

NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS AND THE INTERNET ONSLAUGHT

Allen Nnanwuba Adum, Ph.D.

Department of Mass Communication,
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka,
Anambra State
+2348037585067,
allenadum@gmail.com

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Nze Uchenna Nze

Department of Mass Communication
, Tansian University, Umunya
+2347036454987,
nzeunze@gmail.com

Uche Patricia Ekwugha

Department of Mass Communication
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
Anambra State,
Nigeria.
+2348035962584
ucheekwugha@yahoo.com

Abstract: *The study examines the nature of the Internet and the Newspaper; as well as their strenghts and weaknesses. The paper highlights how journalism started in Nigerian. It shows how the citizens have been embracing each new information technology that came into the country at a particular period. The work reveals how the internet has changed the Nigerian media terrain, and the populace's active participation in the Global Village. The article explains how the internet is undermining the printed newspaper in Nigeria. Despite the strenghts, feautres, uniqueness and weaknesses of each, the findings show that the two media channels are still important in Nigeria and need to be used hand-in-hand for information as each will complement the effort of the other as well as fill the vaccum created by the other.*

Keywords: the Internet, Printed Newspaper, Subscription, Circulation, Global Village, Citizen Journalism

INTRODUCTION

The printed Newspaper and the Internet are two different channels of communication. They are among the mass media channels that are available to Nigerians as sources of information. While the newspaper is a print medium, the internet belongs to the new media which is an offshoot of the electronic. They are mediated interpersonal communication. The media are not for the illiterates unlike the broadcast because one must attain certain level of education before becoming their audience. They present their information in a universal language unlike the traditional media. Both have a bigger theatre for audience; they can reach about two hundred thousand Nigerians at different nooks and crannies of the federation.

The newspaper and the internet are packaged according to content. Each has significant topic or headlines that helps one to choose whatever story to read. The media publish every issue that has to be of great interest to the general public whether international or national. Their main function are: to inform, educate and entertain the audience. They equally assume the position of the watchdog of the society as well as the fourth estate of the realm. These two media channels help the audience to become better citizens as well as guiding them in their decision making. They help to interpret and explain issues to the audience. The internet and the newspaper help Nigerians to solve their daily problems. The media have great impact on the Nigerian society.

According to Rowe and Schuh (2005 p. 432) the internet is a global network of networks that provide vast amount of information as well as human connectivity, communication and collaboration. It places the world at one's finger tips. Dominick (2009 p. 277) describes the internet as network of computer networks that combines computer that you can operate from your personal computer. The connections among these networks can be ordinary phone lines, microwaves, fibre optic cables, or wires built specially for this purpose. Just as there is no one phone company, there is also no one internet company. The internet technologies include: e-mail, facebook, 2go, twitter, whatsapp, blog. The new technology of the internet provides various platforms of communication to the public.

Baran and Davis (2012 p. 144) add that the internet technologies assumed a growing news gathering and dissemination function in our society as well as a central role in democracy public discourse. Today's Citizen Journalism practice whereby ordinary citizens become amateur reporters is clear evidence that the newspaper no longer enjoy the monopoly of news collection and dissemination. The internet has become a mainstream. Bloggers are routinely granted off real access to major news event like presidential press conferences and Supreme Court hearings. The internet equally gives the audience the opportunity to comment or react to the event immediately – immediate feedback, which is not same with the newspaper.

The prediction of Marshal McLuhan in 1964 that the world would be a Global Village is made possible today by internet technologies. What it means is that someone in

Nigeria can hear and see within seconds an incident that happens in far away China. This makes the internet an attractive medium of communication. From your mobile phone or personal computer, you can find information about anything you can name or even imagine (Gralla 2002 p.2). The technology has the facilities that can combine aspects of both interpersonal and mass communication such as social networking sites, weblogs, and online role playing games. Rodman (2012 p.300) emphasizes that the internet is growing so quickly that statistics change by the minute. Personal computers and mobile phones have made the internet service available to people at the comfort of their homes. The power of the internet network cannot be underestimated as it cuts across social and geographic distance to facilitate the information flow. Page | 3

In Nigeria today, many mobile telecommunication companies like MTN, GLO, Airtel and Etisalat equally provide internet services to their customers.

Sandman et al (1976 p.260) cited in Okunna and Omenugha (2012 pp. 75-76) defines newspaper as “an unbound, printed publication issued at regular intervals which presents information in words often supplemented with pictures”. It is a light weight or portable publication printed on paper with ink. Rodman (2010 p. 100) explains that a wide variety of newspapers make up today’s industry but newspapers are generally categorized as either dailies, weeklies or special interest papers.

In the words of Dominick (2009 p. 92) newspapers contain international, national and local news. They equally have pages for editorials, letters to the editors, movie listings, horoscope, comics, sports, film and book reviews, recipes, advice columns, classified ads, and a host of other materials. They extensively accommodate a lot of content. The newspaper because of their permanent form serves as a historical record. Sambe (2005 p. 114) identifies the strengths of newspaper in areas of permanence, depth, pass-along audience and portable. A newspaper must be published at least once in a week or fortnightly. It must be timely and must be mechanically produced.

Some prominent newspapers in Nigeria today includes: *Sun, Guardian, the Punch, Vanguard, Daily Independent, Thisday, Daily Trust, the Nigerian Tribune, etc.*

JOURNALISM IN NIGERIA: BRIEF HISTORY

Journalism in Nigeria started with the newspaper. And that was with *Iwe Irohin*, which was the first printed newspaper in Nigeria. The paper was founded in 1859 at Abeokuta by Rev. Henry Townsend. Okunna and Omenugha (2012 p.65), state that, apart from the book, the newspaper is the oldest form of mass communication in Nigeria. It has been in existence for a long time. Before the proliferation of internet technologies in Nigeria, the newspaper industry grew faster than any other mass media channel. The industry has continued to grow even before the amalgamation of Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914 which gave birth to what is, today, called Nigeria. The proliferation of newspaper especially in the 20th century has many newspapers available in Nigeria.



After Iwe Irohin, more newspapers like *the Anglo-Africa*, *Lagos weekly*, *Lagos Daily*, *the West African Pilot* and so on hit the news stand and Nigerians continued to enjoy the content of the newspapers without any other media-channel option. The Newspaper continued to enjoy the monopoly of information, education and entertainment in Nigeria till 1933 when radio was introduced by the British Colonial Government. The introduction of radio brought about some audience leaving the newspaper to radio programmes. Another achievement was recorded in 1959 when Chief Obafemi Awolowo the then premier of the Western Region built the first Nigerian television station at Ibadan. Television presented the audience with some advantages which the newspaper and radio did not have. The outcome of this development was that some audience shifted from newspaper and radio to go for television as their preferred media channel.

A turning point came into the Nigeria mass media when the internet was introduced in 1995 through the UNESCO sponsored Regional Informatics Network for Africa (RINAF) project. UNESCO held several workshops and propagated the idea of the internet to Nigerians. This gave birth to the formation of Nigeria Internet Group (NIG) which was a non-profit and non-government organization with the primary aim and objective of promoting and facilitating access to the internet in Nigeria. This new media technology became a reality in Nigeria when the Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) Ile-Ife in late 1990s became the first institution to have its own VSAT (Very Small Aperture Terminal). With the breakthrough at OAU, many institution and organization started to consider internet use. The number of organization and individuals that are made use of the internet in Nigeria kept increasing. The technology has proliferated in Nigeria with cyber cafes even in the streets (see History/Internet Exchange point of Nigeria: www.ixp.net.ng/history. Accessed on Friday 11th September, 2014)

Rowe and Schuh (2005 p.441) highlight that contemporary technological breakthrough in the electronic world has even made the accessibility of the internet easy with the aid of the mobile phone. People with their laptops or palmtop are able to connect to the internet through modems. The new technology of the internet provides various platforms of communication to Nigerians which the radio, television and the newspaper could not afford.

The advent of the internet technologies saw massive shift of Nigerians from the newspaper to the internet. Though the introduction of the broadcast media in Nigeria affected the newspaper circulation but it was insignificant and invisible compared to the way the shift to the internet is affecting circulations currently. The continuous paradigm shift made the internet to be seriously undermining the activities of the Nigerian printed newspaper.

The concern of this work centres on the chances and position of the newspaper in the internet age: is the Nigerian printed newspaper still relevant in the new media age? Does it stand the chance of surviving in future? Can it be used to complement the effort of the internet? Can it fill the vacuum created by the internet?

THE NIGERIAN NEWSPAPER IN THE INTERNET AGE

Sunshine Publishers Ltd, Onitsha, is a publisher of education children's books. The company has ten departments. They buy ten copies of newspapers on daily bases for each of the department, but when the company connected all the computers in the departments to the internet, they stopped buying the newspapers. The general manager told the heads of departments to use their computer for those information they get from the newspaper.

The above story is a physical evidence of the threat the internet is posing to the newspaper circulation figure in Nigeria. The emergence of internet technologies had brought a dramatic change in the Nigerian media terrain both in content consumption and pattern of reportage. The technological breakthrough has come with striking changes forcing foremost transformations within the Nigerian media sector. Citizen Journalism is an important dimension in this current trend.

Rodman (2010 p.99) points out that the internet is today's greatest challenge to the printed newspaper. This is because the internet has multimedia capacity and democratization of information production, access and distribution. In the current global village, newspapers are finding it is difficult to compete. One can even turn one's mobile phone into multiple use devices for the internet browsing.

A staff of Tansian University, Umunya, Anambra State was once asked how often he buys newspaper. "I won't waste my money to buy newspaper when I can get more than what the newspaper can offer in my mobile phone", he responded. The facilities provided by the internet have made not only the above worker, but many Nigerians not to patronize the newspaper again. The development of the internet technologies left little for the newspaper to do.

Currently some Nigeria newspapers have started adapting themselves to the new media age as they equally have the online version of their stories. The study of the Internet World Statistics shows that Nigeria has the highest number of internet subscribers in Africa. The record reveals that Nigeria has the figure of about Fifty-eight million, three hundred and sixty-six thousand, one hundred and seventy-nine (48, 366, 179) subscribers in 2012. In 2013 the number skyrocketed to Sixty-seven million, three hundred and nineteen thousand, one hundred and eighty six (67, 319, 186) subscribers (internet users and population statistics for Africa: www.internetworldstats.com). These Nigerians also seek for news and other information through the internet relegating the newspaper to the background.

The Advertisers Association of Nigeria (ADVAN) in 2010 conducted a research on newspaper circulation and the internet subscription in Nigeria. The outcome of the study is represented in the tables below:

Table 1: *Volume of the circulation of prominent newspapers in Nigeria (2010)*

S/N	Name of the Paper	Daily Circulation
1	The Punch	34, 264
2	The Sun	25, 632
3	Vanguard	25, 241
4	Guardian	25, 222
5	This Day	21, 703
6	Daily Trust	11, 672
7	The Nigerian Tribune	8, 314
	TOTAL	152, 048

Source: ADVAN 2010

Table 2: *Number of the subscribers or followers of the prominent online media in Nigeria (2010)*

S/N	Name of the Paper	Daily Circulation
1	Nigeria Newsdesk	443, 923
2	Daily Post	182, 480
3	Naija Gist	141, 121
4	Premium Times	78, 090
5	Naija 247 News	15, 308
6	News Diary	4, 157
	TOTAL	865, 079

Source: ADVAN 2010

From the above tables we can see that the daily subscribers of one of the online media, *Daily Post* precisely is larger than the total number of the prominent newspapers put together. The disparity in the number of the circulation and subscription in the above tables has proved that the internet technology is subduing the newspaper immensely.

Popoola (2010) concurs with the above by saying that all the newspapers in Nigeria today have combined circulation figures that is far less than 500,000 copies per day, which was what *Daily Times* circulated on daily bases in the 1980s when the population of Nigeria was half of what it is today. The circulation figure of the *Daily Times* in the 1980 is evidence that radio and television did not suppress the newspaper severely as the internet is doing today. The stockpile of unsold copies of newspaper at different newspaper circulation departments is a clear sign that the newspaper is facing a strong opposition from the internet. The outcome of the 2010 ADVAN research represented in the above tables made numerous analysts to boldly

conclude that the period of printed newspaper is gradually coming to an end in Nigeria.

Oseni and Ehis (2011 p.1) express the view that short fall in advertising revenues and reduction in circulation as a result of the internet signals the gradual closing down of newspaper in Nigeria. Johnson (2013 p.7) takes the stand that the newspaper is on the verge of extinction that by 2030 the internet would completely subdue the newspaper industry in Nigeria, with people having to send or read news and other stories through mobile phones. Page | 7

To some communication scholars, the internet delivers news immediately through *Twitter* and *Face book*, but for newspaper what happens today will appear in tomorrow's edition. This makes theirs stories rather than news. People want to read the current event which is news offered by the internet and not the story offered by the newspaper. The internet makes it easier for Nigerians to engage in online discussion and immediate feedback which makes the internet to be participatory compared to the newspaper. And many Nigerians want to be active participants in the global village. This makes them to turn their back on the newspaper to follow the current trend – the internet.

On the contrary, a group of Nigerian researchers argue that since radio and television did not subdue the newspaper completely, that the internet can neither do so. Ani et al (2007 p.362) is of the opinion that no matter the breakthrough in the electronic world that the newspaper will never decline completely because of some limitations the internet is facing in Nigeria. Such problems make the internet not to be accessible to many Nigerians. Such problems include:

- Lack of steady power supply
- Lack of financial capacity
- Inadequate knowledge of how to navigate on the internet
- Not being computer literate
- Network fluctuation
- Low speed of the server

Some analysts in Dominick (2009 p. 303) strongly believe that the internet can never make the newspaper to be completely redundant. That newspaper still remains the most credible source of information when compared to the internet. They discard the practice of citizen journalism on the ground that they are not real or professional journalists rather people who witnessed or want to report an event. No atom of censorship or gate-keeping in their activities. They can fabricate stories or fine-tune an old story and deliver to the audience.

Newspaper information are always verifiable but that of the internet is not always so. A typical example of the above was on August 7-9th, 2014 when a Nigerian citizen journalist published a false therapy in the internet that people should eat bitter kola, put salt in hot water; drink and bath with it equally as an Anti-Ebola Virus Disease (AEVD) therapy. This false information left some HBP patients who took the therapy dead. Later the citizen journalist apologized that he or she was only joking. No Nigerian newspaper can publish such false information because the reporters verify all



the information from the appropriate authorities before publication. That is the reason why some Nigerians who believe in the philosophy of truth nurtured in accuracy still rely on the newspaper for information.

The Editor-in-Chief of *Vanguard* newspaper, Mr. Gbenga Adefaye in 2010 during the presentation of a paper titled “Forget Circulation Figures, Print Media is Still Relevant”, said that undoubtedly, the internet is making the newspaper to decline but can never subdue it completely. He went on to say that a lot of Nigerians were not sophisticated enough to take full advantage of the internet. More so, that many Nigerians have confidence in newspaper information than the internet. *Table 1* above is the evidence that some Nigerians still believe in newspaper information. Had it been there was no circulation figure at all it is then that it would be clear that the internet has made the Nigerian newspaper to become extinct.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is anchored on two communication theories: the Uses and Gratifications, and the individual differences.

The **Uses and Gratifications Theory** concentrates on media audience rather than the media message. Dominick (2009 p. 37) notes that audience members have certain needs that are satisfied by using media sources. The actual needs satisfied by the media are called **Media Gratifications**. The theory sees the audience members as the active consumers of media message. It believes that people are active and goal-directed and not passive. Kaye and Johnson (2004 p.198) explain that uses and gratifications theory particularly suits the study of the internet and the audience because the internet technologies have interactive features which people choose to gratify their individual needs. And some of the needs Nigerians seek to gratify with the internet include: sending and receiving of information, entertainment, research, etc.

Uses and gratifications theory is equally applicable to the study of newspaper because the audience seeks to satisfy some needs. Rodman (2010 p.45) notes that the theory views the audience as the decision makers who sometimes choose deliberately the media to use and how to use them. It is concerned with “what the audience do with the media” and not “the effects the media have on the audience”. What Nigerians do with newspaper are getting: news, feature stories, editorial, in-depth reportage, research, historical records, etc. The aforementioned are equally some of the needs they seek to satisfy through the newspapers.

The second theory is the **Individual Differences Theory**. Baran and Davis (2012 p.180-181), citing Defleur (1970 p.122) say that the theory argues that because of individual psychological make-ups and perceptions, the influence of the media on people differs. Rodman (2010 p.43) points out that the individual differences theory looks at how media users with different characteristics are affected by mass media. Some types of users are more susceptible to some type of media messages than others are. For instance; a health worker is likely to be influenced by the information on the health column of newspaper than a commercial bus driver, while secondary school

students are likely to be influenced more than a politician by the information posted on the internet.

The implications of the individual differences theory in this study is that some Nigerians prefer the internet for information while others prefer newspaper. The different individual characteristic determines who would be influenced or attracted by a particular media channel and who would not.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, it is obvious that the internet is continuously undermining the printed newspaper in Nigeria. Many audiences have shifted from the newspaper to the internet as their preferred channel of information. The internet need not to be hard-wired these days as the sophisticated technology has made it possible that one can turn one's mobile phone into multiple devices for multifarious purposes. In the present world where information could be found at the click of a mouse, the newspaper is finding it difficult to compete favourably. The internet has made the monopoly by the traditional mass media in collection; processing and dissemination of information almost nonexistent. Citizen journalism is an evidence of this.

Despite the fact that the internet is making the newspaper to be redundant, some Nigerians still have confidence in the newspaper than the internet. And this still makes them to buy newspaper no matter the contemporary breakthrough in the electronic world and the proliferation of the internet technologies. Nigerians still regards the newspaper as the most trusted source of information.

Both the internet and the newspaper are still relevant in today's Nigeria because of the strength each has over the other. Nigerians should use each to complement the efforts of the other. They should be used equally to fill the vacuum created by the other. Newspaper publishers in Nigeria should put the individual differences theory into consideration and follow this audience that prefers the internet as the source of information. The way to achieve this is by having an online version of their publication for such audiences. This would equally make them not to lose out in business as a result of decline in circulation.

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