

# Mediamorphosis: Assessing the influence of digital media on traditional newspapers in Nigeria from the audience and media managers' perspectives

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## Abstract

There is an ongoing debate that conventional print media are becoming seriously threatened and facing possible extinction due to the penetrating presence of the digital media. This paper discusses, from the perspectives of the audience and media managers, the situation as it evolves in Nigeria. Applied and survey research methods are adopted for the study. Roger Fidler's theory of Mediamorphosis and the Toronto School's Medium theory constitute the theoretical framework. The study identifies that traditional print media are becoming endangered due to low circulation figure, dwindling advertisement revenue, and even closures of newspaper businesses. It, therefore, concludes that change has indeed swept through the media environment, and conventional media in Nigeria should adapt to this change in order to remain relevant. In recommending the way forward, the paper advises Nigerian newspaper owners and managers to create new ideas, new value propositions, and new ways to engage with customers so as to improve on their revenue and ultimately remain in business.

## Keywords

Information, mediamorphosis, new digital media, newspapers, traditional mass media.

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## Introduction

Nigeria has a good number of daily newspapers circulating across the country. According to a report by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC, 2019), there are ‘more than 100 national and local press titles, dailies, tabloids and publications which champion ethnic interests’. Some others actually champion political and partisan ideologies at the expense of national ideologies. Interestingly, at the moment, we have the *Daily Trust* newspapers as the champion of northern agenda; the *Sun*, clamouring for the eastern block; and the big four – *Guardian*, *Vanguard*, *Punch*, and *The Nation* as pro-western Nigeria, with a twinge of biases for southern stories. The underlying dynamics in all of these is that most publishers of these media are not from those newspapers’ areas of influence. For instance, *Daily Trust* is owned/published by a northern Christian from the central region but yet it clamours for the information needs of the core Muslim North; *Vanguard* and *Guardian* are owned by core southerners, but they leverage more on business interests of the western axis of the country than on ethnic affinity. This may be why, in that report, BBC describes Nigeria’s media scene as ‘one of the liveliest in Africa’ because it can assume shapes and colourations that swing on several pendulums.

This assessment notwithstanding, the very existence and sustenance of these national newspapers which constitute a prominent segment of the print media genre, have recently been faced with grave challenges. A good number of the newspapers have metamorphosed while some have gone extinct, and a few had taken newer colouration to be able to survive the times. Some observers believe that these challenges have to do with the emergence of new media technologies, dwindling readership of the hard copies because of the ease of the mobile version that comes with the mix of adequate technologies, advertising revenue, and the inability of newspapers to optimally monetise their online efforts (Uduma & Obukoadata, 2016; Yap, 2009). Newspapers generally have lost considerable advertisement revenue to new media carried on the internet platform. On the other side, a depressed economy has forced cancellation of newspaper subscriptions, cut in advertising budget by advertisers, and even closures of newspapers, bankruptcy, layoff of staff, and salary cuts (Mahmud, 2009).

Search engine giants, Google and Yahoo, have been accused of ‘stealing’ the contents of print media by prominent media owners across the globe. Rupert Murdoch, the proprietor of News Corporation and *The Wall Journal*, had declared in April 2009: ‘The question is, should we be allowing Google to steal all our copyright...?’ (Kraverts, 2009). Also, Sam Zell, owner of Tribune

Company that publishes *Chicago Tribune*, the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Baltimore Sun*, had asked, 'if all the newspapers in America did allow Google to steal content for nothing, what would Google do, and how profitable would Google be?' (Masnick, 2007; Pawlak & Ko odziejczak, 2020). These and many other accusations against Google and other search engines/metadata base service providers are attributable to them becoming very powerful at the expense of the traditional newspapers which are gradually being forced out of business. Google sees these allegations and accusations as unfounded and ungrounded. The search engine giant's response is that it is the internet which has posed the threat to the traditional newspaper business and not its services which only enhance the ease of going through the internet. According to its United Kingdom boss, Matt Brittin, 'we do not steal content from newspapers' (*The Telegraph*, December 2, 2009). Rather than harming the industry, Google says it is helping to increase traffic to newspapers' web-sites. It explains that Google News shows only the headlines, a line or two of text and links to the story's web-site, which is fair in copyright laws.

Barthelemy, Bethell, Christiansen, Jarsvall, and Koinis (2011) observe that there are clearly significant shifts taking place within the print media industry, particularly around attempts to monetise online content and find alternative sources of revenue to replace falling advertising revenues. They, therefore, believe that the decline of the industry is overstated. News organisations are going through a process of change and adaptation. Some observers see the arrival of New Communication Technology (NCT) as bringing with it a set of opportunities and challenges for traditional media professions such as journalism (Garrison, 1996). Journalists, especially when writing for magazines and newspapers, can gather news via the internet protocols and do their fact-checking or inquiries into facts and figures or background historical information directly from their homes or offices.

The main focus of this paper, therefore, is to assess if and how the conventional print media in Nigeria have been threatened with possible extinction as a result of the overwhelming penetrating presence of the new media. To guide the research, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ: To what extent, according to the audience and media managers' perspectives, have new digital media usage and penetration impacted on traditional newspapers?

RQ: What constitute the distinctions and complementarities between online and traditional newspapers?

## Literature review

### Print media, online media and information cycle in Nigeria

According to Ola and Ojo (2006), quoting Okojie (1993), despite keen competitions from other mass media, the print media have exerted the greatest influence because of the inherent advantages of being relatively cheap, quite portable, more widely available and frequently published thus ensuring the most up-to date information and readability by individuals with varying reading abilities as and when they like. This position was re-echoed by the then editor-in-chief of *Vanguard* newspapers, Gbenga Adefaye in 2010 in the paper, 'Forget circulation figures, print media is still very relevant', where he argued that the print media was evolving, adding that in spite of the influx of new technologies, it was still regarded as one of the most trusted sources of information by many Nigerians. He noted that though the new media at present provided various platforms for communicating, a lot of Nigerians were not sophisticated enough to take full advantage of the new technology which has redefined the latitude of the media and made it a stronger competition like the broadcast media. His voice was strong on the undercurrent of both print and electronic media using the same technological platform in serving the day's events as there seem to be no more boundaries between both, thus necessitating the couching of the multimedia design approach.

The structuring of print media suggests they perform the intrinsic functions of informing, interpreting the news, providing service to readers, and entertaining society. These functions explain the necessity of the print media. The print media aim at a large circulation of general readers and are primarily vehicle for topical news and information (Rudin & Ibbotson, 2002). Nigeria has one of the most pulsating media systems in Africa. According to Ganiyu and Akinreti (2011), there are 400 identifiable and consistent print titles of varying formats in the country, out of which 216 are newspapers, 63 magazines, 44 interest magazines, 16 vernacular publications and 16 religious publications with a diverse string of ownership pattern ranging from government to private to groups and institutions. There are still many fledging others whose consistency cannot be vouched for but could raise the figure to over a thousand. Some are tailored towards ethnic issues, others religious, educational and diverse interests.

Abdulraheem, Adisa and La'aro, (2012) state that the print media in Nigeria aid readers become informed citizens and make better decisions by providing lots of facts. Hard news stories, vital statistics, weather, sports stories, and event calendars are examples of items that help inform readers. Some newspaper articles help to interpret, or explain, the meaning of news to readers. These

stories often include the opinion of the writer or newspaper management. Editorials, opinion columns, news analysis, and reviews are some examples. These authors argue that the newspaper stories provide information that helps readers solve their business, home, recreation, and daily living problems. Advertisements assist in informing readers about products and services. Hard news stories, feature stories, classified adverts, and display adverts are items that provide a service. Some items in the newspaper are designed to amuse or provide enjoyment to readers. Feature stories, comics, puzzles, and humour columns are entertainment items. At the risk of generalisation, newspapers will normally contain a mixture of hard news and features including sports, finance, foreign affairs, opinion, analysis, reviews, leaders, etc.

This position avertedly places the print media on the driving seat. The question is, is it the traditional newspapers that is in extinction or the circulation figures or the platform for circulation or the content?

## **Overview of the newspaper market in Nigeria**

The name, newspaper, is from the words, 'news' and 'paper' which roughly means a paper that carries news as its content. However, a more embracing definition of newspaper can be a publication which circulates periodically and contains news, features, opinion articles, pictures and other information as well as advertisement. Newspapers have helped the processes of communication at the local, national and global levels, and have acted as agents of change and globalisation, to a large extent (Ezuilo, Okon, & Okugo, 2020).

As explained by McQuail (2010), there are various forms of newspaper. These include 'free newspaper' paid for by advertising, and 'more recently, the "electronic newspaper" that is offered online [which] lacks the limits of time and location of the traditional newspaper'. In Nigeria, both the traditional and online (or electronic) newspapers are published, while the 'free newspaper' is not in existence.

For the traditional newspapers in Nigeria, they are characterised by hard and soft news stories, deploying significantly different writing styles and story structures. The hard news focus on discrete events, statements, coverage of politics and government as well as disasters. Of recent, the dominant theme has been that of terrorism, kidnapping and banditry; while the soft news focus on romance, religion and human interests. The tribal and ethnic elements are very strong in the whole construction of the newspaper framing themes. Ownership is more in private hands as over 95 percent of Nigerian newspapers are owned by private entrepreneurs (Okon, 2018; Sunday, 2017). Government, at different

levels, used to have majority stakes, but such is thinning out by the day. This could possibly explain why it was easy for most of the newspapers to transit from physical to online publication. The news content, too, has heavily tilted towards satisfying the local audience with bits of some national and international trends that have been adjudged to reclassify the newspapers as national. No single Nigerian newspaper currently has the international tag, except such is considered within the ambit of technology use.

Prominent features in the newspapers are photo-news, celebrity engagements and gossips, politics and crime. Readership is across the broad spectrum of the society, with those in the upper and middle class less likely to read hardcopies of newspapers except issues concerning them are discussed. It is the low-class persons that spend more time to read newspapers at the local vendor shops through the 'free-reader club' (PRC). It is this same tradition that has been catapulted into the online frame of free newspaper reading, such that even before the incursion of technologies, readership and circulation figures had begun to drop. This created serious concern then, as it has today.

At a forum organised by the Advertising Agencies' Association of Nigeria (AAAN) in Lagos in 2010, the future of newspaper in Nigeria was debated in which there was a majority cry that unless the print media braced up to the challenges posed by the new digital media, it might go extinct in the nearest future. This position was a fall-out of the report which portrayed an alarming slide in the patronage of the newspaper where the daily sales figure of all the newspapers was less than 300,000, meaning that, as at then, only one in more than 410 Nigerians buy newspapers daily (Ekeng, 2010). Considering Nigeria's current estimated population of 206.14 million as at 2020, and ranking as the seventh most populous nation (Worldometer, 2020), this ratio has now come to 1:687. The dwindling trend has continued unabatedly over the years, with circulating and subscription worsening despite the availability of the e-copy of the said newspapers in circulation. The argument has always been that the ease of sharing and storage as a defining quotient of the new media is an albatross for the traditional newspapers, even in Nigeria (Uduma & Obukoadata, 2016).

Popoola (2010) had earlier contended that all the newspapers in Nigeria today have combined circulation figure that is far less than the 500,000 copies per day of the *Daily Times* in 1980 when the population of the country was about half of what it is today. At present, the stockpile of unsold copies of newspapers and magazines in the circulation departments of most print media organisations is a vivid sign of this challenge. Ekeng (2010) discloses that *The Punch*, leading the top-eight-selling national dailies and adjudged as number

one, only circulated 34,264 copies. *The Sun* was ranked third with 25,632 unit sales. *Vanguard* got 25,241, while *Guardian* and *This Day* came fifth and sixth respectively, with 25,222 and 21,703 daily sales. *Daily Trust*, the most popular newspaper up North had 11,672 daily unit sales. *Tribune*, the oldest surviving newspaper in Nigeria, was another surprise, managing only 8,314 daily sales. On the lower side were *Compass*, *Daily Independent*, *Leadership*, *National Life*, *New Nigeria*, *Mirror* and *Westerner*, which barely raked up 1,600 daily sales.

Though these figures have been disputed by Nigerian newspaper proprietors, they remain, according to Olaniyan (2019), as the only published information 'regarding the circulation of Nigerian newspapers'. The situation has remained this confusing because, as noted by Ayankunbi (2020), no Nigerian newspaper is a committed member of the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC), the organisation set up to certify and provide accurate and comparable circulation figures for newspapers and magazines. Any figure put forward, therefore, by owners of these newspapers are merely speculative. This explains why a Federal Government agency, the Nigerian Press Council (NPC), set up to regulate the print media in the country, cannot provide the average daily circulation figures of major Nigerian newspapers in its inventory of newspapers and magazines published in Nigeria (NPC, 2013).

The Nigerian NCT newspaper experience is remarkably not different from what is obtainable in other climes. The hard copies of national newspapers are becoming less popular due to technology that has provided processes for bypassing the everyday street vendor (Hassan, Azimi, & Nasidi, 2018; Obukoadata, 2010; Okon & Ekpe, 2018); and has enabled the reader with a smart device to access all sorts of news content free of charge. And there are many of these mobile phone users in Nigeria where 122.7 million of the citizens are active internet users and around 24 million Nigerians (comprising 12 percent of the population) are active on social media as at January 2019 (BBC, 2019). Yet, unlike other global news outlets, the Nigerian newspapers, even though with strong online presence, are usually accessed free of charge, thereby creating a situation whereby they could be described as 'charity'. They only rely on advertisements paid on their web-pages to earn money. This, no doubt, implies that the newspapers are yet to appreciate how to utilise the NCT to their business and professional advantage.

We could add that the Nigerian newspapers do not readily deploy cookies or other analytical tools that should help them to become more prominent and sell their contents directly. They rely heavily on other search engines and microblogging sites to drive traffic to their contents. This is antithetical approach

to deployment of technologies (Obukoadata, Uduma, Okon, & Ulam, 2020). Besides, their online presence is clearly not any different from the physical presence which helps readers to just be satisfied with the free online presence. Nonetheless, this may not all be negative as the consistency in online and offline presence can help resonate the brand. In all, the newspapers, through their online versions, are inadvertently exposed financially.

## **Theoretical framework**

In any research endeavour, theories play central role in situating the study (Thompson, 1995). For this study, theory of Mediamorphosis, propounded by Roger Fidler in 1997 and Medium Theory, set forth by the Toronto School – founded by the Canadian economic historian, H. M. Innis, were found to have relevance in identifying the challenges and prospects of the traditional newspapers in the era of new media incursion, especially from the perspective of media stakeholders.

In Mediamorphosis, Anaeto, Onabanjo and Osifeso (2008) observe that owing to the complex media systems that are equally occasioned by other complex societal structures, external pressure is exerted on the media and forces its reorganisation towards survival. Specifically, it was stated that the new media do not arise spontaneously and independently, but are occasioned through gradual metamorphosis of the traditional older media thus forcing the question of what is the new media in the real sense of the older ones; and if the old will wear a new wine skin or remain within the purview of the old.

As for the Medium Theory, also known as ‘channel theory’ or ‘media formalism’, it was deemed useful in this study on mediamorphosis because it ‘explains how the media are influenced in propagating information physically and psychologically’ (Asemah, Nwammuo, & Nkwam-Uwaoma, 2016). This theory, according to McQuail (2010), sees a medium as ‘any vehicle for carrying meaning, with some distinctive characteristics in respect of technology, form, manner of use, means of encoding or social definition’. It surveys the influences of communication technologies; describes the differences among communication environments; emphasises the features of each medium of communication that make it distinct from other media; and examines how one medium (such as the traditional newspapers) differs from another (such as the new digital media).

As this study focuses on the traditional newspapers as channels of communication and how they are influenced by the digital technologically-driven new media, Baran and Davis (2012) argue that ‘changes in communication technology inevitably produce profound changes in both culture and social



structure'. This position, however, seems to question the stand of McQuail (2010) that technologies are unlikely to have a direct impact on cultural practices because their effects can only be mediated through a relevant institution which, in this case, is the mass media.

Therefore, this study is expected to scrutinise and come up with the position as canvassed by industry players in Nigeria as to whether new media incursion has produced any significant changes in the activities of the traditional newspapers in the country. Thus, this becomes a querying point for this research.

## Research methodology

This study adopted as its research design the applied and survey research methods. The applied method is used to examine specific practical issues and also, in some cases, to solve a specific problem (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). Asemah, Gujbawu, Ekhareafu and Okpanachi (2017), citing Asika (2002), note that this type of research explains or exposes 'a situation in order to enable the researcher understand it better, hence, it is often regarded as explanatory research or expository research'. Applied research method is, therefore, used here to test the empirical content or validity of Fidler's Theory of Mediamorphosis as it relates to how traditional newspapers can survive in the age of digital new media in Nigeria. The survey method, on the other hand, is a specific type of field study that involves the collection of data from a sample of elements drawn from a well-defined population through the use of questionnaire or any other instrument for data collection.

In line with these definitions, the applied research method was seen as being very appropriate for this study, especially as this paper focused on examining the extent of the dwindling fortune of the traditional newspapers vis- -vis the penetrating influence of the digital new media. In all, 18 currently nationally circulating newspapers – *Blueprint, Business Day, Champion, Daily Times, Daily Post, Daily Trust, Guardian, Independent, Leadership, Nation, New Nigerian, Nigerian Pilot, Punch, Sun, The Cable, This Day, Tribune, and Vanguard* – were assessed.

For the survey, a Google Forms questionnaire was used to contact respondents across Nigeria through different groups on *WhatsApp* and *Telegram* social media platforms out of which 976 persons responded by the deadline. This number, therefore, constituted the sample for the study, and was adopted, using 95% confidence level, 80% expected response rate and loss of sampling efficiency at 1.5 from an infinite population since there are no defined population statistics of the audience and media managers. The audience includes civil servants,

students, tertiary institution lecturers, politicians and political office holders, professionals such as doctors, lawyers, engineers, accountants, etc., applicants/unemployed and media managers – journalists, broadcasters, bloggers, media owners, editors.

The two adopted research methods were used with the qualitative analytical approach to discuss this evolving phenomenon.

## **Results and discussion**

Out of the 18 traditional newspaper media managers contacted for this study through an online questionnaire which sought to assess the way their mainstream newspapers in Nigeria have been affected by the advent of the new media, 13 (representing 72.2 percent) answered the questions asked. Their responses are aggregated and summarised here.

Eleven of the 13 media managers (84.6 percent) agree that their newspapers are threatened by the penetrating presence of the new media while only two (15.4 percent) feel unthreatened. On what those who feel threatened have done to contain the threat, their responses include: make the production more aesthetically attractive; engage good writers as columnists; expand circulation network; have an online version; and embark on more aggressive canvassing for advertisements. These are evident in the new looks of Nigeria papers today. They are aesthetically appealing and further enhanced by the colours they display.

All the 13 media managers (100 percent) affirm that they operate an online version for their newspapers. Eight of them (61.5 percent) agree that their advertisement revenue has ‘very much’ been affected by this development while the remaining five (38.5 percent) rate the effect as ‘fairly much’. None of them accepts the ‘not at all’ option.

As to other reasons the online version has helped to keep their newspapers in business, their responses include costing less to reach their readers; the cost of maintaining the online site as compared to that of the machines, production offices, circulation network, etc. which is negligible; less control of the media by government; it helps to preserve readership of the young-generation audience; it allows for instantaneous feedback from readers; and it reaches a wider audience across the world.

Answering the question, ‘Do you think that traditional newspapers will outlive the new media or there will be a marriage at a point?’, seven media managers (53.8 percent) accept that ‘traditional newspapers will outlive new media’, three (23.1 percent) think they will not while another three (23.1 percent) see a marriage taking place between the two.

For the audience survey, the 976 respondents were distributed thus: 279 civil servants (28.58%), 224 students (22.95%), 135 tertiary institution lecturers (13.93%), 92 politicians and political office holders (9.43%), 87 professionals – doctors, lawyers, engineers, accountants, etc. (8.91%), 58 applicants/unemployed (5.94%), 56 media practitioners – journalists, broadcasters, bloggers, etc. (5.74%), and 45 business owners/operators (4.61%). The media practitioners were evaluated differently from the managers because they are seen as obeying the dictates of the managers more than making any managerial inputs into the newspapering business. The audience's responses are recorded as follows, using a 4-point Likert Scale ranging from Strongly Agree (S.A.) to Agree (A.), Disagree (D.), and Strongly Disagree (S.D.).

*Table 1*

**Audience members' assessment of the impact of new media on traditional media in Nigeria**

S/N	Question	S.A.	A.	D.	S.D.	Total
1.	New media usage and penetration have positively impacted the audience of traditional newspapers.	201 (20.5%)	237 (24.2%)	463 (47.6%)	75 (7.7%)	976 (100%)
2.	New media have positively impacted traditional newspapers in term of quality of production in such areas as page design, choice of typefaces, as well as use of pictures and colours.	325 (33.3%)	226 (23.2%)	113 (11.6%)	312 (31.9%)	976 (100%)
3.	New media have impacted traditional newspapers positively as regards quality of news.	304 (31.1%)	311 (31.9%)	243 (24.9%)	118 (12.1%)	976 (100%)
4.	New media have positively affected traditional newspapers' readership.	183 (18.8%)	230 (23.6%)	262 (26.8%)	301 (30.8%)	976 (100%)
5.	New media have impacted traditional newspapers as it affects comprehension of news content.	237 (24.3%)	304 (31.1%)	207 (21.2%)	228 (23.4%)	976 (100%)

## Discussion of findings

*RQ : To what extent, according to the audience and media managers' perspectives, have new digital media usage and penetration impacted on traditional newspapers?*

'New media' is a broad term in media studies that emerged in the later part of the 20th century to suggest newer approaches to the use of technology as a platform for sharing of ideas. New media hold out a possibility of on-demand access to content anytime, anywhere, on any digital device, as well as interactive user feedback, creative participation and community formation around the media content. Another important promise of new media is the 'democratisation' of the creation, publishing, distribution and consumption of media content. While the traditional media are characterised by one-to-many communication, reaching out to anonymous receivers, employed through one-way communication channels and with a clear-cut distinction between producers and receivers, the new media forms are marked by interactivity, borderless approaches, speed and seamlessness. All these attributes of the new media have been confirmed by the data generated in this study.

The click of the button provides the leeway for today's information flow which the print media have equally benefitted from. The early 1990s ushered in the Information Revolution or the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) revolution which has occasioned a paradigm shift in production processes and relations, the emergence of a new knowledge-based economy, and a quantum leap from an industrial society into an information society. The internet, the major force behind information technology, and argued by Song, Shao and Wu (2010) to represent the most significant change in the media market during the past decades, has established itself as the dominant force in the information world, transforming the ways in which information is aggregated, stored, searched, and retrieved and facilitating media convergence which are the pin-point of mediamorphosis (Campbell, Martin, & Fabos, 2009).

Meyer (2009) argues the point of advantage for the print media in adapting the new media technologies for their e-newspapers where portability becomes classic and accessible almost everywhere and any time. This point is amplified by the miniaturisation of computing devices which accommodate the nuances of the configuration of the print media. The traditional medium for publishing content is paper; but now, newspapers have tried certain new options such as online newspaper edition and mobile phone newspapers. At present, about 60 Nigerian newspapers are online; and remarkably, out of the 13 newspapers that participated in the study, all of them, representing 100 percent, as seen in the data generated, publish online editions in addition to their print editions.

This indicates that a fusion of both the traditional and new media would likely happen at a point, and copiously blur the distinction between both. The issue though is what name would we call such fusion at the end?

There is a spiral growth in the audiences for online journalism; and print media publishers have responded adequately to the challenges from this new media, clearly adopting the multimedia platform to grow their popularity and attract more revenue as bailout from the dwindling newsstand newspapers. Baran (2002) underscores this position by stressing that the internet is different from these traditional media in that rather than changing the relationship between audiences and industries, the internet changes the definition of the different components of the process and as a result, changes their relationship. On the internet, a single individual can communicate with as large an audience as can the giant, multinational corporation that produces a network television programme. All these point towards the direction from an earlier warning by media mogul, Rupert Murdoch, chairman and chief executive officer of News Corporation, in a speech delivered to an audience of newspaper editors, where he noted that the 'dynamic revolution taking place in the news industry today revolves around the fact that "technology-savvy young people" are becoming increasingly likely to turn to the web as their news medium of choice' (Abdulraheem, Adisa, & La'aro, 2012).

Also, as can be seen in the data obtained from this study, all the 13 newspaper editors who participated agreed that new media affect the advertisement and circulation bases of their newspapers though in differing dimensions and to a very great extent. Their responses were shared between advertisement revenue being affected 'very much' (61.5 percent) and 'fairly much' (38.5 percent). It is necessary to note here that this effect has been more negative than positive on traditional newspaper circulation, which is seen in only 44.7 percent of the audience members 'strongly' agreeing or just agreeing that new media usage and penetration have 'positively' impacted the audience of traditional print media.

In all, though 84.6 percent of the media manager agreed that their newspapers were threatened by the penetrating presence of the new media and 53.8 percent believed that traditional media might outlive new media, it should be noted that to predict the future of the new media is dangerous as the spiral growth is a function of several isolated individuals under a platform trying to harness the potentials of the carrier. Mass media news outlets are struggling with changing gate-keeping standards due to demands for interactive content produced by the audiences themselves (Bennett, 2003). The traditional Nigerian newspapers, as shown in the study, are trying to contend with these demands by diversifying into online publication.

*RQ : What constitute the distinctions and complementarities between online and traditional (print) media?*

In exploring the distinctions and complementarities between online newspapers and their mainstream counterparts, one must understand the technical distinctions between these various media forms (Brydon, 2011). Fortunati (2005), in an earlier description of this process of complementarity or mutual convergence, had emphasised the parallel tendencies of what he referred to as ‘mediatization’ of the internet and the ‘internetization’ of the mass media.

As confirmed in this study, the mainstream mass media are typically highly centralised, require significant investment and resources and can be heavily influenced by governments through various mechanisms and forms of control (Banerjee, 2008). The new media, represented here by the online newspapers, have radically different diatribes offering use for all forms of communications. They are also extremely de-centralised, require very low investment, provide greater interactivity and public participation and are much more difficult to control (Banerjee, 2008). This scenario has opened the gain-door of popularity and acceptance which has shifted focus from the conventional media stream. Creating media content is now a priority for individuals rather than the exclusive preserve of the traditional mass media (Rosenstiel, 2005). In order to continue remaining in business in Nigeria, the newspapers need to do a lot more than they hitherto had been doing. In this wise, the editor-respondents in this study reveal some approaches they have adopted, which include improving on the attractiveness of their production; engaging good writers as columnists to attract more readers; expanding their circulation network; having an online version for their newspapers; and working harder to improve their advertisement base.

The new digital media have opened up a whole lot of activities for both producers and receivers of communication contents in Nigeria; helping to define communication as sharing process in the real context of it. As experiments with global citizenship go forward, the empowerment offered by distributed, networked digital communication may become more widely shared. Does this, therefore, warrant an adjustment to media hegemony theories?

Responses of the Nigerian newspapers’ audience members as shown in *Table 1* provide the needed answers to this question. Majority of the respondents agree that online newspapers do positively impact the quality of production, quality of news, sustainability, credibility, comprehension of news, and economic concerns of the traditional newspapers, while the traditional newspapers’ acceptance, distribution, and readership are negatively affected. This is possible because though there is, technologically, a clear distinction between online

and traditional newspapers, both work to complement each other with the traditional print media providing the acceptance and credibility for the business while the digital media make up for the reach-out, sustainability and economic gains required.

Also, as explained by the media manager-respondents, the internet has made possible online publication and sustainability of newspapers at lower cost and under a less controlled media environment with less demanding annual licensing scheme. This has, therefore, made some people to dub the new media, represented here by online newspapers, as the mainstream media. The comments of Syed Hamid Albar, a former member of the Dewan Rakyat and Malaysian Home Minister, in this direction is noteworthy where he stated that the internet/digital media cannot be called an 'alternative media' anymore as it is a more popular medium than the traditional mainstream media in Malaysia: 'I think we have to call the alternative media the mainstream' (*Straits Times*, October 22, 2008). As seen in the outcome of this study, this comment fits the situation in Nigeria as well.

## **Conclusion and the way forward**

Change has swept through the media environment and the conventional media should adapt to the change so as to keep fitting in as canvassed by mediamorphosis and medium theory. Change is propelled by technology and carried by adaptation, and most times, these technologies release harsh propane on the older formats, and attack the very essence of what was, to create what is. Some observers think that conventional media managers should do some serious soul-searching and accurately feel the pulse of the change agent in order to stay relevant (Yapp, 2008), by not just fighting the new, but seeking mutual grounds that would better the old, and keep the new in track. The new digital media have come to stay, and their penetration is challenging every sector of society, especially with the normal approach to life. Traditional newspapers may sound their own death knell if they remain rigid to change.

The credibility of the new media continue to soar by the day especially with more sectors embracing it strongly, hence the print media should not lag. Perhaps among the reasons new media appear to gradually be gaining more credibility are the perceptions that the conventional mainstream media are government- and institutionally-controlled, which limit the essence of voice. The fact that we are increasingly living in an era of media convergence, distinctions among traditional mainstream mass media and the new media such as the internet are getting more and more blurred (Banerjee, 2008). Despite these distinctions,

there are still complementarities between the new media and conventional print media. They will continue to coexist and reinforce each other in Nigeria for now, but the future is not guaranteed.

However, in spite of the pervasiveness of new media in Nigeria, the newspaper is still a more trusted medium of communication. This is premised on the observed tendency of new media in Nigeria to be extremely sensational, propagandistic, and full of fake and outright false information.

The way forward for mainstream newspapers as well as other conventional print media would be, first of all, to improve their credibility since most people see them as a follow-up of the online version. At other times, they are viewed as propaganda organs of their promoters and/or owners. Gilbert (2002) observes that, first and foremost, newspapers should separate their news venture and their core business, the news venture being the online digital newspapers and their core business being their already existing newspaper business. These separate sites dedicated to only online newspapers will be successful in building new markets with new sources of revenue.

The way out for newspapers and other media will always be on the revenue side, creating new ideas, creating new value propositions, and creating new ways to engage with customers. In other words, newspapers could work with search engines and Internet Service Providers to provide and include in the ISPs' package access to digital newspapers. Newspapers could also charge a subscription fee for their online version where, upon payment of the fee, a password is given to the subscribers. Online presence as well as print version of the newspaper should run side by side.

Equally, newspapers in Nigeria should also consider exploring free circulation, as some of their counterparts across the globe are doing, which makes them purely advertising-based. This will attract younger readers who are not willing to pay for newspapers and have thus been moving to free or less expensive, more advertising-based circulations. The media managers may have argued that the traditional newspapers are going nowhere soon, but the audience think that they are gone as majority of them rarely mention or talk about traditional print title. These perspectives provide grave implications for mediamorphosis and denouement of an age-long tradition.

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