money to the tune of the embarrassing and mind-boggling figures we read they are pilfering from the government at all levels. None! (Agba Jalingo, *CrossRiverWatch*, 11/10/22).

However, more than half (15) of the twenty-one analysed articles of ‘Fisayo Soyombo amplified the voices of socially marginalised Nigerians. For example, in his article on the Twitter ban by the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN), he argued that the government’s intention was to stifle the civic space. Having spent some days in prison in one of his investigative exposes, he amplified the voices of ‘genuine’ ENDSARS protesters:

...it was the galvanizing platform through which victims of police brutality relived their sufferings at the hands of the men in black. Having spent days in a police cell and in prison under cover myself, I knew majority of these narrations were pure truth (‘Fisayo Soyombo, *Al-Jazeera*, 9/6/21).

In another article, Soyombo amplified the voices of the victims of LASTMA’s (Lagos State Traffic Management Authority) extortions in Lagos State. Apart from the fact that social justice or saving “everyone some stress” is one of the foci of Soyombo’s platform—*Foundation for Investigative Journalism (FIJ)*—, “numerous members of the public had contacted FIJ about extortion and oppression by LASTMA officials, about how doctors in

emergencies trying to save lives were extorted, how LASTMA officials at road construction sites would not redirect motorists to alternative routes but would wait for them to misstep and then apprehend them, how LASTMA officials were weaponising fines to extort lawbreakers, how LASTMA generally pursued funds for their pockets instead of traffic smoothening” (‘Fisayo Soyombo, *FIJ*, 18/10/21).

Presenting his investigative report on how the wife of the Former President of Nigeria, Aisha Buhari, violated the human rights of many of her former staff, Soyombo also amplified the voices of some of the victims. Ordinarily, the voices of these victims would have not been heard had Soyombo’s alternative journalism medium not intervened. To show how important speaking up to Soyombo’s medium was to this victim, she narrated:

My family and friends tried to silence me out of fear for their lives. They said since Aisha fell and had surgery and spent four days in the hospital, that must have been God fighting. But silence was doing me more harm mentally, hence everything I’m doing, even this interview, is independent of what my husband, mum, siblings and friends feel. I’m making these decisions alone, on my own (‘Fisayo Soyombo, *FIJ*, 16/2/23).

Soyombo shared the stories of two more victims of Mrs Aisha Buhari’s social injustices. One of them states, “I had many miscarriages in the course of that job...and with all the bleeding, I was still doing all the work” while the second was a report disclosed to Soyombo by an employee of the villa about the First Lady’s sacked beautician:

They searched this girl to her vagina, to her pants. But they didn’t find any money on her. She was fired nevertheless. Her mistake was telling the First Lady about the land; the First Lady is someone who doesn’t want her people to progress. Claiming she stole \$10,000, or was it \$20,000, was just a smokescreen (‘Fisayo Soyombo, *FIJ*, 16/2/23).

In addition, Soyombo amplified the silenced voices of victims of police injustice, and army brutality as well as those duped by big Nigerian business brands. An example is a teacher who invested 1.4 million Naira in a company but did not get any return after two years of investment. Others include the voices of victims of failed financial transactions whose money



was not returned by the affected banks. Another instance is a story of a road user whose N80,000 was extorted by the police despite causing him road accident in Ondo State. In the analysed stories, Soyombo also documented how some big airlines failed to return the money of the passengers whose flights were cancelled by the airlines. He even documented the experience of a passenger whose money was not returned “one month after” Aero Contractors accepted “payment for nonexistent flight” (FIJ, 22/6/23).

In an interview with this researcher, ‘Fisayo Soyombo corroborated these findings by highlighting some of the impacts of his social justice journalism practice. He submitted:

In less than three years, FIJ’s investigative work has helped in the recovery of more than \$200,000 belonging to different cadres of Nigerians at home and abroad. It was something that previously looked impossible — that people’s funds withheld by banks, airlines, the police could be released just because a newspaper wrote about it. FIJ’s entrance to the media landscape a little over two years ago has made it possible. The frequency with which FIJ has reclaimed money for innocent members of the public, without collecting a dime from them, has earned the organisation the moniker ‘debt collector’ in some quarters (IDI, ‘Fisayo Soyombo, 26/07/23).

As already established in the content analysis of his articles, he reiterated that his journalistic activities and those of his platform, FIJ, have “helped increase accountability in the Police, traditionally one of the most corrupt agencies in Nigeria; led to the freedom of Nigerians unjustly detained by the police and the compensation of those who were exploited at gunpoint.” Lending their voice to Soyombo’s submission, 43.5% of 101 respondents asserted that the journalist promotes the voices of marginalised Nigerians through his news articles.

### ***Challenging authorities***

In all the twenty-one articles analysed for Agba Jalingo, the main authority he challenged was the State Government, especially Governor Ben Ayade of Cross River State (now former) and some government ministries. Citing evidence from his investigative stories, Agba accused the Governor of corruption, mismanagement of state funds, lies and deceit as well as failure. In one of the stories, for example, he called out the State Ministry of Aviation and the Governor for a failed airport project in Cross Rivers State.

CallyAir no work, Airport no work. But there is an Aviation Ministry that Ayade created and people are earning salaries there. Issorite! I really don't know any problem I can say Governor Ayade solved as Governor in eight years of his administration. If anyone knows any, the person can help out (Agba Jalingo, *CrossRiverWatch*, 28/04/23).

Agba Jalingo, in another story, did not mince words in describing Governor Ayade as corrupt, citing different financial mismanagement of the Governor as instances. In one instance, he wrote:

In 2019, the Cross River State Government awarded 40 contracts valued at over N6.9 billion to 31 companies. Of the 31, seven were illegally awarded contracts as they were not registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission, CAC, a fundamental requirement of the Public Procurement Act. Another 7 benefiting companies lacked experience and expertise concerning the contract they were awarded. In this investigation, Archibong Jeremiah established that the same scheme took place in 2020. This time over N600 million was paid to nine companies that are not registered or recognized under the law. Likewise, the contract to construct the palm oil refinery awarded to Biana's Project Ltd for N380,031,069.60 has no physical presence. The project, which was not budgeted for like the other ten, only exists on paper and in news reports and social media posts. When this reporter visited the address, it was discovered that two compounds share the same address and no one recognized Biana's Project Ltd (Agba Jalingo, *CrossRiverWatch*, 12/05/23).

Another case of mismanagement was the August 30, 2022, investigative story he titled "Obudu German Hospital—The Untold Truth." In the story, he questioned the Governor and his State Executive Council (SEC) about where they kept the proceeds of the state hospital they sold, as the Governor alone could not singlehandedly take such a decision without the input of the SEC.

In another story titled "Is This How Governor Ayade Will Leave Us?", Agba Jalingo used forty rhetorical questions to list the failures of Governor Ayade. The main issue raised in the questions was how the Governor failed to deliver many infrastructural projects he promised while coming in as the State Governor. Some of them are:

...like play, like play, is this how Governor Ayade will just leave us? Without a superhighway, an evacuation corridor where we will drive from Calabar to Obudu with a glass of water on the trunk of the car and the glass will not shake? Without turning Bakassi to Lugano? Without resettling the Bakassi IDPs? Without, a deep seaport in Bakassi?... (Agba Jalingo, *CrossRiverWatch*, 08/03/22).

Another challenge was contained in an article he titled “Go And Verify”:

I attempted to move around the 18 to give you updates on the state of governor Ayade’s projects in all. I will not lie about any of them and I am still challenging any of his aides to call me out if I do. If the reader isn’t satisfied, you can as well go and verify...Deep Sea Port: It is not working. We can’t even say work actually started there other than dredging. Garment Factory: After over six years of establishment, they don’t have a single product in any market, not even in Calabar. Not even a handkerchief.... (Agba Jalingo, *CrossRiverWatch*, 14/12/22).

On the other hand, the authorities challenged by ‘Fisayo Soyombo were diverse. These include the Federal Government of Nigeria, LASTMA, the law enforcement agencies in Nigeria (the police and the army, the customs), the Nigerian Prisons Authority as well as big Nigerian business brands (such as airlines and financial institutions). While challenging Buhari’s government for temporarily banning Twitter, for instance, Soyombo accused the government of “hiring...thugs to attack protesters, and infiltrate and discredit their movement” (*FIJ*, 09/06/21), stating that “the biggest threat to Nigeria is the lack of inspirational governance” (*FIJ*, 09/06/21) and not Twitter ban. In another related story, he even described the Former President, Muhammadu Buhari’s government, as a failure. That is:

...It is on record that state agents invested a lot of effort in covering up the deaths and injuries from the October 20 military raid that brought the protest movement down. Buhari’s government exists – supposedly – on the mandate of the people; Kanu exists because of the failures of the government (‘Fisayo Soyombo, *FIJ*, 09/02/21).

In another story, he challenged the authority of the Former First Lady of Nigeria, Aisha Buhari, and called her “the last human you would want to have around if you are someone with a smidgen of value for human rights” (*FIJ*, 16/02/23). This call happened after his investigative report recorded serial human rights abuses against Mrs Buhari. The next

authority Fisayo's reports challenged was the Nigerian Police Force, specifically their extortion and extra-judicial killings. All these challenges were provided with traceable shreds of evidence.

The Police in Nigeria have a history of illegitimate arrests and extrajudicial killings. In July, Chinedu Obi, a musician better known as Zinquest, was accosted for spotting tattoos and shot in Sango, Ogun State. Only two months ago, policemen in Lagos shot two unarmed civilians — they died instantly — suspected of phone theft. In April, anti-cultism policemen killed Kolade Johnson, a civilian, at a football viewing centre in the Onipetesi, Mangoro area of Lagos... (*FIJ*, 14/10/19).

Furthermore, Soyombo challenged the Nigerian government for using heavy propaganda to cover up the 2020 Lekki Toll Gate shooting of ENDSARS unarmed protesters. According to him, “when government so desperately wants to sell an agenda, nothing can stand in its way”, though “the damage may be limited but it can hardly be stopped, considering government’s unlimited access to state funds, the media, the police and the army” (*FIJ*, 20/01/20). In fact, many respondents aligned with the findings as 45.5% said Soyombo always challenges powerful people and entities in his journalistic writings. He also uses his journalistic activities to fight for human rights and government accountability (44.5%).

This researcher was curious to understand how ‘Fisayo Soyombo use investigative journalism to expose corruption and hold powerful individuals or institutions accountable, particularly when there is a need for social justice. According to him, “The approach is to do everything to establish the public interest in the story, and then establish the truth. No public interest, no story.” He adds:

...when wrongdoing and the public interest have been established, the next step is to obtain as many proofs as possible and present it in writing in a way that best exposes the injustice and gives the victims a voice (*IDI*, ‘Fisayo Soyombo, 26/07/23).

Anytime he engages in investigative reporting that exposes social injustice, Soyombo believes in securing “firsthand experience” of what he reports. As such, he “likes to be there

as an observer-journalist” to convincingly and evidently report events he had witnessed. This strategy that the journalist adopts was observed in some of his stories analysed (e.g., undercover reportage revealing the corrupt prison system in Nigeria).

Then, challenging authorities always comes with its obstacles. Agba Jalingo was arrested, charged to court and imprisoned while ‘Fisayo Soyombo was, on several occasions, threatened with death, intimidation and censorship. He stated:

Censorship, threats, and intimidation come with the terrain; you do not do investigative reporting and expect those whose wrongdoing you’re exposing to always fold their arms or applaud you. Sometimes, powerful people themselves feel powerless; other times, they strike back, usually in the form of SLAPP (Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation). I’ve received a number of death threats, the most recent being after my ‘Prophets of their Pockets’ series. Someone emailed me to threaten me with death and I replied him that he would go before me! Someone once opened a Facebook account and dedicated it to seeing my end. As I always say, death is the end of all of us. Death is a fact of life. In December 2021, the Police tried to censor FIJ by inviting me for questioning and detaining me, but it did not deter us from continuing with our work. Powerful people in the private sector have tried to censor us with SLAPP, but it hasn’t worked so far and it won’t (IDI, ‘Fisayo Soyombo, 26/7/23).

He also narrated how “Shell UK reached out to Twitter in an attempt to get” his Twitter account suspended after publishing an investigative story ‘Hell in Shell’ in May 2023. The story revealed how the powerful private oil company ruined the life of one of their staff’s children after an unsuccessful brain surgery was performed on the child, and Shell did not want to take responsibility. They could not succeed in suspending his Twitter account but were able to “shadow-ban” his Facebook account. Shadow-banning him means that “for a very long time after that story” his “Facebook posts were restricted to only a small group of people.”

### ***Activism and social change advocacy***

Based on the analysed articles, the journalism practice of Agba Jalingo and ‘Fisayo Soyombo is tailored towards activism and social change advocacy. However, as observed in the gathered data, Agba Jalingo’s works are more of socio-political activism while ‘Fisayo Soyombo’s journalism activities tilt more towards social change advocacy. Agba’s activism

reflects in the way he used language. At times, he would use directive language markers as if he were physically addressing the powerful entities he was addressing by using second addressee pronouns (you, your, yours). For example, he used this style of writing when addressing the Rivers State Governor in the article he titled “Ayade vs Jarigbe – What Is The Governor Looking For In The Tribunal?”:

In 2011, you ran for the Cross River North Senatorial seat and got it on a platter of gold against more popular candidates. ...there were accusations of rampant rigging in your favor, yet no one took you to the tribunal. In 2015, the governorship ticket of your party then, PDP was taken in broad daylight from Jedy Agba and handed to you in an arranged primaries. Do you really think the salt is tasty only on one side of the mouth?... (Agba Jalingo, *CrossRiversWatch*, 26/04/23).

In some other places, he would use weighty words to describe the politically exposed individuals he addressed; he would also dare them. Here are three instances from the same story:

You didn’t come from heaven with a seat in government. Everyone leaves when it is time and your time is now. I am talking to my Governor, Senator Ben Ayade. A word is enough for the wise. **I don’t know if you are still wise sir.**

**I am daring the governor to go to the other political wards to campaign.** Not just for votes for himself but also for the APC Presidential Candidate, Tinubu, since he is the South-South Coordinator of the Tinubu campaign....He will be booed and pelted with missiles by angry citizens who hoped so much on him but ended up disappointed.

Governor Ayade...is an epitome of a **plan-less leader and a reflection of what a disaster plan-lessness and impulse leadership can wreck....** When I say our Governor is a **smooth-talking liar** whose tongue is far from truth, my readers think I am exaggerating.

Aside from daring Governor Ayade with open facts, Agba also described the governor as a disaster. According to his April 18 2023 article titled “Cross River Property Concession – The Seller Is the Buyer”, Rivers State had Governor Ayade as “the disaster” because Ayade mismanaged the resources of the state and deceptively acquired some state’s property all in the name of concession. He questioned the concessions the same way a social activist will:

The governance of the newly purchased hotel has not even been handed over to the State government. Till now, the State hasn't been told the content of what we bought for N2.7 billion. And the governor is already listing it as one of the properties to be concessioned. The seller is the buyer. Spare me! 2. 1. Remember the governor's last attempt at concessioning his industries, he listed more than 18 of them. That attempt failed and the Governor openly wrote a press release saying Cross Riverians had rejected the idea in a referendum. At what point did he choose to return to the idea? At what point did the industries reduce to five? Why didn't he conduct a referendum this time? (Agba Jalingo, *CrossRiversWatch*, 07/04/23)

In his activist-like writing style, Agba Jalingo also demanded accountability from Governor Ayade. His imperative use of an exclamation mark at the end inflection of the expression below alludes to such activism.

After joining their political party, Obono Obla, abandoned the petitions he wrote against Governor Imoke and the press statement from Governor Ayade's office on Friday, though conceded that they get N500m every month, still didn't tell the public what exactly the money has been used for. **It is our right to know and we need to know and we actually need to know NOW!** (Agba Jalingo, *CrossRiversWatch*, 06/11/22)

Despite these instances of social activism in Agba's journalistic writings, there are occasions where he advocated change, especially socio-political change. For example, in his July 12 2023's investigation titled "Investigation: Like 2019, Cross River Government Awarded Over N600 Million Contracts To Dubious Companies In 2020", he advocated proper health management for the casual workers working on the refuse site he investigated. He advocated this when he met "the driver and his conductor, with no hand glove and nothing to protect the nose, eye, and entire head but just a pair of old boots, battled the mountain of refuse in front of them" during his fieldwork investigation. Also, when writing about the need for the Rivers State Police to punish erring officers disrupting the public peace, Agba also advocated the need for the Police to take very good care of its staff and investigate their pitiful working conditions. In fact, he gave a personal experience of the infrastructural decays he witnessed while he was temporarily in jail. He wrote:

Doing something about it, not just in terms of punishing the errant police personnel involved but to also look into the deplorable condition of that place and the men working there. The Police used to call bullets “groundnuts.” They buy their groundnuts with their personal money. They are not given by authorities. Civilians also come to sell them statement forms, Police files and other administrative materials.... In fact, all their documents including sensitive information are typed and photocopied in public business centers (Agba Jalingo, *CrossRiversWatch*, 01/06/22).

For ‘Fisayo Soyombo, social activism and social change advocacy complement each other in most of his articles and those published on his platform. Most respondents (57.4%) attested to this reality when they revealed that he frequently promotes social justice and socio-political change through journalism. The first instance reflects in his October 18 2021 rejoinder to LASTMA after releasing an investigative report on how LASTMA officers extort motorists in Lagos all in the name of fines. According to him, “After the Police, if there is any state institution in Lagos with the potential to someday trigger a large-scale protest, it is LASTMA.” He proceeded to advocate social change whereby “values such as probity, accountability and conscientiousness are strong determinants of public-office occupation.” In another story titled “The Oppression of Victims”, Soyombo advocated change among Nigerians, especially those who have abused the term “victimhood”. According to him, these people engage in several illegal activities just because politically exposed individuals engage in such activities. ‘Fisayo vehemently argued that a stop must be put to this attitude by Nigerians.

If Nigeria must someday become a country that works for all, this claim to victimhood by every Tom, Dick and Harry must stop. The Nigerian people must hold themselves as responsible for this country’s failings as they do the leaders (‘Fisayo Soyombo, *Sahara Reporters*, 03/02/20).

Aligning with the thoughts of ‘genuine protesters of ENDSARS, Soyombo also argued that banning Twitter by the FGN was not the solution to the growing agitations (e.g., Biafra) in the country; rather, the solution lies in having a sincere socio-political change. According to him, “Good governance is the ultimate secret to securing Nigeria’s corporate existence; solve



these problems and watch Kanu disappear into obscurity; nobody listens to him if they have food on their table. Nobody joins the June 12 protest if healthy and gainfully employed” (FIJ, 09/06/21).

In addition, Soyombo showed some sort of activism in some of the selected stories. For example, in his investigative report of 16 February 2023 which he titled “‘First Lady, Last Human’ — Aisha Buhari’s Legacy of Human Rights Violations”, he confidently submitted that the Department of Security Service (DSS) has been bastardised. He emphasised:

By its own admission, the DSS was set up to prevent or detect any crime against the internal security of Nigeria...However, it has been reduced to something of a vigilante group, picking up citizens for petty allegations like the deletion of Instagram posts.

Using a questioning approach, Soyombo also showed activism in his report on how a federal teaching hospital in Nigeria covered up a death case of a prominent Nigerian during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Even a roadside mechanic knows that nobody shows up at a teaching hospital for headache; the deceased only took his wife there because they both knew they may have been exposed to the virus. One other red flag. If the hospital is indeed convinced Obanimomo died of food poisoning, why did it prevent the ambulance that evacuated the corpse from reentering the hospital premises? Why were the doctors, nurses and pharmacists who potentially had contact with him isolated and placed on chloroquine prophylaxis? I mean, you didn’t just isolate them; you placed them on drugs! And why was the medical emergency shut down and fumigated? It’s not Coronavirus, right?... (‘Fisayo Soyombo, *The Cable*, 06/04/20)

However, combining activism and advocacy for social change in Soyombo’s journalistic style is “a tricky one because Nigeria is still a country where the public are often unable to differentiate between opinionating and reporting” (IDI, ‘Fisayo Soyombo, 26/7/23). Despite that, he uses social media for advocacy and his published articles as social and investigative journalism practice. He has recorded social justice impact by using this approach. According to him, the greatest impact that his journalism practice has brought is the “growing public consciousness of the existence of a media outfit that is easily accessible for exposure of

injustice and power abuse, without any previous links to the newsroom or its editors” (IDI, ‘Fisayo Soyombo, 26/7/23).

### *Alternative information sources*

The two journalists explored the use of undisclosed informants to strengthen some of their investigative reports. For instance, Agba Jalingo utilised only one informant from the government. This can be seen in his July 12, 2023, story titled “Investigation: Like 2019, Cross River Government Awarded Over N600 Million Contracts To Dubious Companies In 2020.” The alternative source gave useful information about ghost contracts the River State Government awarded:

When these issues are raised too often, anti-graft agencies rarely respond, there is a need to reach out to them to investigate the contract mafias. When the government gives a contract and after the time the contract is supposed to be in existence, and it fails to come to reality, the community must take it upon themselves to write the anti-graft agency or attorney general of the federal and the chief judge of the state.

On the other hand, ‘Fisayo Soyombo’s alternative sources of information include insiders from the Aso Rock Villa (those working with the former First Lady, Aisha Buhari), anonymous and undisclosed sources and a constitutional lawyer. One example is this:

Meanwhile, a **source** familiar with Zainab’s work but who asked not to be named for fear of sack as **they still work in the villa**, told FIJ Zainab literally slaved for Aisha Buhari. “Zainab planned all the presidential weddings that happened between 2015 and her sack last year — every single one!” said the source (‘Fisayo Soyombo, *FIJ*, 16/02/23).

Also, through another undisclosed source, Soyombo got a tip on how a popular man died of COVID-19, even though the teaching hospital where he died covered it up. According to his sources “who saw Obanimomo (the deceased)”, the deceased “soon started showing very strong COVID-19 symptoms” when he was brought into the teaching hospital, and “died less than an hour after. By this stage, he still hadn’t been tested” (‘Fisayo Soyombo, *The Cable*, 06/04/20).

For alternative media journalists, having alternative media sources is key. This is important because alternative media journalists:

...have to seek as many allies as possible. They'll need allies in Law, for instance, because Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPP) are increasingly being used to frustrate independent journalism. They'll need allies in government, too, because they have to be one step ahead of their persecutors (IDI, 'Fisayo Soyombo, 26/07/23).

**Research Question Two: How have Agba Jalingo and 'Fisayo Soyombo used their platforms to represent or promote dissent in Nigeria?**

This research question focuses on four themes that resonate with the utilisation of alternative media for the representation or promotion of dissents in Nigeria. These include representing the victims of social injustices, reporting underrepresented journalism perspectives, sharing people's stories, and promoting social justice. These themes are succinctly analysed below.

***Victims of social injustice and Campaign for Social Justice***

Here, only the stories by 'Fisayo Soyombo and his FIJ represented the victims of different degrees of social injustices. In the investigative report that revealed how LASTMA was extorting motorists in Lagos and published by his platform (FIJ), Soyombo represented the voices of some victims of LASTMA's extortion. The representation was necessary because "numerous members of the public contacted FIJ about extortion and oppression by LASTMA officials, about how doctors in emergencies trying to save lives were extorted, how LASTMA officials at road construction sites would not redirect motorists to alternative routes but would wait for them to misstep and then apprehend them, how LASTMA officials were weaponising fines to extort lawbreakers, how LASTMA generally pursued funds for their pockets instead of traffic smoothening" (FIJ, 18/10/21). He also represented the voice of an ex-staff of the Former First Lady of Nigeria who was unjustly tortured before her resignation. Other instances include the voices of victims of police brutality and illegal arrests/detention,

victims of fraudulent practices, failed financial transactions and withheld money for cancelled flights. Two such representations are presented thus:

Johnson Alayande, a part-time secondary school teacher, has told FIJ how Quintessential Limited, an investment company, took N1.4 million out of his life savings (FIJ, 12/06/23).

Abhulimen Oseghale, an Edo State resident, has narrated how Aero Contractors charged him N46,350 for a nonexistent flight and then withheld his ticket fee (FIJ, 22/06/23).

Having reported the victims of social injustices, Soyombo called out injustices from politically exposed entities and individuals as well as campaigned for social justice for the victims. Some victims got justice after his media campaign. Out of those he called out for injustice was the FGN. He indirectly described the government as unjust for promptly tagging IPOB a terrorist organisation but remained quiet about the atrocities of bandits and criminal herdsmen who did kill other Nigerians.

In 2017, the Buhari government rushed to declare IPOB a “militant terrorist group” via the Army in violation of the country’s Terrorism Act, before subsequently acting in accordance with the law. Four years later, it still hasn’t mustered the courage to so declare herdsmen, despite their designation in 2015 by the Global Terrorism Index as the fourth deadliest terror group in world... Bandits are terrorizing Nigeria’s North...Still, to the Nigerian government, killers and kidnappers are no terrorists (‘Fisayo Soyombo, *FIJ*, 09/06/21).

For some cases of injustice he campaigned for, the victims got social justice. Some of these include the cases of Klasha, a multinational Lagos and San Francisco-based e-commerce startup that refunded an Akure-based medical doctor whose N570,000 savings vanished in one night; of Maryam Omotayo, a Lagos-based trader whose failed PoS transaction of N81,800 was returned by the United Bank for Africa (UBA); and of a trader whose N146,000 was returned by a travel agent, among others. They, among other enjoyers of Soyombo’s social justice campaign, got justice after his platform, FIJ, reported the social injustices against the victims. This impact has, therefore, democratised the media.

On the other hand, Agba Jalingo did not use this approach of social justice for victims of social injustices because his journalistic approach is specifically activist and government-focused, and this reflects in his articles analysed thus far.

### ***Story-sharing***

This theme is closely related to the above theme. The main difference is that the stories of victims of social injustices in the first one were summarised by the two journalists in their reports while the “story-sharing” theme captures the direct stories as told by dissent and victims of social injustices themselves. For Agba Jalingo, the first example was observed in his investigative report where the Cross River Government was accused of awarding over N600 million in contracts to dubious companies. In the article, he shared the story of one of the casual workers whose story needs to be told.

Our working conditions here are poor, once employed you are alone. You get your boots and gloves yourself. We don't have any health care system, we don't have good machines...we get fuel for four hours to power our bulldozer and it's expected to carry us for the eight hours we work (Agba Jalingo, *CrossRiverWatch*, 12/05/23).

Interestingly, as a dissent to Governor Ayade's government, Agba shared his own story of how ready he was to defend himself in court after writing about how the wife of the Governor's brother contracted a mercenary to write her law exams.

I am ready to stand trial and defend myself as always. But, in what appears like desperation to satisfy their paymasters, the Police have vowed to come for me...They have also vowed to disregard the court and come back to arrest me from my home and lock me up, till the next court date. I am aware that the Ayades are bent on making sure I am removed from circulation before the forthcoming elections for reasons best known to them... (Agba Jalingo, *CrossRiverWatch*, 14/02/23).

He also shared another personal story of the next date he would be charged to court. According to him, “return to court on May 31, 2023” to begin his trial would be equivalent to “two days after they (Governor Ben Ayade) have exited power” (*CrossRiverWatch*, 11/10/22).

Looking at Soyombo's approach to story-sharing, it was observed that he focused on the direct stories of social injustice victims as well as his personal encounters during his undercover investigations. For example, Zainab, one of the victims of social injustice at the hands of Aisha Buhari and her officers, shared her experiences with Soyombo:

Every other person there I knew, but not these two guys, so I believe they were the ones who went to bring Aminu from Jigawa. I must have received two or four slaps, because my brain...Each time I tried to defend myself against the allegations, she (Aisha Buhari) told them to hold my mouth and slap it...This happened 12 times ('Fisayo Soyombo, *FIJ*, 16/02/23).

Soyombo also shared the stories of some wrongfully detained cell mates he met in the prison during his undercover reporting to the Nigerian Prisons, Ikoyi. One cellmate was wrongfully accused of stealing a motorcycle while the other was accused of stealing a mobile phone.

How can anyone say I tried to snatch a motorcycle in broad daylight yet no weapon was found on me? I had no knife, no gun, no spade. No cutlass or machete. Do you rob in daylight without any weapon?...

I didn't watch it, neither did the Police. The Police arrested me because the phone owner said I was the thief. They didn't watch any CCTV footage ('Fisayo Soyombo, *FIJ*, 14/10/19).

### ***Underrepresented perspectives***

There were several instances where Agba Jalingo and 'Fisayo Soyombo presented perspectives in their investigative stories which cannot be presented by mainstream journalists. Those perspectives will be ignored by mainstream media because the perspectives are born out of rigorous days, weeks, and months of deep searches beyond the surface-level journalism practice. For example, Agba Jalingo challenged Governor Ayade's administration's ineptitude regarding the state's airport in his investigative story of April 28, 2023. Using his detention as a practical example, he also told a story of the deplorable state of police cells in his June 1, 2022 story titled "Police Anti-Cultism Unit Calabar: Matters Arising." He was equally critical in his article "Cross River's Scandalous Debt Burdens:

What Will Prince Otu, Do Differently?’ published on July 14 by questioning how the state would pay its debt despite having a very low Internally Generated Revenue (IGR). All these perspectives can hardly find their places in mainstream media written by mainstream journalists.

Similarly, ‘Fisayo Soyombo had perspectives quite different from mainstream journalism’s perspectives. In his report about the real reason the government temporarily banned Twitter, the investigative journalist gave logical perspectives on why the intent of the government regarding the ban was to stifle civic space. Also, documenting the victims of Aisha Buhari’s injustices in a detailed investigative report was a perspective the mainstream media would not deeply explore or even investigate. In addition, Soyombo’s strategies to change his identity and frame himself to the police who later arrested him and got him jailed provided him with a strong justification to have personalised perspectives and lived experiences about the country’s social and criminal justice system. He also went ahead to uncover the portraits of the deaths of protesters at Lekki Toll Gate during the ENDSARS protests in Lagos, presenting a perspective contrary to the perspectives of mainstream media about the incident. All these perspectives he created in his journalism writings can rarely be established by mainstream media and journalists.

One of these uncommon perspectives was alluded to by Soyombo during an interview with this researcher. This is about a story he published about Shell—Hell in Shell. When the victims whose voices he amplified in the story reached out to the mainstream media for coverage, they were turned down, as the perspective of traditional media journalists can hardly represent the in-depth coverage of the victims’ stories.

The victims whose voices I amplified in that story tried to build on my work by approaching numerous traditional print and broadcast stations; one by one, all of them turned the victims down because Shell is just Shell — we’re talking money, power and influence (IDI, ‘Fisayo Soyombo, 26/07/23).

Soyombo also challenges the narratives of mainstream media alongside their under-represented perspectives because he sees a chunk of news items in traditional media as a form of Public Relations, especially when the items are sponsored content. Because of this, his platform is left with no other option than to utilise the media space “to hunt the truth down and present it to the public” (IDI, ‘Fisayo Soyombo, 26/07/23) in manners uncommonly followed by mainstream media.

This style of journalism was also corroborated by most respondents (63.4%) who ascertained that his articles frequently expose corruption and crimes as well as reveal investigative and undercover stories that mainstream media do not ordinarily cover.

**Research Question Three: How have Agba Jalingo and ‘Fisayo Soyombo promoted citizens’ empowerment through their journalism practice?**

To answer this research question, the researcher sought responses from readers of ‘Fisayo Soyombo’s or/and Agba Jalingo’s articles. One hundred and one (101) respondents filled out the electronic questionnaire used to collect responses. Most of the respondents (57/56.4%) are aware of ‘Fisayo Soyombo and his journalistic activities while very few respondents (13/12.9%) know who Agba Jalingo is. The cheater questions that followed this awareness question indicate that most of the respondents neither know Agba Jalingo nor read his journalistic activities, but answered the questions on how Agba Jalingo uses his platform to challenge power imbalance and promote dissent in Nigeria as if they read his work. For this reason, responses to ‘Fisayo Soyombo’s journalistic activities are used throughout the analysis of the findings of the survey.

To start with, those who know ‘Fisayo Soyombo and read his works identify him with investigative journalism (61.4%) and social justice journalism (28.7%). Most respondents (67.3%) reported that they have been following the journalistic activities of ‘Fisayo Soyombo



for the past 1 to 5 years while 15.8% have been following for the past 6 to 10 years. To show how familiar they are with his journalistic activities, most respondents (64/63.4%) ascertained that his articles expose corruption and crimes as well as reveal investigative and undercover stories that mainstream media do not ordinarily cover. Most (58/57.4%) also revealed that he promotes social justice and socio-political change through journalism. Other areas of his journalism practice they affirmed are challenging powerful people and entities in his journalistic writings (46/45.5%), fighting for human rights and government accountability (45/44.5), promoting the voices of marginalised Nigerians through his news articles (44/43.5) and questioning incredible official narratives and propaganda (41/40.6).

Now, Tables 4 and 5 below present the respondents' submissions on how 'Fisayo Soyombo's journalistic pieces of writing have impacted and empowered them on significant socio-political happenings in Nigeria.

**Table 4: The extent to which readers agree or disagree with the impact of 'Fisayo Soyombo's journalistic writings**

Variables	SA	A	U	SD	D	Total	D
He has exposed injustices in politics, governance and businesses in Nigeria.	53 (52.5%)	38 (37.6%)	7 (6.9%)	1(0.9%)	2(1.9%)	101	
He has exposed corruption among politically exposed individuals and sectors in Nigeria.	41 (40.5%)	45(44.5%)	14(13.8%)	0(0%)	1(0.9%)	101	
His social justice reports have empowered marginalised Nigerians to speak up against injustices.	44 (43.5%)	45(44.5%)	0(0%)	12(11.8%)	0(0%)	101	
He has successfully challenged socio-political inequality between the powerful and the powerless Nigerians.	36(35.6%)	48(47.5%)	16(15.8%)	1(0.9%)	0(0%)	101	
His investigative/undercover reports have brought socio-political change to the institutions he exposed.	32(32.6%)	46(45.5%)	20(19.8%)	1(0.9%)	2(1.9%)	101	
His work has promoted awareness among Nigerians about flaws and human rights abuses in Nigeria's criminal justice system.	36(35.6%)	52(51.8%)	12(11.8%)	1(0.9%)	0(0%)	101	
Through his investigative and social justice journalism, he has advocated justice, equity and accountability.	37(36.6%)	49(48.1%)	15(14.8%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	101	

**Researcher's analysis, 2023**

According to most respondents, 'Fisayo Soyombo's journalism practice has recorded a number of significant social impacts in Nigeria. For example, most respondents (91.1%) alluded to the fact that through Soyombo's journalistic activities, injustices in politics, governance and businesses in Nigeria have been exposed. The majority (85%) said his journalism practice has exposed corruption among politically exposed individuals and sectors in the country. The same applies to empowering marginalised Nigerians via his reports, as 78% of the respondents maintained that his social justice reports have empowered marginalised Nigerians to speak up against different cases of injustice in the country.

In addition, Soyombo has successfully used his articles to challenge socio-political inequality between the powerful and the powerless Nigerians (as attested to by 83.1% of the respondents) while his investigative/undercover reports have brought socio-political change to the institutions he exposed (as attested to by 78.1% of the respondents). Then, his work has promoted awareness among Nigerians about flaws and human rights abuses in Nigeria's criminal justice system (87.4% of the respondents) while his investigative and social justice journalism has provided advocacy for social justice, equity and accountability (84.7% of the respondents).

**Table 5: The extent to which Soyombo's journalistic writings influence readers' socio-political awareness**

Variables	SA	A	U	SD	D	Total
His investigative reports have provided me with detailed insights into corruption, human rights abuses, and systemic flaws within institutions.	41(40.5%)	35(34.6%)	23(22.7%)	0(0%)	2(1.9%)	101
His work has empowered me with information I can use to hold authorities accountable.	29(28.7%)	44(43.5%)	26(25.7%)	1(0.9%)	1(0.9%)	101
Through his work, I have been indoctrinated to always examine the actions of Nigerian leaders and demand transparency critically, accountability and good governance.	31(30.6%)	36(35.6%)	31(30.6%)	2(1.9%)	1(0.9%)	101
His work has inspired me to always advocate social justice and socio-political reforms in Nigeria.	30(30.6%)	38(37.6%)	30(30.6%)	2(1.9%)	1(0.9%)	101
His work has made me develop critical perspectives about socio-political matters in Nigeria.	27(26.7%)	41(40.5%)	28(27.7%)	4(3.9%)	1(0.9%)	101
His work has strengthened my belief and trust in unconventional journalism.	27(26.7%)	34(33.6%)	36(35.6%)	2(1.9%)	2(1.9%)	101
His activism-like practice has inspired me to always demand that the Nigerian government respect press freedom and the rule of law.	30(30.6%)	37(36.6%)	28(27.7%)	3(2.9%)	3(2.9%)	101

**Researcher's analysis, 2023**

Table 2 summarises the influence that Soyombo's investigative and social justice articles have had on respondents' socio-political awareness/empowerment. Through his journalistic writings, 76 respondents reported that have gained deeper insights into corruption, human rights abuses, and systemic flaws within Nigerian institutions; 73 respondents stated that the stories have empowered them with fundamental information required to hold authorities accountable, while 67 respondents stressed that his writings have indoctrinated them to always examine

the actions of Nigerian leaders and demand transparency, accountability and good governance using a critical approach. Moreover, his work has inspired 68 respondents to always advocate social justice and socio-political reforms in the country while 68 more respondents are able to

develop critical perspectives about socio-political issues in Nigeria. Through his work, 61 respondents revealed that their trust in unconventional journalism has been strengthened. Then, 67 respondents emphasised that his activism-like practice has given them more inspiration on the need to always demand that the Nigerian government respect press freedom and the rule of law.

Furthermore, the respondents were asked to identify which of Soyombo's journalistic writings had empowered them for social justice. Eighty respondents (79.2%) identified his undercover investigation that exposed corruption and human rights abuses within Nigerian prisons as top on the list of investigative stories that have impacted them. This is followed by his undercover investigation that revealed widespread corruption in the Nigerian healthcare sector (45.5%) and undercover investigation that revealed widespread corruption in the Nigerian customs service (38.6%).

## **4.2 Discussion of Findings**

The first research question examined the journalistic activities of Agba Jalingo and 'Fisayo Soyombo, focusing on how their selected articles have been used to challenge power imbalances in Nigeria. Challenging power imbalances in this context focused on how the articles were used to amplify marginalised voices, challenge authorities, engage in activism and call for social change alongside rely on alternative information sources. Findings indicate that the journalists used their alternative media platforms and journalistic writings to amplify the voices of marginalised Nigerians who could either speak for themselves or whom the journalists could speak for. This finding aligns with the aims of *FIJ* established by 'Fisayo Soyombo—to combat injustice, hold power to account and speak for the voiceless (Owoyemi, 2023) as well as *CrossRiverWatch* found by Agba Jalingo—to watch the civic space of Cross River State. These dominant themes of power imbalances are some of the

dimensions that describe alternative media (Ciszek, 2016; Treré et al., 2017; Holt, et al., 2019; Sarmiento, 2019; Dowling, 2020; Luna et al., 2022).

Then, the two journalists challenged powerful individuals and authorities in Nigeria, although with different foci. Ferrucci and Canella (2023) described challenging authorities as a form of resistance that alternative media journalists utilise to remain critical of public discourse. Agba Jalingo's main interest, for instance, was more pronounced within the circle of the Cross River State Government under Governor Ben Ayade alongside the ministries under the Governor's watch, exposing corruption, mismanagement of funds and failures within the administration. His writing style reflected activism, daring powerful entities and demanding accountability within Ben Ayade's government. Aside from the fact that activism is an attribute of alternative journalism (Waisbord, 2018; Chen, 2018; Çoban, 2018; Dowling, 2021), this form of activism, according to Waisbord (2018), showcases advocacy for social change. On the contrary, 'Fisayo Soyombo focused on national issues that require social justice. These issues, as documented in his journalistic activities, include police brutality, extortion and corruption, human rights violations as well as financial injustices from prominent brands and business owners. For example, through 'Fisayo's demand for justice in his social journalism reports published within the first year of founding his FIJ, 59 social-justice victories were recorded (Owoyemi, 2022). When FIJ turned two years, the platform's social justice stories had "helped the public recover #46.9 million." This implies that credible alternative media is a veritable tool that can be used to fight different levels of social injustice in Nigeria, although such media are always critical and radical in approach (Rodríguez et al., 2014; Chen, 2018). In many instances, alternative media breach some ethical provisions that traditional journalism will adhere to (Al-Zo'by, 2021) just to unravel hidden facts and facilitate social justice.

Furthermore, both journalists' works were characterised by activism and social change advocacy which are typical of alternative media (Alemany, 2020), but Agba Jalingo's writings leaned more towards socio-political activism, while 'Fisayo Soyombo's journalism aimed at more of social change but less of activism. Jalingo's language was directive and confrontational, addressing powerful individuals and calling for socio-political change in governance and public policies in Cross Rivers State. Soyombo too advocated socio-political change but focused more on employing investigative journalism to provide evidence and demand change within government institutions, encouraging Nigerians to take responsibility for the country's socio-political atmosphere and demanding accountability from political leaders and stakeholders (Uiterkamp, 2021).

Moreover, the journalists often relied on alternative information sources to strengthen their investigative reports. These sources include insiders from government institutions, anonymous informants, learned professionals and undisclosed sources. The alternative sources allowed and still allow them to uncover hidden truths and shed light on issues that might otherwise remain concealed by mainstream media (Baysha, 2014; Hafdell, 2014; Ataman & Çoban, 2018; Sampedro & Avidad, 2018; Tshabangu, 2019). The journalists were able to provide these alternative sources because their media platforms are non-traditional that offer independence in ownership, content production and distribution (Runhanya, 2014).

For the second research question that examined how the journalists used alternative media to represent or promote dissent in Nigeria, it was established that the journalists, through their articles, shared the stories of how their investigative reportage landed them in prisons; reported perspectives uncommonly covered by mainstream media; shared reporting underrepresented perspectives, and promoted social justice. Although the two journalists displayed social justice journalism attributes in their reportage, only 'Fisayo Soyombo used



his platform to fully give victims of social injustices spaces to voice their concerns and share their stories. His advocacy for social justice led to some victims getting justice, demonstrating the impact of his alternative media practice (Leeckwyck, 2019).

In addition, both journalists presented underrepresented perspectives in their articles using critical socio-linguistic strategies such as rhetorical questions, metaphors, assertives, storytelling, touches of sarcasm and invectives. These perspectives include challenging government ineptitude, uncovering the truth behind significant events, and exposing corruption and social injustices affecting ordinary citizens. To buttress their knowledge-driven perspectives, they even shared their personal encounters during their investigations including some challenges encountered (e.g., intimidations, death threats, arrests and incarceration) (Tshabangu, 2019; Erkmen et al., 2022). These challenges are typical of shrinking civic spaces (Uiterkamp, 2021) where many alternative media journalists operate.

The last research question sought responses from readers of the two journalists with a view to understanding how their exposure to the journalists' writing pieces has empowered them on social justice and social change advocacy. But it is vital to state that most of the respondents neither know nor read Agba Jalingo; as such, only responses from 'Fisayo Soyombo's readers are discussed here. According to the findings, 'Fisayo Soyombo has had a significant social impact in Nigeria. Most respondents acknowledged that Soyombo's journalistic work has exposed injustices in politics, governance, and businesses in the country. His reports have also been instrumental in uncovering corruption among politically exposed individuals and sectors. Essentially, Soyombo's journalism has also played a role in empowering marginalised Nigerians, as his stories have empowered them to speak up against various forms of social injustice in the country. Most respondents also noted that his articles have challenged socio-political inequality between powerful and powerless Nigerians, contributing

to greater awareness and accountability. The findings align with Lasisi et al.'s (2023) finding on the impact of Soyombo's investigative and social justice journalism.

Significantly, the impact of Soyombo's investigative and social justice articles on respondents' socio-political awareness and empowerment was evident in the study. Respondents were empowered with in-depth and essential information about human rights abuses, corruption and political excesses; the need to hold authorities accountable, demand transparency, accountability, and good governance; advocate social justice and socio-political reforms and critical perspectives on socio-political issues in Nigeria. Soyombo's unconventional journalism approach also gained the trust of many respondents, strengthening their belief in such reporting. The implication of this citizen empowerment is that the democratisation of Soyombo's alternative platform enabled his readers to be free to engage with his work and even approach him or his platform whenever there are true cases of social injustice. Habermas described this as the democratisation of the public sphere (Bruns & Highfield, 2015; Castelli Gattinara, 2017). The fact that these readers enjoyed diverse, participatory and democratic forms of communication through Soyombo's articles is also an indication of citizen empowerment (Godole, 2017; Vatikiotis, 2017) and civic participation (Hossain et al., 2018).

Theoretically, using the transformative dimension of the critical social theory of alternative media (Sandoval & Fuchs, 2010), the findings in this study have ascertained that alternative media is crucial in promoting social justice and participatory democracy. That is, the argument that alternative media is a tool for social change has been affirmed in this study. The theory equally enabled us to understand that the critical information reported by the alternative media was consumed by readers who were also critical of the powerful individuals. That made the readers stand in solidarity with the alternative media on their

critical views of public discourse as seen in the impact the stories had on readers. Therefore, this study affirms that the propositions of critical media theory which assume that alternative media challenge these power imbalances and provide a more diverse range of perspectives (Miloni, 2009), challenge dominant cultural values and ideas and provide a platform for marginalised or dissenting voices (Kenix, 2011a) and empower citizens and promotes greater democracy (Kenix, 2011b). Therefore, promoting marginalised voices, challenging power structures and promoting social change are the normative framework for social justice journalism (Santos & Ndlovu, 2022).

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This chapter presents the summary of the study's findings, offers a succinct conclusion and provides some recommendations informed by this study's key findings.

#### **5.1 Summary**

The general objective of this study was to examine the role of alternative journalism in promoting social justice in Nigeria, using the journalistic practices of two alternative media and investigative journalists in the country, Agba Jalingo and 'Fisayo Soyombo as cases. However, the study had three specific objectives. One, it examined how Agba Jalingo and 'Fisayo Soyombo have used their platforms to challenge power imbalances in Nigeria. Two, it investigated how the journalists have also used their platforms to represent or promote dissent in Nigeria. Lastly, it established how the journalists have promoted citizen empowerment through their journalism practice.

In challenging power imbalances in Nigeria, findings indicate that the journalists used their alternative media platforms and writings to amplify marginalised voices, challenge authorities, engage in activism, and call for social change. Although Agba Jalingo's writing style reflected activism, daring powerful entities and demanding accountability within the Cross River State Government under Governor Ben Ayade's watch, while 'Fisayo Soyombo focused on national issues requiring social justice, such as police brutality, extortion, corruption, human rights violations, and financial injustices from prominent brands and business owners. Both journalists' works were characterised by activism and social change advocacy. Also, the journalists often relied on alternative information sources to strengthen their investigative reports, including insiders from government institutions, anonymous informants, learned people and undisclosed sources. This allowed them to uncover hidden

truths and shed light on issues that might otherwise remain concealed by mainstream media. On the second objective, findings show that the two journalists used alternative media to share their investigative reportage, report underrepresented perspectives, and promote social justice. Soyombo's platform, specifically, provided victims of social injustices spaces to voice their concerns and share their stories, demonstrating the impact of his alternative media practice. However, both journalists presented underrepresented perspectives in their articles, challenging government ineptitude, uncovering the truth behind significant events, and exposing corruption and social injustices affecting ordinary citizens. They also shared their personal encounters during their investigations, highlighting threats to life, planned censorship, intimidation, arrest and imprisonment as challenges faced in alternative journalism.

The final objective sought responses from readers of the two journalists to understand how their exposure to the journalists' writings has empowered them on social justice and social change. The findings indicate that Soyombo's investigative and social justice articles have exposed injustices in politics, governance, and businesses in Nigeria, empowering marginalised Nigerians to speak up against social injustice. Significantly, the impact of Soyombo's investigative and social justice articles on respondents' socio-political awareness and empowerment was evident. Respondents were empowered with in-depth and essential information about human rights abuses, corruption and political excesses; the need to hold authorities accountable, demand transparency, accountability, and good governance; advocate social justice and socio-political reforms and critical perspectives on socio-political issues in Nigeria. Soyombo's unconventional journalism approach also gained the trust of many respondents, strengthening their belief in such unusual reporting. The implication of this citizen empowerment is that the democratisation of Soyombo's alternative platform enabled his readers to be free to engage with his work and even approach him or his platform whenever there are true cases of social injustice.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

This study has shown that alternative media played a vital role in representing dissent and promoting social justice in Nigeria, democratising the media landscape and providing a platform for marginalised voices. The journalists' activism and advocacy demonstrated the power of alternative media in challenging power imbalances and amplifying voices that might otherwise remain unheard. Agba Jalingo and 'Fisayo Soyombo have demonstrated their commitment to challenging power imbalances in Nigeria through their journalistic work, thereby contributing significantly to fostering transparency, accountability and social justice in the country. Their efforts serve as a reminder of the critical role that independent journalism plays in holding those in power accountable and promoting positive societal change. Overall, the transformative dimension of the critical social theory of alternative media supports the argument that alternative media is crucial in promoting social justice and participatory democracy. Therefore, promoting marginalised voices, challenging power structures, and promoting social change are the normative framework for social justice journalism.

## **5.3 Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the researcher recommends the following:

One, governments, organisations and individuals need to recognise the crucial role played by alternative media platforms in promoting social justice and democratic values. Efforts should be made to support and protect these platforms, ensuring they can operate freely and independently without fear of censorship or retaliation. By fostering a conducive environment for alternative media, marginalised voices can be amplified, and important social justice issues can be brought to the forefront.

Two, media bodies such as the Press Council and the NUJ should continue advocating the need to protect investigative journalists like Agba Jalingo and 'Fisayo Soyombo who often face threats, intimidation, and harassment for their exposés. In fact, it will be in the best interest of relevant authorities

to take proactive measures to provide adequate protection for journalists who engage in critical reporting and expose corruption and social injustices. Legal frameworks should also be strengthened to safeguard their freedom of expression, allowing them to carry out their duties without fear of reprisals and censorship.

Three, promoting media literacy among the public is crucial to help individuals critically evaluate news and information from various sources. Media literacy programmes can equip citizens with the skills to discern credible information from propaganda, enabling them to make informed decisions and support responsible journalism. Educating them about the role and importance of alternative media can foster a more engaged and discerning audience.

Four, while alternative media may sometimes breach traditional journalism's ethical provisions to uncover hidden truths, it is essential to maintain high ethical standards in reporting. Alternative media journalists should adhere to ethical guidelines of truth, objectivity and fairness even in their pursuit of social justice, to maintain credibility and trust.

Five, more journalists and media platforms should be encouraged to prioritise social justice reporting. This can be achieved through journalism schools, professional organisations and media support networks, which can provide training and resources to foster investigative journalism with a social justice focus. By encouraging more journalists to take up social justice causes, the media landscape can be enriched with impactful and meaningful reporting.

Finally, collaborations between mainstream media and alternative media platforms should be encouraged. Mainstream media organisations can amplify the voices of alternative media journalists, providing broader reach for social justice issues and facilitating wider public awareness. Such collaborations can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of social justice challenges and promote cross-disciplinary reporting in Nigeria.

#### **5.4 Suggestions for Further Studies**

First, the study suggests that future research consider using socio-linguistic methods and theories such as Critical Discourse Analysis, Speech Act Theory and other related theoretical frameworks to examine the ideologies and power relations inherent in the textual content of alternative journalists in Nigeria. Then, researchers should consider evaluating the social media usage of Nigerian alternative journalists in promoting social justice and how their readers utilise User-Generated Content (UGC) under the journalists' social justice-related posts.



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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Coding Scheme's Content Categories

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
1	<b>Challenging power imbalances</b>									
	<b>Date</b>	<b>Headline</b>	<b>Amplifying marginalise d voices</b>	<b>Quote</b>	<b>Challenging authorities</b>	<b>Quote</b>	<b>Activism and social change</b>	<b>Quote</b>	<b>Alternative information sources</b>	<b>Quote</b>
2										
3										
4										
5										
6										
7										
8										
9										
10										
11										
12										
13										
14										
15										

	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T
1	<b>Representation of dissenting voices</b>									
	<b>Victims of social injustice</b>	<b>Quote</b>	<b>Underrepresented perspectives</b>	<b>Quote</b>	<b>Story-sharing</b>	<b>Quote</b>	<b>Social justice</b>	<b>Quote</b>	<b>Media democratisation</b>	<b>Quote</b>
2										
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15										

	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
1	<b>A tool for socio-political change</b>					
	Challenging mainstream narratives	Quote	Social mobilisation	Quote	Advocating change	Quote
2						
3						
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14						
15						



## Appendix 2: IDI Guide for ‘Fisayo Soyombo

Good day,

My name is Ajetunmobi Umar Olansile, a postgraduate researcher from the Department of Communication and Language Arts, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. I am conducting a study on the roles of alternative or radical media in promoting social justice journalism in Nigeria. You are selected as an interviewee because of your media expertise and wealth of experience in activist/social justice and investigative journalism. This experience, will no doubt, provide me with some insights into my research enquiry. Let me assure you that whatever information you provide in the course of this interview will strictly be used only for this research purpose. I am also ready to keep the information you don't want me to use confidential or anonymous.

In this study, I define **alternative journalism as a form of journalism that challenges the mainstream media's approaches to reporting and provides critical and independent coverage of socio-political, cultural and economic issues that mainstream media will not ordinarily cover. Then, alternative media are independent and not-for-profit media that represent the viewpoints of underreported groups, marginalised people, dissident voices and those suffering from social injustice.**

I thank you very much for your honouring this interview appointment. Now to the questions!

1. How do you approach investigative reporting to expose corruption and hold powerful individuals or institutions accountable?
2. Alternative media often emphasises giving voices to marginalised individuals or groups. Can you briefly explain how your platform has addressed the concerns of marginalised people/groups in Nigeria? What steps do you take to ensure their voices are authentically represented and amplified?

3. How do you balance your role as a journalist with activism and advocacy for social change? Can you provide examples of instances where your platform's reporting led to tangible policy changes or other significant outcomes in Nigeria?
4. How have you navigated censorship, threats or intimidation from powerful entities who may seek to suppress your work?
5. Alternative media often aims to amplify marginalised voices. How have you used your platform to allow marginalised individuals and communities to express their dissenting views?
6. Investigative reporting is a powerful tool for challenging power imbalances. Can you briefly explain how you have utilised your investigative reporting skill to uncover corruption, human rights abuses, or other injustices? Can you provide examples of investigations that had a significant impact on public awareness or policy debates?
7. Alternative media journalists like you often challenge mainstream narratives. How have you countered official narratives or dominant ideologies about socio-political issues in Nigeria?
8. The Nigerian media landscape faces challenges such as censorship and threats to press freedom. How have you navigated challenges while representing dissent in your work? Can you briefly discuss instances where you have faced censorship or intimidation and how you have responded to protect yourself and journalism?
9. Public discourse and dialogue are essential for promoting dissent. How have you facilitated conversations and engagement with your audience on critical socio-political issues?

10. Looking ahead, what do you believe are the key challenges and opportunities for alternative media journalists in Nigeria in terms of challenging powerful individuals and institutions as well as representing and promoting dissent? How can they further enhance their impact and contribute to a more inclusive and democratic society?

Thank you very much for your time and insightful responses.

### Appendix 3: Questionnaire for Readers of the Journalists' Articles

Dear Respondent,

I am a postgraduate researcher from the Department of Communication and Language Arts, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. I am conducting a study on the roles of alternative or radical media in promoting social justice journalism in Nigeria. Your honest responses to the questions raised in this survey will be greatly appreciated. I assure you that whatever information you provide will strictly be used for this research purpose.

Before we begin, permit me to provide the definitions of two key concepts you will come across in this survey—alternative journalism; alternative media. One, I define **alternative journalism as a form of journalism that challenges the mainstream media's approaches to reporting and provides critical and independent coverage of socio-political, cultural and economic issues that mainstream media will not ordinarily cover.** Then, **alternative media are independent and not-for-profit media that represent the viewpoints of underreported groups, marginalised people, dissident voices and those suffering from social injustice.**

Thank you very much!

1. Which of the following Nigerian journalists are you aware of?  
A. Agba Jalingo B. 'Fisayo Soyombo C. David Hundeyin D. Jones Abiri  
E. 'Kunle Adebajo
2. How would you describe their style of journalism? (You may pick more than one option whenever applicable)

Journalist style	Agba Jalingo	'Fisayo Soyombo	David Hundeyin	Jones Abiri	'Kunle Adebajo
Investigative Journalism					
Social Justice Journalism					
Data					

Journalism					
Multimedia Journalism					
Citizen Journalism					
Feature Writing					
Opinion Writing					

3. How long have you been reading or following the journalistic activities of the following journalists?

	0 year	1-5 years	6-10	11-15	16-20
Agba Jalingo					
‘Fisayo Soyombo					
David Hundeyin					
Jones Abiri					
‘Kunle Adebajo					

4. Have you come across any articles, reports, or videos produced by any of these journalists?

	Yes	No
Agba Jalingo		
'Fisayo Soyombo		

5. Is there any of the works of the following journalists that you can recall vividly?

	Yes	No
Agba Jalingo		
'Fisayo Soyombo		

6. If yes, which of the following describes the work of the journalists? (You may pick more than one option whenever applicable)

<b>Agba Jalingo</b>	<b>'Fisayo Soyombo</b>
Challenging powerful people and entities in his journalistic writings	Challenging powerful people and entities in his journalistic writings
Demanding government accountability through journalistic writings	Promoting social justice and socio-political change through journalism
Promoting social justice and socio-political change through journalism	Promoting the voices of marginalised Nigerians through his news articles
Promoting activism through his writings	Exposing corruption, and crimes; revealing investigative and undercover stories that mainstream media do not ordinarily cover
Exposing corruption, and crimes and revealing investigative stories that mainstream media do	Fighting for human rights and government accountability

not ordinarily cover	
Writing satirical articles on socio-political public discourse	Questioning incredible official narratives and propaganda
Others (please specify) .....	Others (please specify) .....

7. Have you come across any articles, reports, or videos produced by any of the following journalists that represent or promote dissent (those who disagree with certain viewpoints) in Nigeria?

	Yes	No
Agba Jalingo		
'Fisayo Soyombo		

8. If yes, how would you describe the content of their work in relation to representing or promoting dissent? (Select all that apply)

<b>Agba Jalingo</b>	<b>'Fisayo Soyombo</b>
Giving voice to opposition groups or activists	Giving voice to opposition groups or activists
Covering protests or demonstrations against government policies	Covering protests or demonstrations against government policies
Questioning official narratives or providing alternative viewpoints	Questioning official narratives or providing alternative viewpoints

Encouraging readers to engage in and debate critical public issues	Encouraging readers to engage in and debate critical public issues
Highlighting the struggles of marginalised communities or individuals	Highlighting the struggles of marginalised communities or individuals
Holding government and politically exposed persons accountable	Holding government and politically exposed persons accountable
Challenging repression by using his platform to document and expose plans to silence opposing voices	Challenging repression by using his platform to document and expose plans to silence opposing voices
Others (please specify) .....	Others (please specify) .....

Please read each item carefully and indicate the extent to which you agree with each item by ticking (✓) SA – Strongly Agree (5), A – Agree (4), U – Undecided (3) D – Disagree (2), SD, Strongly Disagree (1)

9. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the impact of the journalistic writings of these two journalists?

S/N	<b>‘Fisayo Soyombo</b>	<b>Agba Jalingo</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>
1.	He has exposed injustices in politics, governance and businesses in Nigeria.	He has exposed injustices in politics, governance and businesses in Nigeria.					
2.	He has exposed corruption among politically exposed individuals and sectors in Nigeria.	He has exposed corruption among politically exposed individuals and sectors in Nigeria.					
3.	His social justice reports have empowered marginalised Nigerians	His social justice reports have empowered marginalised Nigerians to					



	to speak up against injustices.	speak up against injustices.					
4.	He has successfully challenged socio-political inequality between the powerful and the powerless Nigerians.	He has successfully challenged socio-political inequality between the powerful and the powerless Nigerians.					
5.	His investigative/undercover reports have brought socio-political change to the institutions he exposed.	His investigative reports have brought socio-political change to the institutions he exposed.					
6.	His work has promoted awareness among Nigerians about flaws and human rights abuses in Nigeria's criminal justice system.	His work has promoted awareness among Nigerians about flaws and human rights abuses in Nigeria's criminal justice system.					
7.	Through his investigative and social justice journalism, he has advocated justice, equity and accountability.	Through his investigative and social justice journalism, he has advocated justice, equity and accountability.					

10. Have you ever taken any action or been inspired to take action for socio-political change as a result of any of the following journalist's work?

	Yes	No
Agba Jalingo		
'Fisayo Soyombo		

11. If yes, to what extent have the following socio-political influence their work had on you?

Tick (✓) SA – Strongly Agree (5), A – Agree (4), U – Undecided (3) D – Disagree (2), SD, Strongly Disagree (1) where applicable.

S/N	'Fisayo Soyombo	Agba Jalingo	SA	A	U	SD	D
1.	His investigative reports have provided me with detailed insights into corruption, human rights abuses, and systemic flaws within institutions.	His investigative reports have provided me with detailed insights into corruption, human rights abuses, and systemic flaws within institutions.					
2.	His work has empowered me with information I can use to hold authorities accountable.	His work has empowered me with information I can use to hold authorities accountable.					
3.	Through his work, I have been indoctrinated to always critically examine the actions of Nigerian leaders and demand transparency, accountability and good governance.	Through his work, I have been indoctrinated to always critically examine the actions of Nigerian leaders and demand transparency, accountability and good governance.					
4.	His work has inspired me to always advocate social justice and socio-political reforms in Nigeria.	His work has inspired me to always advocate social justice and socio-political reforms in Nigeria.					
5.	His work has made me develop critical perspectives about socio-political matters in Nigeria.	His work has made me develop critical perspectives about socio-political matters in Nigeria.					
6.	His work has strengthened my belief and trust in unconventional journalism.	His work has strengthened my belief and trust in unconventional journalism.					
7.	His activism-like practice has inspired me to always demand that the Nigerian government respect press freedom and the rule of law.	His activism-like practice has inspired me to always demand that the Nigerian government respect press freedom and the rule of law.					

12. Which of the journalists' specific articles or investigations did you find particularly impactful or empowering? (Select all that apply)

Tick (✓) SA – Strongly Agree (5), A – Agree (4), U – Undecided (3) D – Disagree (2), SD, Strongly Disagree (1) where applicable.

S/N	'Fisayo Soyombo	Agba Jalingo	SA	A	U	SD	D
1.	Undercover investigation exposing corruption and human rights abuses within Nigerian prisons	Investigation of alleged financial mismanagement and corruption in Cross River State					
2.	Undercover investigation revealing widespread corruption in the Nigerian healthcare sector	Investigation highlighting discrepancies and alleged embezzlement in government projects in Cross River State					
3.	Undercover investigation revealing widespread corruption in the Nigerian customs service	Stories on how Cross River State Governor mismanages the state					
4.	Others (please specify) .....	Others (please specify) .....					