Corruption in the Limelight:
The Relative Influence of Traditional Mainstream
and Social Media on Political Trust in Nigeria

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Corruption erodes trust in government. While research has established the link between the two, we know much less about how different media types affect people's perceptions of corruption, which in turn influence their degrees of political trust. Hence, we conducted a survey during the 2019 general election in Nigeria (a country ranked 146 in the Corruption Perceptions Index) to test the relationships among media, corruption, and political trust. We recruited 688 respondents by using a multistage cluster sampling and analyzed the survey data using Partial Least Squares—Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Our findings suggest that social media have greater influence than traditional mainstream media on perceptions of corruption and that negative perceptions of corruption determine low political trust. We also found that traditional media play a significant role in fostering political trust during an election but that social media do not. We use several theoretical insights from agenda-setting and agenda-melding theories to explain our results.

Keywords: traditional mainstream media, social media, corruption, political trust, general election, Nigeria

Political trust is a key resource for the development of any modern society. It has long been a matter of interest for scholars because of the belief that no leader, whether democratic or otherwise, can succeed without gaining the trust of the citizens (Allen, 2016; Cai, Liu, & Wang, 2019; Easton, 1975; Newton, Stolle, & Zmerli, 2018). Extant research, however, shows that there has been a continuous decline

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in political trust worldwide (Camaj, 2014; Gallup, 2012; Iroghama, 2012; Wang, 2016; Wilkes & Wu, 2017) and that there is a growing interest in investigating the determinants and consequences of political trust (Newton et al., 2018; Wilkes & Wu, 2017). Most of these studies associate political trust with socioeconomic change, political leadership, and institutional performance. The role of media in promoting political trust has received less attention (Allen, 2016) even though studies generally agree on the powerful effects of media use in shaping perceptions of public issues, including politics (Ceron, 2015).

Existing research shows that access to political information facilitates positive behavioral change, political knowledge, and political participation among citizens (Camaj, 2014). Some studies assert that media use is essential to political trust since it sensitizes people and helps them to become aware of various government activities (Ceron, 2015). Nevertheless, there is another strand of research that suggests the opposite. Mass media have been blamed for distracting people from public affairs news, which leads to low political engagement (Abbas Naqvi, Jiang, Miao, & Naqvi, 2020; Putnam, 2000) as increasing numbers of users, especially young people, turn to mass media for entertainment purposes (Olaniru, Olatunji, Ayandele, & Popoola, 2020). Meanwhile, media exposure of misconduct and corruption in politics leads to political distrust (Ionescu, 2016), and studies show that perceptions of corruption among citizens reduce support for their governments (Barnes & Beaulieu, 2019; Wang, 2016). This is because corruption is often linked to lower economic growth, decreased investment, and greater income inequality (Frank, Lambsdorff, & Boehm, 2011). These pernicious effects are usually brought to light by mainstream media outlets, social media platforms, and international organizations. Consequently, access to information about corruption increases people's perceptions of corruption as well as their discontentment with corruption (Transparency International, 2017; Treisman, 2007), which in turn affects political legitimacy, hinders democratic development, and weakens the functioning and maintenance of political trust (Barnes & Beaulieu, 2019).

In this study, we aim to examine the extent to which mainstream and social media assign news salience to corruption issues and what effect that had on citizens' political trust during the 2019 Nigerian general election. We chose to conduct the study in Nigeria as little is known about political trust on the African continent (Babalola, 2012). Most studies of the determinants and consequences of political trust have been carried out in Western countries (Allen, 2016; Ceron, 2015), though some studies focus on Asian countries (Cai et al., 2019; Wilkes & Wu, 2017). Acknowledging the uniqueness of the political landscape of African countries (Haagensen, 2016), we identify some corruption problems prevalent in Africa and investigate how media exposure of these problems affects citizens' trust in the government of the day. We focus on how mainstream and social media shaped people's perceptions of corruption, which affected their political trust and was then reflected in their choices of candidates in the recent Nigerian general election.

Media Use, Corruption, and Political Trust in Nigeria: The Study Context

As in many other countries, the two major sources of news in Nigeria can be broadly categorized as mainstream (traditional) and social media. Mainstream traditional media include newspapers, television, radio, and magazines, while social media is the cluster of Internet-supported applications that are found on a number of platforms such as Twitter, WhatsApp, YouTube, blogs, and Facebook. With the advent of the Internet, traditional mainstream media have also adopted online platforms to reach their audiences (Omar & Ahrari, 2020). Yet there are distinctions between them in terms of both organizational structure and

content (Rauch, 2016). First, mainstream media are authority-oriented and hence structurally tied to the centers of power (Camaj, 2014). Social media are independent and mostly people-oriented. Second, mainstream media content tends to be homogenous, ubiquitous, and pro status quo (Rauch, 2016), and reflects dominant public opinion (Chomsky & Barclay, 2010). Social media content is also ubiquitous nowadays but tends to be heterogenous, broadcasting multiple viewpoints, including those that challenge the status quo.

These two media types coexist in Nigeria. Mainstream media in Nigeria (i.e., radio, television, magazines, and newspapers), however, have been associated with state control, and they usually support the incumbent government by engaging in propaganda in favor of the government to avoid sanctions (Eshett, 2018; Udeze, 2012). Earlier studies have found that mainstream media in Nigeria have failed to promote a healthy political climate because of their biased reporting of political news and current affairs (Demarest & Langer, 2018). During the 2019 general election, mainstream media were actively involved in image laundering of the incumbent federal president and state governors (Momoh, 2019). On the other hand, social media have empowered the Nigerians with opportunities for freedom of expression (Abubakar, 2016). The two major political parties in Nigeria, namely the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), made extensive use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp to promote their candidates and to discredit their opponents (Fafchamps & Vicente, 2013). The general public in Nigeria use social media to express their feelings about government policies and decisions without interference (Uwalaka & Watkins, 2018), to hold the government accountable and responsible to the people, and to shape opinions on public issues (Jimada, 2019).

One of the public issues that has plagued Nigeria for a long time is corruption. The Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, which ranks countries from the least to the most corrupt, puts Nigeria among the 40 most corrupt countries in the world. This index of 178 nations, for five consecutive years, ranked Nigeria in the bottom 42: at 154th in 2021 , 149th in 2020 , 146th in 2019, 144th in 2018 and 148th in 2017 (Transparency International, 2021). President Muhammadu Buhari has declared a war against corruption and promoted the slogan "If this government fails to kill corruption, corruption will kill Nigeria" to combat this perennial menace (Aloko & Abdullahi, 2018). Although the rate of corruption is high, studies (e.g., Fadairo, Fadairo, & Aminu, 2014) show that news of corruption rarely makes the headlines of national newspapers. This indicates that news about corruption has not been given the prominence it warrants. Many studies reveal that the Nigerian media have not paid enough attention to corruption issues precisely because the majority of the media stakeholders in Nigeria are also corrupt, themselves involved in unethical behavior because of poor remuneration, media ownership patterns, conflicts of interest, and poor working conditions (Jatula, 2017). This fact partly explains why corruption remains an epidemic in Nigeria. However, since combating corruption is the main aim of the government, it is important to examine the roles of two major sources of news in Nigeria with regard to their treatment of this issue, which is expected to create awareness and important outcomes such as political trust.

Despite the high prevalence of corruption in Nigeria, there has been little empirical research into its effects on political trust in the African context. A study by Alemika (2004) suggests that low trust in public institutions and agencies in Nigeria is explained by poor government performance and perceived high levels of corruption among the people. He claims that political corruption in Nigeria has weakened the

capacity of government to provide needed public goods and services, which contributes to declining trust among citizens and to a general dissatisfaction with the political system in the country. The study, however, ignores the role of media in molding people's perceptions of corruption, a gap that the present study aims to address. In addition, most existing studies (e.g., Duval, 2019; Hooghe & Stiers, 2016) examine political trust without considering the time factor. In this study, we argue that political trust is more crucial during elections than at other times. This is because contesting political parties often strive to gain people's trust as it is crucial to their electoral success. In our study, the 2019 Nigerian general election provides a specific context for understanding media effects on political outcome.

Theoretical Background and Hypothesis Development

We use two theoretical lenses, agenda setting and agenda melding theories, to elucidate the roles of traditional mainstream media and social media. These perspectives are interrelated but distinctive in explaining two media contexts. The main assumption of agenda-setting theory is that the media, through their creative processes and gatekeeping functions, give prominence to certain issues while neglecting others that are possibly of equal weight and importance (Kiousis & Strömbäck, 2010; McCombs, Shaw, & Weaver, 2014). Deliberate underpinning of issues through news coverage in the media is a function of agenda setting (Allen, 2016). The theory assumes that media audiences are passive, that they become aware of the importance of an issue according to the level of prominence and volume of coverage that the matter receives in mainstream media (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), and that audience exposure to selected issues shapes public attitudes and opinions about the issues (Kiousis & Strömbäck, 2010).

Meanwhile, agenda-melding theory (McCombs et al., 2014), a spin-off from agenda-setting theory, provides theoretical insight into how audiences in the digital age, especially social media users, on the basis of their own personal views and experiences, decide, select, frame, comment on, "like," even create and share information to influence other users and contribute to the setting of national agenda (Allen, 2016; McCombs et al., 2014). Scholars describe agenda melding as a process in which social media users gather various agendas to create the personal communities in which they consciously choose to live (Allen, 2016; McCombs et al., 2014). In contrast with agenda-setting theory, wherein the media purposefully select news items to influence the audience, agenda-melding theory depends on the audience to set the public and media agenda.

Examining two media types, we investigated the perceived salience of corruption in mainstream and social media. In doing so, we linked traditional mainstream media news salience of corruption issues with agenda-setting theory, while social media are associated with the agenda-melding theory. Our study aimed to uncover the extent to which perceived salience of corruption, for both mainstream and social media contexts, affects people's perceptions of corruption, which in turn influence their political trust. Acknowledging other influential factors in political trust, we also controlled for the effects of political interest and political efficacy.

Salience of Corruption and Perception of Corruption

Social issues in the society can be made prominent or kept subdued by mass media. Research shows that mass media play important roles in assigning salience or prominence to certain issues to gain people's attention and reaction (Omar & Dauda, 2015). Mass media provide political knowledge and use their social power in a bid to influence the minds of individuals in their audiences by increasing communication, understanding, and dialogue among diverse people with different views (Taylor, 2013). Past studies have found that mass media exposure of corrupt practices is the best way to shape public opinion on the threat of corruption (Färdigh, 2013) and to involve them in debate on the subject (Park, 2012). In a study analyzing media freedom in 150 countries, Jha and Sarangi (2017) found that the lower the freedom of the press, the higher the corruption rates, and conversely, the greater the press freedom, the lower the corruption levels in a country. Their findings suggest a strong association between corruption and media freedom. We infer that social media have high media freedom and are more likely to expose cases of corruption than traditional mainstream media, as the latter are hindered by government influence. Evidence from past studies shows that media use has political consequences (Camaj, 2014) and that issues prominently raised and discussed in social media influence political outcomes (Ionescu, 2016). Hence, we posit that both traditional mainstream and social media, through issue salience, shape people's perceptions of corruption. We also assert that the impact will be greater for social media than for traditional mainstream media. Hence, we propose the following hypotheses:

H1:   *Perceived salience of corruption by traditional mainstream media will be positively associated with perception of corruption.*

H2:   *Perceived salience of corruption by social media will be positively associated with perception of corruption.*

H3:   *Social media will have stronger effects on people's perceptions of corruption regardless of high or low use than traditional mainstream media.*

Corruption and Political Trust

Existing research has established that corruption erodes trust in government (e.g., Treisman, 2000; Wang, 2016) and that a high level of corruption predicts declining trust in the ruling party (Anderson & Tverdova, 2003). Studies generally agree that people usually see corruption as a greater danger than other sociopolitical problems such as budget deficits, social security, unemployment, and terrorism (Clark, 2017; Gallup, 2012). For instance, most Americans, according to Clark (2017), perceive corruption as the most prevalent and prominent issue in the country. Other studies (Ionescu, 2016; Wang, 2016) have found corrosive effects of political corruption on citizens' trust in institutions, suggesting that corruption has negative consequences for political trust and other attitudes related to political support. These studies generally concur that people expect their government to be ethical and transparent. Corruption undermines the legitimacy of institutions, distorts policies and priorities, and has negative effects on the development of political attitudes, especially political trust (Barnes & Beaulieu, 2019; Wang, 2016). Consistent with most existing findings, we hypothesize that:

H4:   *Perception of corruption will be negatively associated with political trust.*

H5:   *Perception of corruption will mediate the impact of perceived salience of corruption on political trust in both traditional mainstream media and social media contexts.*

Control Variables: Political Efficacy and Political Interest

Apart from salience of corruption in mainstream media and in social media, we identified two individual factors that affect political behavior, namely political efficacy and political interest. Political efficacy is the individual's belief in their competence to participate actively in certain political activities (Morrell, 2003), such as expressing positive or negative political opinions, or enthusiastically motivating political leaders whom they trust. Reichert (2016) asserts that political efficacy strongly influences citizens' attitudes to civic engagement, voting behavior, and general political outcomes, especially among young people. Existing studies also suggest that political interest is the most important predictor of political knowledge and citizen participation (Gil de Zúñiga, Weeks, & Ardèvol-Abreu, 2017; Lee, 2015) and that individuals become more interested in politics when stimulated by political events and information contexts (Lee, 2015). Hence, discouraging news of politically corrupt activities may reduce political interest, which in turn affects political behavior. Acknowledging the influences of these factors, we controlled for the effects of political efficacy and political interest during data analysis.

Methods

A survey research design was adopted in this study. Data for this study were collected during the peak of the campaign and voting period, from January to March 2019. A multistage cluster sampling technique was adopted for data collection to obtain a truly representative sample of the Nigerian population. The selection process, from geopolitical zone level to local government ward level, was conducted through a randomly selected lottery ballot, in which a ballot without removal criterion was adopted. Our multistage sampling process involved six stages. First, we divided Nigeria into six geopolitical zones (Northeast, Northwest, Northcentral, Southeast, South-south, and Southwest). Next, we selected one state each from the six geopolitical zones. Each of these six selected states was then further divided into three senatorial zones, from which we selected one from each state, giving us six senatorial zones in all, each of which comprised a number of local governments. Next, we selected one local government from each of the selected senatorial zones, for a total of six chosen local governments. Finally, we selected one ward from each of these six local governments; they were: Karu, Nafada, Zaria, Udenu, Oredo, and Ede. The electoral rolls of the ward polling units compiled by the Independent National Electoral Commission were used as the sampling frame for this study. Finally, we selected 120 voters randomly from the electoral roll of each of the six selected wards to give us a sample of 720 respondents. A set of questionnaires consisting of 56 questions was used to collect data. After culling incomplete and invalid responses, we had a total of 688 responses for analysis.

Measures

Key variables of this study are (1) salience of corruption by traditional mainstream media, (2) salience of corruption by social media, (3) perception of corruption, and (4) political trust. All variables were measured using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree."

Perceived Salience of Corruption

We examined salience of corruption in both traditional mainstream and social media contexts. Salience is a convergence of attention and prominence (Lim, 2010). In this study, we measured how people perceive the degree of prominence given by traditional mainstream media and social media to political corruption news reports intended to gain their attention. In this study, perceived salience of corruption was measured by asking the respondents questions relating to the major elements of salience, which are attention, prominence, and valence. Using Kiousis (2004), we developed a nine-item scale to measure salience of corruption. Kiousis (2004) analyzed the content of *New York Times* articles and established indicators of visibility (i.e., relevant stories, total stories, front-page stories, and front-section stories), and valence (front-page valence stories and total valence stories) as dimensions of media salience. For our study, we adopted these indicators and developed statements such as "News on corruption is usually reported on the front page of newspapers" and "News on corruption usually appears on social media feeds" to measure how people perceive the extent to which traditional mainstream media and social media give salience to corruption issues in Nigeria. Two sets of questions were used to test two contexts: perceived salience of corruption by traditional mainstream media and perceived salience of corruption by social media (see Appendix).

Perception of Corruption

Corruption refers to the misuse of entrusted power for private benefit, which involves deriving private gain at public cost by deviating from rules, norms, and the law (Roy, 2007). Perception of corruption was assessed by asking respondents' views on the level of corruption in Nigeria, including bribery and misuse of power. We asked for responses to statements such as "Many people, especially politicians, public officials, policemen, and judges are corrupt in the country" and "In most cases, government officials demand special and illegal payments." A scale of 11 items was developed from the Transparency International Global Corruption Barometer (2017) and Treisman (2000) to measure people's perceptions of the level of corruption in Nigeria (see Appendix).

Political Trust

Political trust refers to the confidence that people have in their government and institutions and can be regarded as an evaluative orientation of citizens toward their political system, or some part of it, based on their normative expectations (Wang, 2016). The measurement includes 12 question items, adapted from Bahry, Kosolapov, Kozyreva, and Wilson (2005) and Chao, Yuan, Li, and Yao (2017), which ask about the extent to which people trust the incumbent president, state governors/state government, local government, federal government, police, and judges, among others (see Appendix).

Sample Size

Our study sample characteristics showed 59.3% of respondents were male and 40.7% female, while the majority (81.1%) were aged between 18 and 54 years. The characteristics of the sample are similar to the general profile of the Nigerian population given by the National Bureau of Statistics (2017) which report that Nigerian citizens are 50.81% male and 49.19% female, and those aged between 18 and 54 years represent 73.2% of the total population. The ethnic distribution of the Nigerian population is Hausa (53.59%), Igbo (26.66%), and Yoruba (19.75%). The sample distribution of our respondents was Hausa (50.1%), followed by Igbo (33%), and Yoruba 16.9%). By matching the sample with the population distribution, we minimized the potential problems associated with an unrepresentative sample.

Data Analysis

This study used PLS-SEM for data analysis. It involved a two-step approach: We first analyzed the measurement model and then tested the structural model of the study. PLS-SEM enables researchers to analyze and examine the relationships among multiple variables and test the structures of interrelationships or theoretical models with various independent and dependent variables (Keyton, 2015). In this study, we used the bootstrapped Confidence Interval's lower and upper limits to interpret the results, as suggested by some prominent scholars (e.g., Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2013).

Findings

Measurement Model

First, we tested the validity and reliability of the measurement model by assessing the factor loadings, composite reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the measures used in the study. For internal consistency, factor loadings of more than 0.7 and a composite reliability (CR) score between 0.7 and 0.9 are considered satisfactory (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2016), and a close look at our results in Table 1 shows that all the variables satisfied the condition for internal consistency. For convergent validity, an AVE score of greater than 0.5 shows the degree to which two measures that are theoretically related are in fact related. Our findings show that AVE values for each measure are met. In addition, collinearity assessment using collinearity statistics (VIF) is also recommended to determine an acceptable level of multicollinearity presence (Hair et. al., 2013). The threshold of VIF below 5 is acceptable, and the present study fulfilled the lateral collinearity assessment test as well. Thus, our results of measurement model testing satisfied the criteria for convergent validity and composite reliability.

Table 1. Factor Loadings, Convergent Validity, and Composite Reliability.

Constructs	Items	Loadings	CA	CR	AVE	VIF
Salience of Corruption by Mainstream Media (SCMM)	SCMM1	0.799	0.851	0.893	0.626	1.346
	SCMM2	0.775				
	SCMM3	0.769				
	SCMM4	0.799				
	SCMM5	0.812				
Salience of Corruption by Social Media (SCSM)	SCSM1	0.765	0.905	0.923	0.600	1.346
	SCSM2	0.828				
	SCSM3	0.822				
	SCSM4	0.795				
	SCSM5	0.777				
	SCSM6	0.756				
	SCSM7	0.735				
	SCSM8	0.711				
Perception of Corruption (POC)	POC1	0.707	0.951	0.958	0.673	1.164
	POC2	0.834				
	POC3	0.827				
	POC4	0.841				
	POC5	0.849				
	POC6	0.783				
	POC7	0.850				
	POC8	0.852				
	POC9	0.831				
	POC10	0.823				
	POC11	0.817				
Political Efficacy (PE)	PE1	0.913	0.794	0.870	0.692	1.958
	PE3	0.800				
	PE4	0.777				
Political Interest (PII)	PI1	0.841	0.879	0.906	0.659	1.787
	PI2	0.887				
	PI3	0.791				
	PI4	0.782				
	PI5	0.751				
Political Trust (POT)	POT1	0.734	0.918	0.931	0.601	-
	POT2	0.827				
	POT3	0.825				
	POT4	0.803				
	POT5	0.722				

POT7	0.714	
POT8	0.719	
POT10	0.827	
POT11	0.791	

The third criterion to be fulfilled is discriminant validity. It involves examining cross-factor loading to show the degree of difference between variables or constructs when they are described to measure different concepts (Hair et al., 2013). In this study, as recommended by several scholars (Gefen, Straub, & Boudreau, 2005; Hair et al., 2013), we accessed discriminant validity using two tests: the Fornell-Larcker criterion and Heterotrait Monotrait ratio (HTMT) criterion. An acceptable discriminant validity is attained when the diagonal components are larger than the off-diagonal components in parallel rows and columns (Hair et al, 2013). For the Fornell-Larker criterion, the construct's AVE should be higher than 0.70 (Gefen et al., 2005) while the HTMT criterion requires that all values must be less than or equal to 0.90. Since all values in the HTMT in Table 3 below are less than 0.90, the HTMT discriminant criterion has been fulfilled. Our findings, as shown in Tables 3 and 4, show that the criteria for discriminant validity were met.

Table 2. Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Larcker Criterion).

Fornell-Larcker Criterion	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Perception of Corruption (POC)	0.820					
2. Political Efficacy (PE)	0.375	0.832				
3. Political Interest (PI)	0.242	0.664	0.812			
4. Political Trust (POT)	0.072	0.124	0.143	0.775		
5. Salience of Corruption by Mainstream Media (SCMM)	0.359	0.290	0.245	0.207	0.791	
6. Salience of Corruption by Social Media (SCSM)	0.415	0.285	0.221	0.164	0.507	0.774

Table 3. Discriminant Validity (HTMT Criterion).

HTMT Criterion	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Perception of Corruption (POC)	-					
2. Political Efficacy (PE)	0.431					
3. Political Interest (PI)	0.262	0.820				
4. Political Trust (POT)	0.117	0.128	0.133			
5. Salience of Corruption by Mainstream Media (SCMM)	0.395	0.333	0.277	0.227		
6. Salience of Corruption by Social Media (SCSM)	0.437	0.327	0.233	0.186	0.582	-

Structural Model

Having satisfied the criteria for validity and reliability assessment of the measurement model, the next step is to assess the structural model of the study. Bootstrapping of the 688 cases on 2000 subsamples

was conducted for significance testing. Table 4 shows the results of direct relationships in the structural path analysis. The path coefficient between perceived salience of corruption by mainstream media and perception of corruption (β = .200, p = .000, t = 4.723) and perceived salience of corruption by social media and perception of corruption (β = .314, *p* = .000, t = 7.762) were both significant. The results suggest that whenever mass media assign news salience to corruption issues, people's perceptions of corruption increase. Mass media influence on perception is evident in the present study. Hence H1 and H2 were supported. We also found that perception of corruption has negative effects on political trust (β = −.137, t =2.753, p = .006), offering support for H3. The result suggests that high perception of corruption predicts low political trust in the incumbent government, a finding echoed in a lot of earlier research (see Aliu, 2019; Suleiman, 2017; Wang, 2016), which also found that corruption leads to low political trust. We add to the existing literature that perception of corruption has significant mediating effects on the relationship between salience of corruption and political trust for both traditional mainstream media (β = −.027, t =2.35, p = .019) and social media (β = −.043, t = 2.599, p = .009) contexts. Our findings suggest that perception of corruption is a significant mediator contributing to low political trust in both contexts. H4 was supported.

Table 4. Direct Effects Analysis.

Variable relationship	Std-Beta (β)	Std. Dev	*t*-value	*p*-value	2.5% LL	97.5% UL
SCMM > POC	0.200***	0.042	4.723	0.000	0.113	0.280
SCSM > POC	0.314***	0.040	7.762	0.000	0.234	0.390
SCMM > POT	0.177***	0.047	3.748	0.000	0.051	0.216
SCSM > POT	0.007	0.046	0.150	0.881	−0.023	0.199
POC > POT	−0.137**	0.050	2.753	0.006	−0.216	−0.011

Note. *t*-values were computed through bootstrapping with 5000 samples.
*p ≤ 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001

Table 5. Mediation Analysis.

Variable relationship	Std-Beta (β)	Std. Dev	*t*-value	*p*-value	2.5% LL	97.5% UL
SCMM > POC > POT	−0.027*	0.012	2.35	0.019	−0.052	−0.007
SCSM > POC> POT	−0.043**	0.016	2.599	0.009	−0.072	−0.005

Note. *t*-values were computed through bootstrapping with 5000 samples.
*p ≤ 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001

Comparing the strength of coefficient values among the relationships tested, we found a stronger effect of corruption salience by social media than mainstream media on perception of corruption. We conducted an additional test of multigroup analysis to confirm which media types have stronger effects in shaping people's perceptions of corruption in Nigeria. Four conditions were tested: high traditional media use, high social media use, low traditional media use, and low social media use. Our findings suggest that in high media use conditions, perceived salience of corruption has significant effects on the degree to which people perceive corruption in the country. Such effects can be found in both traditional media and social media contexts. On the other hand, salience of corruption effects on perception of corruption was found to be significant among those who use social media less, whereas no significant effect was found in a condition of low traditional mainstream media use. This suggests that social media

have stronger effects on people's perceptions of corruption than traditional mainstream media because the effect of corruption salience on perception of corruption remains significant even in a condition of low social media use. Hence, H3 was also supported.

Table 6. Differences Between Traditional Mainstream Media and Social Media Influence on Perception of Corruption.

	High Traditional Media Use		High Social Media Use		
	(β)	(p-value)	(β)	(p-value)	Decision
SCSM —> POC	0.269	0.000***	0.356	0.000***	Sig. —> Sig.
SCMM —> POC	0.230	0.000***	0.126	0.015**	Sig. —> Sig.
	Low Traditional Media Use		Low Social Media Use		
	(β)	(p-value)	(β)	(p-value)	Differences
SCSM —> POC	0.460	0.000***	0.246	0.000***	Sig. —> Sig.
SCMM —> POC	0.065	0.389	0.322	0.000***	Not Sig. —> Sig.

Note. *, **, and *** are significant at the 10%, 5%, and 1% level of significance.

Discussion

Our findings support an association between high perception of corruption and low political trust. In this, we confirm many similar past research findings (e.g., Clark, 2017; Wang, 2016). Nevertheless, our study further contributes to knowledge in this field in several ways. First, many of the earlier studies focused on people's general views of corruption (Wang, 2016), giving little attention to the sources that contribute to the formation of such perceptions. Our study focused on how people perceive mass media's roles in giving salience to corruption issues that influence their perceptions of corruption. By giving salience to corruption, we found that both traditional mainstream media and social media in Nigeria shaped people's negative perceptions of the issue, which led to low levels of trust in the government. Second, we treated perception of corruption as a mediating variable to uncover its indirect effect on political trust. Perception of corruption was found to be an influential factor that decreases political trust. Our findings suggest that mass media coverage of corruption issues has no effect on political trust if it fails to foster negative views of corruption among the audiences. Third, we compared two major sources of news, traditional mainstream media and social media in Nigeria, to determine which media type has greater influence in the shaping of people's perceptions of corruption. We found a stronger effect for social media than traditional mainstream media on general views of political corruption in the country. These findings suggest some important theoretical implications.

Using two theoretical perspectives, we linked traditional mainstream media effects with agenda-setting theory and social media effects with agenda-melding theory. The first assumes that the mainstream media, through their gatekeeping function, select news items to influence the audience, while the latter depends on the audience to set the public and media agenda. Our study found that traditional mainstream media continue to play an important role in determining "what people should think" in the significant association between salience of corruption and perception of corruption. The assumptions of agenda-setting theory, hence, are still relevant to explaining strong media effects on audiences. Traditional mainstream media can influence how people perceive corruption in the country by giving prominence to news stories on

corruption that have been selected and framed according to the agendas of the media owners. Past studies examining media in Nigeria (Fadairo et al., 2014) assert that traditional mainstream media in the country constitute a tool for the government to gain support and maintain the status quo. Our results confirm this assertion. In testing the direct relationship between salience of corruption in traditional mainstream media and political trust, we found a significant positive relationship, suggesting that the coverage of corruption by traditional mainstream media led to an increase in political trust. It means that the more people were exposed to political corruption stories on traditional mainstream media, the more their trust in the government grew. One possible explanation for this is that the traditional mainstream media may have focused on proactive measures taken by the government to combat corruption, which fostered political trust among its citizens.

Our study found that the influence of perception of corruption, as a mediator, is significant for both traditional mainstream media and social media contexts. The negative perception of corruption shaped by media exposure is the reason for low political trust. When we tested the mediating effect of perception of corruption in the traditional mainstream media context, we found a significant negative relationship. For traditional mainstream media, the presence of perception of corruption contributed to low political trust (significant negative indirect effect), while the absence of perception of corruption led to high political trust (significant positive direct effect). In the case of social media, giving salience to political corruption has no effect on political trust if negative perceptions of corruption are not formed among the public. Unlike traditional mainstream media, which have a common aim to portray the ruling party in a positive light, social media have multiple agendas. Social media allow multiple truths to be formed (Abubakar, 2016), as people are free to talk about corrupt behavior among the government and other politicians, hence the various and inconsistent public agendas available on social media. High exposure to political corruption on social media therefore cannot lead to political trust. This explains why this study did not establish a direct effect of salience of corruption by social media on political trust. The indirect effect, however, is a significant negative relationship. Public expression of opinions about political corruption on social media leads to negative perception of corruption, which in turn reduces people's trust in the government. If it does not evoke negativity, then people's degree of trust in the government is not affected. While agenda-setting theory is strongly grounded in the literature, the testing of agenda-melding theory is still in its infancy. Our study provides some evidence that the agenda set by media owners (media agenda) and the agenda collectively melded by social media users (public agenda) influence political trust in different ways.

In this study, we found support for the influence of both media agenda and public agenda on public trust. Our findings suggest that social media have greater influence than traditional mainstream media in forming people's perceptions of corruption. Social media users, whether they are heavy or light users, tend to be influenced by multiple agendas formed on the online platforms, whereas only heavy users of traditional mainstream media were influenced by the agendas set by the media organizations. This indicates that agenda setting works in high traditional media use conditions, while agenda melding seems to be effective in both high- and low-use conditions. Our results suggest that information, postings, and retweets made available by online users on corruption issues have the potential to affect other users, even though they use social media less frequently. This can be explained by looking at the increasing importance of social media as a platform for social interaction, political discussion, and information exchange, which has brought about liberation, socialization, emancipation, collective engagement, and public awareness (Dzisah, 2018). On the

one hand, social media are becoming more accessible, cheaper, and more interactive than traditional mainstream media in Nigeria. Other studies have found that an increase in social media use leads to a greater exposure to social, economic, and political information (Kibet & Ward, 2018), including exposure to corruption. Social media expose users to multifarious sources of news, comments, viewpoints, and opinions (Dzisah, 2018; Uwalaka & Watkins, 2018) capable of influencing public opinion on public issues. On the other hand, most mainstream media in Nigeria are owned and controlled by the government and politicians (Eshett, 2018; Udeze, 2012), which results in many people turning to social media for free and independent news and information (Mustapha, Omar, & Atoloye, 2019). As social media use increases in Nigeria, a fusion agenda created by its users grows in importance and influence in shaping people's opinions and attitudes.

Another novelty of our study was the testing of political trust in a Nigerian context, offering an alternative view to the mostly Western-centered political communication studies. On a practical level, this study indicates that while traditional media and social media have significant influence in shaping perceptions of corruption, how corruption news is framed is crucial to determining the direction of media effects on political trust. Traditional mainstream media, through their gatekeeping role, have the power to frame corruption news in a way that can cast positive light on the government and hence increase political trust. Meanwhile, social media have no control over how corruption news is shaped and framed; hence, we cannot expect a uniform effect on political trust. These findings could be representative of other countries that present similar conditions, wherein traditional mainstream media are under state control while social media offer freedom of expression. In addition to other African countries, the findings could be generalized to certain Asian countries such as Malaysia (e.g., Omar & Ahrari, 2020) and Singapore (e.g., George, 2007), where media conditions are similar. The findings also provide some insight into how governments might use both traditional media and social media for political purposes. In Nigeria, traditional mainstream media have successfully played a role in the war against corruption. It can be said that the incumbent government won a second term of four years because of strong support for the president's bid to put an end to corruption. Although the predictive power of social media in determining the direction of political trust is not evident from this study, it is important to note that social media's role in shaping people's perceptions of corruption is gaining importance over traditional media. In this sense, optimizing social media to combat corruption is a general gain in the digital era.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Our study provides insights into media effects on political trust in Nigeria. However, the findings come from data from a one-off survey. One-off surveys have their limitations when it comes to drawing causal conclusions. Future research is needed to study political trust across different time series to understand better how trust is affected by matters such as corruption over time. In addition to longitudinal studies, future research could employ experimental research—which is lauded for its high internal validity—to establish causal relationships between news salience by different media types and political trust. Through the experimental method, future researchers could also establish casual order that explains the reciprocal relationships among media, corruption, and political trust as the method allows manipulation and control of variables of interest. Future research is encouraged to examine how specific media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and WhatsApp affect attitudes and behavior in relation to certain issues. We also acknowledge that we are now living in the age of misinformation in which the proliferation of fake news on

social media seems to be pervasive and uncontrollable. A certain number of reports on social issues such as political corruption is highly likely to be fabricated to influence and mislead people. We need research into fake news stories about political corruption and analysis of the effects of fabricated corruption news on political trust. This could lead to further developments in political communication research.

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Appendix

Perceived Salience of Corruption in the Traditional Media
1. There are usually more stories on corruption than other stories in the mainstream media
2. Corruption is usually covered or reported extensively in the mainstream media
3. News on corruption is usually reported on the front page of newspapers
4. News on corruption is usually reported in early stories of radio and television

5. Corruption is usually a dominant issue discussed in the mainstream media
6. Corruption is usually discussed in a strong negative slant (tone) in the mainstream media
7. Corrupt officials are usually portrayed negatively in the mainstream media
8. News on government commitment to fight corruption is usually predominant in mainstream media
9. News on various steps taken by government to fight corruption is usually predominant in mainstream media

Perceived Salience of Corruption in the Social Media
1. There are usually more stories on corruption than other stories in social media
2. Corruption stories are prevalent in social media
3. News on corruption usually appears on social media feeds
4. News on corruption is usually given a lot of prominence by social media users
5. Corruption is usually a dominant issue discussed in social media
6. Corruption is usually discussed in a strong negative slant (tone) in social media
7. Corrupt officials are usually portrayed negatively by social media users
8. News on government commitment to fight corruption is usually predominant in social media
9. News on various steps taken by government to fight corruption is usually predominant in social media

Perception of Corruption
1. The level of corruption in this country is increasing
2. In Nigeria, a large amount of money is being lost to corruption in public and private business
3. Most government officials often ask or receive bribes and illegal payments before performing their official duties
4. Most people at the helm of affairs in this country misuse their public power for individual benefit
5. Many people, politicians, public officials, policemen, and judges, are corrupt in our country
6. In most cases, government officials demand special and illegal payments
7. Government officials give contracts to their party members without considering other contractors
8. Some Nigerians embezzle government money that they are not entitled to
9. Most Nigerian leaders and government officials employ or recommend favors for their friends, family, and relations at the expense of others
10. Most Nigerian leaders and government officials usually favor the people from their ethnic/religious groups at the expense of others
11. Abuse of power is a common phenomenon among Nigerian leaders and government officials

Political Trust
1. I trust our current president
2. I trust the federal government
3. I trust our state government/governors
4. I trust our legislators (members of Senate and House of Representatives)
5. I trust our judiciary (judges)
6. I trust our police
7. I trust our politicians

8. I trust our political parties
9. I trust our army
10. I trust our ministries
11. I trust our local government officials
12. I trust the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)