**Determinants of FOI Act utilisation among journalists in Nigeria**

**Abstract**

This study examined the factors that influence journalists’ use of the FOI Act. Guided by the Social Theory of Journalism, the study surveyed 296 journalists in Nigeria. Data gathered were analysed using SPSS and Warp PLS 4.0. The result of the study showed that perceived organisational support and knowledge explained 59.6% of the changes in self-efficacy, perceived difficult FOI regime accounted for 42% of variance in attitude to the FOI Act and 28.7% of variation in trust in government respectively. Self-efficacy, attitude to FOI, trust in government and knowledge of the Act explained 52% of variance in the use of the Act. The result also indicated that knowledge of the Act and self-efficacy significantly impacted the use of the Act with a path coefficient of 0.385 and 0.41 at a significance level of 0.001 and 0.000 respectively. Also, knowledge of the Act influenced the use of the FOI Act with a path estimate of 0.758 at a significance level of 0.000. Perceived difficult FOI regime had a positive effect on attitude towards FOI Act with a path estimate of 0.648 at a significance level of *p* = 0.000. The implications of these findings are discussed in the study.

Keywords: FOI Act; journalism; self-efficacy; perceived difficult FOI regime; perceived organisational support; Nigeria

**Introduction**

Transparency is crucial in democratic societies, fostering an informed citizenry and reducing corruption. Evidence linking press freedom to lower corruption levels supports the global movement for Freedom of Information (FOI) laws (Shabbir & Anwar, 2007). A free press acts as a powerful deterrent against bureaucratic corruption. Nigerians view the passage of the FOI bill as a transformative step for journalism, particularly following years of military rule that imposed restrictive press laws (Abone & Kur, 2014; Endong, 2019). Experts believe that the FOI Act will enhance investigative journalism, thereby strengthening democracy (Dunu & Ugbo, 2014). However, only active use of the FOI Act can realize its potential. Mr. Bayo Atoyebi, the executive secretary of the Nigeria Press Council, emphasizes the need for the media to move beyond the initial excitement of the FOI Act's enactment and focus on leveraging its benefits for societal improvement (Dunu & Ugbo, 2014).

The FOI Act serves as a vital tool for journalists, granting them access to government-held information, which is essential for investigative reporting (Apuke, 2016). This access allows journalists to obtain government documents and data, enabling them to uncover hidden truths, expose corruption, and inform the public about governmental actions (Bradshaw, 2017; Apata & Ogunwuyi, 2019). Since the FOI Act's implementation, there has been increased scholarly interest in its application within Nigerian journalism. Initial studies focused on journalists' awareness and understanding of the Act (Egielewa & Aidonojie, 2021; Obayi et al., 2020). Subsequent research, however, suggests that journalists underutilize the Act in their practices (Ahmad et al., 2022; Obayi et al., 2020).

Given the pressing issue of corruption in Nigeria, it is crucial to explore the factors influencing the deployment of the Act in journalism practice (Olapade & Isola, 2021). This study aims to enhance understanding of the manner journalists use the Act in their professional duties, addressing a gap in existing literature that has largely overlooked the factors affecting its use. By identifying these factors, the study hopes to provide insights that can help government officials and media managers tackle challenges hindering the effective use of the FOI Act. We expect that encouraging journalists to use the Act more frequently will promote transparency and accountability in society. The structure of the paper includes a literature review and hypothesis formulation, followed by a methodology outline, data presentation, findings discussion, and a conclusion.

 **Literature review and model development**

*Journalists’ Knowledge of the FOI Act* (Know)

Various stakeholders have endeavoured to educate Nigerians, especially journalists, about the Act’s provisions since its enactment. Non-profit organisations like Media Rights Agenda (MRA) and International Press Centre (IPC) have constantly provided training for journalists on the act’s application (Adeyomoye, 2020; Dunu & Ugbo, 2014). Obayi et al. (2020) posit that familiarity with the Act will enhance journalists' self-efficacy in utilising it, thereby promoting its application.

Previous studies have found a direct association between knowledge and self-efficacy (Alkharusi, 2011; Schunk & Pajares, 2002; Bandura, 1997). For instance, Permana, Sabirin, and Feladi,(2016) found that prior knowledge influenced self-efficacy. Though there was poor knowledge of the Act,Egielewa and Aidonojie (2021) found that those who had adequate knowledge of the Act expressed confidence in their ability to apply the Act to their journalistic duties. For their part, Obayi et al. (2020) found that Imo State journalists had extensive knowledge of theAct. Of those who exhibited a strong understanding of the Act, most reported having utilized it or expressed a willingness to incorporate it into their professional responsibilities.Based on the aforementioned information, we propose the following hypotheses:

H1: Journalists’ knowledge of the Act positively and significantly influences self-efficacy

H2: Journalists’ knowledge of the Act significantly impacts its use.

*Perceived organisational support (POS).*

Perceived organisational support refers to employees' perceptions of how much their employer is concerned for their well-being and appreciates their contributions. (Brunetto et al., 2014). Studies have shown that workers who believe their organisation supports them and cares about their welfare tend to experience greater happiness, report lower levels of job-related stress, and demonstrate higher job satisfaction. They are also more inclined to assume new roles, achieve better performance, and have a higher likelihood of staying in their positions (Chen et al., 2009; Shanock et al., 2019). Research has confirmed that perceived organisational support affects job satisfaction and self-efficacy of journalists (Hoak, 2021; Simunjak & Menke, 2023).Hanitzsch & Mellado (2011) recognise organisational factors as one of the influences affecting media content. In accordance with this perspective, we propose the following third hypothesis:

H3: Perceived organisational support significantly impacts journalists' self-efficacy to use the FOI Act.

*Self-efficacy* (SE)

Self-efficacy is the belief that a person has in their capability to plan and execute the actions needed to effectively complete a task. (Bandura, 1997). Bandura (1997) argues that efficacy beliefs function as a crucial element in a generative framework of human competence. Efficacy beliefs are empowered to shape and guide the decisions that individuals deem worthy of investigation (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy is a determinant of how people feel, reason, act, and inspire themselves. Existing studies indicate that an individual's level of self-efficacy for a certain activity predicts task performance in educational contexts (Andres, 2020). Within the media industry, research has indicated that self-efficacy is a key factor influencing journalists' adoption of digital technologies(Mohammed et al., 2021; Githae, 2022). According to the results of these studies, we hypothesize that:

H4: Self-efficacy positively and significantly influences the use of the Actamong journalists.

H5: Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between theFOI Act’sknowledge and its usage.

*Perceived difficult FOI regime* (PDFR)

The context in which journalists operate has a direct bearing on their practice. Hallin and Mancini (2004) popularized this notion by arguing that research on journalism should consider the sociopolitical milieu within which the media operate. Concerning the FOI regime in different parts of the globe, available evidence shows that the normative objective of the Act, which is to encourage the accessibility of government information, is not implemented at the same level across the world. For instance, Michener (2011) asserts that the problematic Freedom of Information laws in Zimbabwe and Paraguay have led to decreased access to information that was once accessible, thereby impeding freedom of expression. Political exigency in some states may have contributed to the enactment of the FOI law, preventing them from mustering the required political commitment to facilitate its execution (Michener, 2011). This could potentially negatively impact journalists' trust in the government's ability to create an enabling environment for the use of the Act. A study by Ituma, Ani, and Chiaha (2019) found that the perceived insincerity of the government in implementing the FOI Act in Rivers State was fuelling the erosion of trust in the FOI regime in the state. Beyond that, a difficult FOI regime can negatively affect the attitude of journalists toward the Act. Mohammed et al. (2023) found that journalists who believed that the FOI Act regime in Nigeria was difficult formed a negative attitude towards the Act. Olanrewaju et al. (2021) and Aligwe, Ugochukwu, and Adibe (2016) found a similar result, linking perceived difficulty in FOI administration to a negative disposition toward the Act. Based on the aforementioned findings, we propose the following third and fourth hypotheses:

H6: The perceived difficulty of the FOI regime significantly impacts journalists' trust in the government.

H7: Journalists' perception of the FOI regime's difficulty significantly influences their attitude towards the Act.

*Journalistic role conception* (JRC)

To appreciate the fundamental purpose and function of journalism in society, it is necessary to explore how journalists conceive their roles (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017). Also, Holton, Lewis, and Coddington (2016) argue the way journalists perceive their professional role in society is fundamental to the field of journalism. Although many scholars have come up with different categorisations of these roles, the six roles articulated by Mellado and van Dallen (2014) appear to be the dominant ones. They include watchdog, disseminator-interventionist, loyal facilitator, service, civil roles,andinfotainment. Professional roles may overlap (Mellado, 2015), given their historical production and occasionally contradictory nature (Vos, 2017). Journalists in Western societies value the watchdog role of journalism (Raemy, Beck & Hellmueller, 2019), a value that has arguably spread to other parts of the world. Concerning the FOI Act usage in journalistic profession, severalinvestigations have shown that journalists who identify journalism taking on a monitorial role will be more embracing of FOI Act utilisation (Rupar, Němcová Tejkalová, Láb, & Seizova, 2021; Relly & Schwalbe, 2013; Meijer, ’t Hart, & Worthy, 2018). It's not surprising that Dunu and Ugbo (2014) assert that the Act would expand the scope of investigative reporting. Zuffova (2023) discovered that journalists use the FOI Act as an enterprise resource. Enterprise journalism largely operates within the framework of investigative reporting. Again, the time lag between requesting information and its release qualifies it for investigative journalism. Based on this, we hypothesise that

H8: Journalists’ role conception positively influences their use of the FOI Act.

*Journalists’ attitude toward the FOI Act* (Att)

The general definition of attitudes is "an evaluative predisposition towards the behaviour as a function of its determinant personal consequences" (d'Astous, Colbert & Montpetit, 2005, p. 292). This implies that the possible advantages and disadvantages of selecting a specific behaviourdrive an individual's attitude. Studying workers’ attitudes is important for understanding their behaviour in the workplace (Sabbir & Taufique, 2022).The study by Kim et al. (2015) revealed that the greater value Korean journalists attribute to public tweets, the more they tend to utilize Twitter for actively sharing information with the public and engaging with them, including news sources. Gulyas (2013) found that UK journalists who had the most positive attitudes towards social media were the most enthusiasticoperators of social media. Research has shown a correlation between journalists' attitudes toward the FOI Act and their usage of it (Ahmad et al., 2022; Obayi et al., 2020). We believe that journalists who have a positive attitude toward the FOI Act will likely use it. Given the aforementioned information, we propose the following hypothesis:

H9: Journalists' attitude towards the FOI Act positively and significantly influences their use of the Act.

*Trust in Government* (TIG)

The belief in the effectiveness of government is known as trust. Research has demonstrated that when the public believes the government is acting in their best interests, policies, directives, tax collection, and other measures become more effective (Fjeldstad, 2004; Hetherington, 2004; Yang, 2005; Horsburgh, Goldfinch & Gauld, 2011). A regime in which there is a near-absence of press freedom will have a difficult time convincing journalists to use its recently enacted FOI law (Obayi et al. 2020). Implementing FOI legislation in a society where journalists do not trust the government will lead to low utilization of the act. Studies have indicated that cCitizens who have a greater level of trust in the government tend to utilize e-government services more frequently, while those who are satisfied with these services are more likely to have trust in the government. (Carter & Belanger, 2005). Hence, we hypothesise that:

H10: Journalists’ trust in government significantly impacts their use of the FOI Act.

FOI Act Usage

FOI Act usage is defined as the deployment of the FOI Act in accessing government-held information for journalistic ends (Eze, 2024). Research has indicated that journalists do not constitute the primary users of the Freedom of Information Act.(Banisar, 2007; Bertoni, 2012). Several factors affect journalists' application of the Act in theirwork. Michener (2011) notes that the FOI regime that makes access to government-held information possible can discourage its use. In certain instances, journalists bear the cost of document reproduction themselves. This may be a pointer to poor organisational support that could negatively affect FOI Act usage (Olanrewaju et al., 2021; Aligwe, Ugochukwu, & Adibe, 2016). Research has demonstrated that people who are knowledgeable of the provisions of the Act, exhibit a positive attitude towards it, and trust the government’s commitment to the implementation of the Act are more likely to use the Act in their journalistic work (Obayi et al., 2020; Ahmad et al.



**Theoretical Framework**.

The Social Theory of Journalism

Developed by Denis McQuail (2013), the Social Theory of Journalism is a framework that aims to account for how various factors influence journalism practice. The theory investigates the goals, rights, duties, and responsibilities of journalists in society. Similar to other normative theories, the Social Theory of Journalism is based on guiding principles and notions of what journalism ought to or should not do (McQuail, 2013, p. 10). The theory argues that journalism must adapt to a specific ideal type of purpose and practice, which varies based on time and location. It maintains that the values journalism subscribes to and the extent to which those ideals are realised impact the recognition given to journalism in the larger society (McQuail, 2013). As opposed to some other normative theories of the press (see Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956), which examine the interface between journalists and numerous segments of society and their effects on the journalism profession, the Social Theory of Journalism goes further to interrogate factors influencing journalism from the perspectives of the society in which it functions, the news organisation, and the journalist. These three analytical levels are crucial for studying how journalists apply the Act to their journalism practice. Nigeria’s constitution in Section 22 entrusts the role of the press to journalists., who are part of the task of upholding the “responsibility and accountability of the government to the people” (Jibo, 2003, p. 182). Given that this research is investigating the factors affecting the application of the Act by Nigerian journalists in their work, the postulations of theory raise critical issues concerning journalism practice in Nigeria. For instance, at the institutional level, how do media houses encourage journalists to employ the Act to their work? At the individual level, how do journalists perceive their role in society, and what is their attitude towards it? The social theory of journalism is pertinent to this research because it offers analytical frameworks that enable an examination of how journalists utilise the Act in their practice.

**Methodology**

The study utilised a survey research design to investigate the factors influencing the use of the FOI Act by journalists in Nigeria.

A multi-stage sampling technique was adopted in which journalists in Nigeria were categorised into six geopolitical regions in the initial stage. In the second stage, we used purposive sampling to choose a chapter of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) from each geographical zone, as these chapters are recognised as media centres within their ownzones. In the third stage,four correspondent chapels, the smallest organizational units of the NUJ within media entities, were chosen through random sampling. The last phase consisted of the unintentional dissemination of questionnaire copies to journalists within the assigned correspondent chapels.

The NUJ was selected for sampling as it represents all journalists in Nigeria and maintains a registry from which samples can be extracted. The study's entire population consisted of 4,299 journalists, spread among the following regions: Lagos State = 2,236; Abuja = 1,267; Enugu State = 192; Rivers State = 202; Kaduna State = 221; and Sokoto State = 181 journalists. Employing Wimmer and Dominick's online sample size calculator, we established a sample size of 353 journalists, using a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. Bowley’s sample technique was subsequently employed to distribute questionnaires among the chosen chapters, resulting in the following allocations: Lagos State = 184; Abuja = 104; Kaduna State = 18; Enugu State = 16; Rivers State = 16; and Sokoto State = 15 journalists. The accidental sampling strategy was utilised to administer the questionnaire to respondents. A total of 313 completed questionnaires were collected and considered appropriate for analysis, yielding an 88.7% response rate.

*Measures*

In the present study, we used a blend of established scales and the ones developed particularly for this study. For this study, the Perceived Difficult FOI Regime (PDFR), Knowledge of the Act (KNOW), and FOI Act Usage (USE) were established. The PDFR and KNOW were assessed using a five-point Likert scale, where 1 represents "strongly disagree" and 5 indicates "strongly agree" In contrast, USE was evaluated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 for "never" to 5 for "always". The items were developed from an extensive review of literature and discussions with experts in the subject area. We used the following items to measure PDFR: "I find it difficult to obtain the information I require via the FOI Act," "I face considerable challenges when attempting to submit a Freedom of Information request," "The language employed in FOI documents and guidelines is comprehensible," and "The duration for receiving a response to an FOI request is acceptable." Concerning knowledge of the Act, these six items were used to measure the construct: “In the event of a denial of a FOI request, a person has the right to contest the decision before an independent authority." “To initiate a FOI request, you must clearly delineate the desired information and submit it in written form." “A public institution shall update and review the information required to be published under this section periodically and immediately, whenever changes occur." “Where a case of wrongful denial of access is established, the defaulting officer or institution commits an offence and is liable on conviction to a fine of N500, 000." “A public institution may deny an application for any information the disclosure of which may be injurious to the conduct of international affairs and the defence of the Federal Republic of Nigeria,” and “A notification of denial of any application for information or records shall state the name, designation, and signature of each person responsible for the denial of such application.” We used three items to assess FOI Act usage, and they included the following: “How often do you use the FOI Act to access information for your reports?" “How often do you use the FOI Act as a confirmatory mechanism?” and “How often do you use the FOI Act as an enterprise source?” The internal consistency for newly developed constructs was assessed using Cronbach alpha. PDFR, KNOW, and USE showed acceptable internal consistency as they yielded 0.72, 0.84, and 0.78, respectively.

Attitude towards FOI Act: This was drawn from Winand et al. (2013) andmodified to align with the current research. Based on four items using a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree, part of the statement reads, "The use of the FOI Act in my journalistic practice is helpful to me”.

Trust in government: This was assessed through four items utilising a five-point Likert scale. Adapted from Han et al. (2021), some of the items read as follows: “I trust the government’s ability to provide an enabling environment for the FOI Act to flourish,” with (1) strongly disagreeing and (5) strongly agreeing.

Self-efficacy: To evaluate this, participants responded to a five-item statement using a five-point Likert scale that ranged from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. These statements were adapted from Woodruff and Cashman’s (1993) research to suit the current study. For example, one of the statements was: “I am confident in my ability to utilize the FOI Act to obtain information held by the government.”

Journalistic role conception: To assess the conception of journalistic roles, a shortened version of the Worlds of Journalism study was utilized, consisting of five items. These items were rated on a five-point scale ranging from (1) very unimportant to (5) extremely important. An example of the statements includes, “I believe in the importance of holding those in power accountable and serving as watchdogs for society.”

Perceived Organisational Support: To measure perceived organisational support, an abridged version of the perceived organisational support (POS) six-item statements was used. Adapted from Eisenberger (1986), the items were assessed using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. An example of the statements includes, “My organisation genuinely cares about my well-being and appreciates my contributions.”

**Results**

Data analysis was performed using SPSS and Warp PLS 8.0. Descriptive statistics of all the observed variables regarding the sample were analysed using a percentage and frequency table. Smart PLS was employed to conduct the Partial Least Square (Ringle et al., 2015). By means of PLS, the research model was analysed in two stages as recommended by Hair et al. (2016): (a) the evaluation of the measurement model and (b) the assessment of the structural model. These two stages represent the process by means of which conclusions can be drawn regarding the hypothesised paths among the constructs (Ringle et al., 2015).

(Insert table 1 here.)

The result of the study as presented in Table 1 shows that the majority of the respondents are male, between the ages of 40 and 49, have obtained HND/B.A./B.Sc. qualification, and are married. Most of the respondents work in either radio or newspaper medium, are generalists, conceive of their role either as disseminator-curator-storyteller or monitor-detective-watchdog, and have worked for either 6-10 years or 11-15 years.

**Measurement Model**

Figure 2. The Hypothesised (Esti­mated) PLS-SEM causal model

****Measurement model assessment was carried out via convergence and discriminant validity indices. Specifically, convergent validity was established using (i) outer loading, (ii) composite reliability index, and (iii) average variance extracted (AVE) (> 0.5) (Hair et al., 2012) and acceptable convergent validity and reliability (Cronbach’s alpha > 0.7). As shown in Table 2, the loadings were generally above the 0.5 threshold except for Att\_4, JRC\_2, JRC\_5, POS\_1, POS\_2, POS\_5, SE\_2, SE\_3, SE\_4, and TIG\_2 and USE\_3. Following the Henseler, Ringle, and Sinkovics’ (2009) counsel that manifest variables with loading values between 0.4 and 0.7 should be reviewed before elimination when it increases the composite reliability,the items were deleted. Since the composite reliability did not meet the acceptable threshold, it was necessary to these items to increase the composite reliability.

Table 1. Convergent validity of the variables in the model

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Outer loadings |  | CR | CA | AVE |
| Att\_1 | **0.703** | 0.872 | 0.802 | 0.631 |
| Att\_2 | **0.752** |  |  |  |
| Att\_3 | **0.846** |  |  |  |
| Att\_4 | **0.866** |  |  |  |
| Know\_1 | **0.855** | 0.912 | 0.88 | 0.639 |
| Know\_2 | **0.851** |  |  |  |
| Know\_3 | **0.82** |  |  |  |
| Know\_4 | **0.829** |  |  |  |
| Know\_5 | **0.881** |  |  |  |
| Know\_6 | **0.49** |  |  |  |
| PDFR\_1 | **0.651** | 0.836 | 0.737 | 0.561 |
| PDFR\_2 | **0.756** |  |  |  |
| PDFR\_3 | **0.78** |  |  |  |
| PDFR\_4 | **0.8** |  |  |  |
| POS\_1 | **0.704** | 0.197 | 0.278 | 0.254 |
| POS\_2 | **0.63** |  |  |  |
| POS\_3 | **0.36** |  |  |  |
| POS\_4 | **-0.458** |  |  |  |
| POS\_5 | **0.277** |  |  |  |
| POS\_6 | **-0.463** |  |  |  |
| JRC\_1 | **0.906** | 0.9 | 0.846 | 0.665 |
| JRC\_2 | **0.901** |  |  |  |
| JRC\_3 | **0.924** |  |  |  |
| JRC\_4 | **0.874** |  |  |  |
| JRC\_5 | **0.271** |  |  |  |
| SE\_1 | **0.819** | 0.295 | 0.128 | 0.284 |
| SE\_2 | **-0.241** |  |  |  |
| SE\_3 | **-0.193** |  |  |  |
| SE\_4 | **0.809** |  |  |  |
| SE\_5 | **0.028** |  |  |  |
| TIG\_1 | **0.85** | 0.862 | 0.784 | 0.613 |
| TIG\_2 | **0.618** |  |  |  |
| TIG\_3 | **0.837** |  |  |  |
| TIG\_4 | **0.805** |  |  |  |
| USE\_1 | **0.953** | 0.786 | 0.588 | 0.613 |
| USE\_2 | **0.952** |  |  |  |
| USE\_3 | **0.159** |  |  |  |

The result of the convergent validity of the trimmed model is presented in Table 3. Results in Table 3 show that the indicators (items) of the various variables in the model are now reliable since all item loadings were ≥ 0.50, while all the composite reliability of the constructs has met an acceptable threshold. Specifically, Cronbach alpha is above 0.7. Composite reliability scores for all the constructs are above 0.7 and AVE ≥ 0.5. From the above, it is shown that the variables have satisfactory convergent validity.

Table 2. Convergent validity of the variables in the trimmed model

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| outer loadings |  | CR | CA | AVE |
| Att\_1 | **0.703** | 0.872 | 0.802 | 0.631 |
| Att\_2 | **0.752** |  |  |  |
| Att\_3 | **0.846** |  |  |  |
| Att\_4 | **0.866** |  |  |  |
| Know\_1 | **0.873** | 0.931 | 0.907 | 0.729 |
| Know\_2 | **0.868** |  |  |  |
| Know\_3 | **0.812** |  |  |  |
| Know\_4 | **0.827** |  |  |  |
| Know\_5 | **0.885** |  |  |  |
| PDFR\_1 | **0.651** | 0.836 | 0.737 | 0.561 |
| PDFR\_2 | **0.756** |  |  |  |
| PDFR\_3 | **0.78** |  |  |  |
| PDFR\_4 | **0.8** |  |  |  |
| POS\_1 | **0.831** | 0.817 | 0.553 | 0.691 |
| POS\_2 | **0.831** |  |  |  |
| JRC\_1 | **0.914** | 0.947 | 0.926 | 0.818 |
| JRC\_2 | **0.901** |  |  |  |
| JRC\_3 | **0.927** |  |  |  |
| JRC\_2\_2 | **0.875** |  |  |  |
| SE\_1 | **0.835** | 0.821 | 0.565 | 0.697 |
| SE\_4 | **0.835** |  |  |  |
| TIG\_1 | **0.85** | 0.862 | 0.784 | 0.613 |
| TIG\_2 | **0.618** |  |  |  |
| TIG\_3 | **0.837** |  |  |  |
| TIG\_4 | **0.805** |  |  |  |
| USE\_1 | **0.956** | 0.955 | 0.905 | 0.914 |
| USE\_2 | **0.956** |  |  |  |

Discriminant validity was assessed using the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Validity is confirmed if the square root of AVE for each latent variable exceeds its correlations with other latent variables. Two methods were employed: the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations and the Fornell-Larcker criterion. An HTMT threshold of 0.85, as recommended by Henseler, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2015), was mostly met (see Table 3). Using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, the square root of the AVE for each construct was computed. For valid discriminant results, the diagonal elements must be greater than the corresponding off-diagonal elements, which was confirmed (see Table 4). Thus, discriminant validity was generally achieved.

Table 3. Discriminant validity Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Att\_ | JRC\_ | Know\_ | PDFR\_ | POS\_ | SE\_ | TIG\_ | USE\_ |
| Att\_ |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| JRC\_ | 0.124 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Know\_ | 0.051 | 1.035 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| PDFR\_ | 0.874 | 0.12 | 0.06 |  |  |  |  |  |
| POS\_ | 0.125 | 0.636 | 0.347 | 0.187 |  |  |  |  |
| SE\_ | 0.057 | 0.837 | 0.854 | 0.051 | 0.307 |  |  |  |
| TIG\_ | 0.655 | 0.073 | 0.072 | 0.713 | 0.036 | 0.094 |  |  |
| USE\_ | 0.039 | 0.695 | 0.744 | 0.047 | 0.199 | 0.758 | 0.066 |  |

Table 4. Discriminant validity - Fornell-Larcker criterion

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Att\_ | JRC\_ | Know\_ | PDFR\_ | POS\_ | SE\_ | TIG\_ | USE\_ |
| Att\_ | 0.809 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| JRC\_ | -0.089 | 0.823 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Know\_ | -0.001 | 0.852 | 0.872 |  |  |  |  |  |
| PDFR\_ | 0.648 | -0.065 | 0.007 | 0.742 |  |  |  |  |
| POS\_ | -0.108 | 0.537 | 0.321 | -0.159 | 0.959 |  |  |  |
| SE\_ | -0.032 | 0.693 | 0.771 | 0.044 | 0.285 | 0.951 |  |  |
| TIG\_ | 0.486 | 0.025 | 0.008 | 0.536 | 0.005 | 0 | 0.814 |  |
| USE\_ | 0.002 | 0.578 | 0.673 | 0.013 | 0.188 | 0.683 | 0.015 | 0.956 |

**Structural model and path analysis**

The goodness-of-fit (GoF) is 0.375, which is above the benchmark of 0.36 (Wetzels, Odekerken-Schroder & Van Oppen, 2009). The GoF of the research model being above the recommended cut-off point of 0.36 as well as other indices showing good fit as evidenced in Table 6 is an indication that the proposed theory aligns with reality. To assess the structural model, we used two main criteria: the level of significance of the path coefficients and the variance explained (R2) (Hair et al. 2016).

Figure 3. Bootstrapping Results of Structural Path Analysis.



Structural model examines the relationship between exogenous and endogenous latent variables by assessing *the R*2value, that is, the coefficient of determination (Hair et al., 2012), and the β value, that is, the path coefficient of the model (Chin, 1998). *R*2 relates to the degree of variance explained by endogenous latent variables (Lleras, 2005). Cohen et al. (2013) recommend that a good model should have the value of R2 of the endogenous latent variable that is more than 0.26. Given that all the *R*2 values (self-efficacy = 0.17, attitude towards FOI Act = 0.43, trust in government = 0.28, and use = 0.46) for the developed model are more than the 0.26 threshold, the model is adjudged to be good. Specifically, perceived organisational support and knowledge explained 17% of the changes in self-efficacy, perceived difficult FOI regime accounted for 43% of variance in attitude to FOI Act, and 28.7% of variation in trust in government. Self-efficacy, attitude towards the FOI Act, trust in government, and knowledge of the Act explained 46% of the variance in the use of the Act.

Structural path coefficient sizes and significance

Figure three shows that five out of nine direct paths in the model were statistically significant (p < 0.05), indicating their influential roles. The strongest effect was from knowledge of the Act (path coefficient = 0.67), followed closely by perceived difficult FOI regime (PDFR) (0.66). The other significant paths include PDFR to TIG (0.53), POS to SE (0.40), and SE to USE (0.10). Consequently, hypotheses H1, H2, H4, H6, and H7 were accepted. However, the proposed relationships involving attitude towards the FOI Act and its use (β = 0.06, p = 0.14), journalistic role conception (β = -0.04, p = 0.21), knowledge of the Act and self-efficacy (β = 0.07, p = 0.09), and trust in government (β = 0.03, p = 0.29) were rejected for not meeting the significance threshold.

Table 5. Significance of hypothesised paths in the model

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Paths Coefficients | T values | P values | Decision |  |
| Att\_ -> USE\_ | 0.01 |  | 0.18 |  | 0.14 | Not supported |
| JRC\_ -> USE\_ | -0.04 |  | 0.36 |  | 0.21 | Not supported |
| Know\_ -> SE\_ | 0.07 |  | 21.97 |  | 0 | Supported |
| Know\_ -> USE\_ | 0.67 |  | 3.18 |  | 0.00 | Supported |
| PDFR\_ -> Att\_ | 0.65 |  | 14.60 |  | 0 | Supported |
| PDFR\_ -> TIG\_ | 0.53 |  | 8.91 |  | 0.01 | Supported |
| POS\_ -> SE\_ | 0.40 |  | 1.34 |  | 0.01 | Not supported |
| SE\_ -> USE\_ | 0.10 |  | 4.72 |  | 0.01 | Supported |
| TIG\_ -> USE\_ | 0.01 |  | 0.20 |  | 0.29 | Not supported |

**Mediation Analysis**

Table 6. Mediation analysis results

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Total effect (Know\_ -> USE\_) (Significant) | Direct effect (Know\_ -> USE) (Significant) |  Indirect effect of know on USE [ie H5= Know-->SE-->USE] (Not significant) |
| Coeff. | P-value | Coeff. | P-value |  | Coeff.  | SD | T-value | P-value | BI[2.5%;97.5%] |
| 0.66 | 0.02 | 0.67 | 0.01 | H5 | 0.01 | 0.065 | 4.794 | 0.43 | 0.187; 0. 436 |

Mediation analysis assessed self-efficacy's role in the relationship between knowledge and use of the FOI Act. Results showed a significant indirect effect of knowledge on use through self-efficacy (β = 0.01, p = 0.43). The total effect of knowledge on use was significant (β = 0.67, p = 0.01), and this remained significant with self-efficacy included (β = 0.66, p = 0.02), indicating total mediation. Thus, H5 was supported.

**Discussion of findings**

This study explored the factors that affect journalists’ use of the FOI Act. The present finding has demonstrated that knowledge of the Act positively influenced the use of the Act. This finding is consistent with previous studies, which indicated that knowledge of the Act affected its use. Available literature in Nigeria on journalists’ use of the FOI Act has shown that those who reported to have used the Act in their journalism duties showed higher levels of knowledge of the Act (Obayi et al., 2020; Egielewa & Aidonojie, 2021; Ahmad et al., 2022). It is almost impossible for an individual to use an innovation he or she does not know. Little wonder, one of the participants in the study by Mohammed et al. (2023) questioned how he could use the Act when he does not know its provisions. This result highlights the importance of knowledge in encouraging the use of the FOI Act among Nigerian journalists. This accounts for why journalists who used the Act seemed to use it more often, as they have acquired the knowledge and tend to be proficient in its use, which empowers them to utilise it for their journalistic duties, thus becoming what Fajans (1984) describes as “paper chasers.” The overall goal of entrenching transparency in government business is hugely dependent on journalists’ knowledge of the Act. If they have poor knowledge of the Act, they would not be able to contest unlawful denial in court. Besides, they would likely rely on the interpretation of civil servants concerning the Act, which will likely not encourage information disclosure. Thus, the Act would be ineffective in achieving its main objectives.

Our result could not find support for the argument that knowledge of the Act significantly impacted journalists’ self-efficacy in the use of the Act. This result negates previous research that investigated the influence of knowledge of the Act on journalists’ self-efficacy (Permana, Sabirin, and Feladi,2016). While we concede that knowledge can be empowering, we suggest that factors such as perceived organisational support could have had more influence on journalists’ self-efficacy in the FOI Act. For instance, a journalist who knows that his organisation would provide legal representation in the case of unlawful denial of the FOI request may exhibit a greater level of self-efficacy than those whose organisations do not provide such assistance or support. This is particularly true for contexts in which there is an increased perception of a difficult FOI regime.

The findings of the present study did indicate that perceived difficult FOI regimes positively impacted journalists’ attitudes towards the Act. This is consistent with extant literature (Ahmad, 2022; Obayi et al., 2020) that found that perceived difficult FOI regimes impacted the attitude of journalists towards the Act. This finding highlights the importance of providing an enabling environment for the implementation of an FOI regime. A difficult FOI regime may decrease journalists’ willingness to use the Act. This, no doubt, would defeat the purpose of enacting the Act in the country. The social theory of journalism has postulated that the society in which journalists operate affects their journalistic duties; the current study has reaffirmed this position. However, it should be pointed out that an unconducive environment does have a negative effect on journalism practice even with a well-entrenched coping mechanism, which could result in journalist turnover (Reyna, 2021). The type of FOI regime that is operational in a country determines to a large extent the attitude and use of the Act among journalists. This explains the differential application of the FOI Act around the globe. This study contends that a difficult FOI regime can hamper the application of the FOI Act in journalism, affecting accountability and the war against corruption.

The present study found that perceived difficult FOI regimes significantly affected trust in government to make information readily available. This aligns with findings by Muhammed et al. (2023) and Ituma, Ani, and Chiaha (2019), which revealed that perceptions of challenging FOI administration eroded public trust in government transparency. Expectedly, the conditions in which the FOI Act has been implemented could serve as a window into the sincerity or otherwise of the government to ensure the success of the Act. This, no doubt, could affect journalists’ trust in government. In light of this, it is pertinent for the government to invest both human and material resources in facilitating the administration of the Act. This action will likely signpost the government's desire to drive through the implementation of the FOI regime, thereby enhancing journalists’ trust in government.

The study found that perceived organisational support affects journalists' self-efficacy in using the FOI Act, aligning with previous research (Hoak, 2021; Simunjal & Menke, 2023; Meijer, t’Hart & Worthy, 2018). Low confidence in using the FOI Act has been identified as a barrier for journalists (Mohammed et al., 2023; Ahmad et al., 2022; Obayi et al., 2020), often linked to inadequate support from their organisations. This lack of support may be exhibited through inadequate legal assistance or funding for document requests. The findings highlight the significance of media organisations in promoting journalists' use of the FOI Act, as a lack of support could discourage them from pursuing transparency, reflecting key tenets of social journalism theory, which underlines the impact of media organisations on journalistic practices.

Our finding could not establish a significant connection between journalists’ role conception and their use of the FOI Act, contrasting with previous research that suggested journalists who identify with a monitorial role are more likely to utilise it. This emphasizes the social theory of journalism, which examines journalists’ behaviour across various levels. The insignificant impact of role conception on FOI usage may be influenced by structural factors like editorial policies, organizational structure, media law, and journalists’ autonomy. Additionally, numerous studies have noted a disconnect between journalists' role conception and their actual performance (Eze, Ugwu & Ugwu, 2023; Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017).

Against our prediction, the current study found that journalists' attitudes towards the FOI Act had no impact on its usage. This differs from previous research indicating that such attitudes did predict its utilisation (Ahmad et al., 2022; Obayi et al., 2020). Other studies have shown that positive attitudes towards public engagement, such as tweets, and social media correlate with increased usage in journalism (Kim et al., 2015; Gulyas, 2013). While social theory suggests that journalists' attitudes are crucial for understanding their societal role, our findings highlight that attitude may not significantly influence how they utilise the FOI Act. Instead, structural factors—such as editorial policy, organisational structure, media law, and journalists' autonomy—may play a more critical role.

The current result showed that trust in government to make information available did not affect FOI Act usage. This is not in agreement with previous studies, which found that the more citizens trusted in government, the more they used e-government services (Mpinganjira, 2015; Carter & Belanger, 2005). Trust is vital to the use of the FOI Act given that they (journalists) have had means of accessing information from the government before the advent of FOI law and may largely be reluctant to make a change if they do not trust the government. An extreme mistrust of the government could make some journalists think that the Act is a ploy to track those who want to expose official corruption. Given the centrality of trust in government in achieving the adoption of the Act in journalism practice, it is imperative that government matches their words with actions to convince journalists that the Act is intended to truly give them access to government-held information, which will ultimately enhance transparency in government.

Conclusion

This study examined the determinants influencing the utilisation of the FOI Act by Nigerian journalists. This study's findings indicated that self-efficacy and awareness of the Act directly affected journalists' utilisation of the Act in their professional responsibilities. Nonetheless, attitude, journalistic role conception, and trust in government were not direct determinants of the use of the FOI Act by journalists in Nigeria. This result is an indication that more studies are needed to understand the factors that affect journalists’ use of the FOI Act. Understanding these factors will contribute to our knowledge of journalists’ use of the Act and add to the growing body of research in the field. Beyond that, such knowledge will enable policymakers and media managers to have a better understanding of journalists’ use of the Act and encourage its optimum utilisation, which will potentially have a far-reaching effect on transparency and the fight against corruption. The value of this study lies in the fact that it is a departure from the previous studies on FOI Act utilisation in journalism in Nigeria, which largely focused on assessing the level of knowledge, perception, attitude, and use of the Act. This study took a sociology of journalism approach by investigating factors that influence the use of the FOI Act in Nigeria. We recommend that further studies should explore other factors like the level of autonomy, the type of media house, etc. effect on the use of the FOI Act by Nigerian journalists.

**Ethical clearance**

The work sought and received ethical approval (UN/FAREC/01022023) of the Faculty of Arts, the University of Nigeria’s Institutional Review Board to investigate determinants of FOI Act utilisation among journalists in Nigeria. Consequently, the principle of informed consent and confidentiality was adhered to in the course of the research.

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