

## **INFLUENCE OF MEDIA CONVERGENCE ON NEWSPAPER READERSHIP IN AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Fears about the imminent death of the print newspaper in the face of the ongoing digital revolution have been widespread for some time. But with miniaturized media tools and hand-held, internet-ready communication technologies offering unlimited on-the-go access to the news via multiple online platforms, prognostications to the effect that the hard copy newspaper may go extinct in the nearest future seem no more an idle speculation. Indeed, print media financiers, publishers, editors, and practitioners have not hidden their concern about the drastic effects of technology. This study comes on the heels of the widespread speculations that the emergence of digital media gadgets that enable online news access would deplete the economic viability of print newspaper houses by pushing news readers online. The situation became increasingly worrisome when some emerging scholarship reported that younger newspaper readers were abandoning the print copy newspaper for electronic and online news sources, which they believed offered greater ease and convenience. A survey (n=431) of respondents drawn from mass communication educators, practicing journalists and civil servants in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Results showed that though the industry faces a significant economic decline, predictions that convergent, digital technology will compel readers to completely abandon print newspapers for digital news sources are not yet a reality, even though print's business model is seriously strained. Survival strategies already adopted include cover price increase, headlines-online-details-in -print, collapse and merger of beats, downward review in wage bill/pay cuts and print run cuts. The study recommends that publishers and editors invent creative and engaging print contents and other strategies such as inserting interactive DVDs in some of their print issues, as had been experimented at some point. Results could be tremendous where such newspaper contents also focus primarily on their immediate surroundings, giving local readers exactly what they

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want – such news stories that are either not readily available on the web or are routinely overlooked by the mainstream media.

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Speculations about the death of traditional media in the face of new communication technologies have been widespread. These fears have become increasingly worrisome for print media financiers following reports that younger newspaper readers were abandoning the print copy newspaper for electronic and online news sources, which they believed offered greater ease and convenience. The newspaper has been the most affected by the advent of the more dramatic media, namely radio, television and now, the internet, and there is no question that the medium has suffered tremendously under a mobile digital transformation that occurred roughly at the same time as the worst economic recession since the 1930s.

Nguyen and Western (2006) study report that a simple Google search resulted in 899 documents with the keyword phrase 'death of print', 368 with 'death of television', and, surprisingly, 4360 with 'death of radio'. With the unprecedented emergence of the internet as a powerful news and information medium, fears of the dinosaur fate have triggered serious concerns among print media financiers, scholars and professionals. With sagging readership, diminishing advertising revenue and dwindling copy sales, these concerns seem to be legitimate.

The 1920s witnessed the radio explosion which offered headlines much more current than those of newspapers. In the 1950s, television ate into the national advertising base which newspapers had once dominated. Today, new media and technological convergence seem bent on nailing the industry's coffin. Gold (2004), cited in Farhi (2005), reports that in Europe and parts of America, only 15% of 18 to 24-year-olds read the daily paper, compared with the majority who regularly get their news from the Web. Not only does the internet and the World Wide Web provide readers with more information and more depth and with greater speed than the traditional newspaper, they also empower readers to control and interact with the news making them their own editors-in-chief. According to him:

A crisis of confidence has combined with a technological revolution and structural economic change to create what can be described as a "perfect storm." Print's business model is imploding as younger readers turn toward free tabloids and electronic media to get news. It is the fear that the newspaper industry will fail to successfully weather the storm that drives owners and their investors to cut out those characteristics -- especially good journalism -- that once defined newspapers (Farhi, 2005, par. 2).

In 2000, media experts at the University of Texas had predicted high print mortality, unless newspapers evolved with technology and have their own websites or online presence in a multi-tasking media environment, where users perform several activities, almost simultaneously, with the aid of Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) (University of Texas, 2000). By 2009, the *Christian Science Monitor*, published for more than 100 years, ended its print edition and shifted to the internet, as did the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. The *Detroit News* and the *Detroit Free Press* cut back their home delivery to three days a week and urged subscribers to visit their websites on the other days. Three years later, the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, a daily paper that distinguished itself amid great adversity during Hurricane Katrina and won two Pulitzer prizes for it, announced it will cut back its print publishing schedule to three times a week and cut staff (Farhi, 2012). In the wake of the storm, the *International Herald Tribune* quoted the newspaper's publisher, Ashton Phelps Jr., as saying that "the need to reallocate resources to accelerate the digital growth and make the website our primary distributor of news would necessitate a reduction in size of the workforce to cut costs" (Carr, 2012).

The situation in the Nigerian print industry is not any different. Though there are no appropriate data on newspaper circulation figures, major stakeholders and big spenders in the industry have not hidden their concern about dwindling print patronage (Popoola, 2010). For instance, several months before *234next* newspaper died in 2010, its publisher, Dele Olojede, a Pulitzer-winning journalist, had constantly decried escalating production cost, a drastic drop in its print readership with more readers accessing the paper through handheld devices (Gambrell, 2011). Gambrell reports that as the challenge wore on, with this new social media demography increasingly unwilling to "pay" for news, Olojede reportedly ordered for a rethinking 'to see how we can outsmart the system that seems so stuck against us' (par. 6). According to the news report, the competition from online news sources became so fierce that the newspaper was losing a lot of money hence the decision was made "to stop its print edition to re-evaluate its finances."(par. 2)

But such a rethinking did little to either win back to the newspaper's readership accustomed to getting news from free news sites or endear advertisers who increasingly depend on readership figures for patronage. According to the Gambrell, the economic decline was so fierce that the newspaper's advertising dwindled, forcing it from publishing six days a week to only on Sundays before it finally died barely after two years on the newsstands. Several other print-only Nigerian tabloids, like *Skynet* have crumbled under intense pressure from free online news sites and blogs, while others such as *Saharareports*, *Elandureports*, *Premium Times*, *Cable news*, *Elombah*, and *Nigeria News Bulletin* have existed only online citing diminishing resources and poor print patronage.

An analysis of the situation in Akwa Ibom State at the time of this study shows that local tabloids are inventing strategies to remain in business. For example, local tabloids such as *Insight*, *Pioneer*, *Newsd'or*, *Radar*, *Censor*, *National Pulse*, *Newslink*, *Propeller* and *Skylink* all have some internet presence. Some have attributed this to the need to keep up with a relatively youthful online audience through microblogging, while also retaining the patronage of their traditional print readers for advertisers (Nkana, 2012, p. 4). . Sadly, however, some newspapers in the state do not have a known frequency for their issues, as they hit the newsstands only when they have advertisement revenue to bankroll the edition. Some titles are known to go under for months only to resurface during major events when individuals and organisations are ready and willing to buy media space for advertorial and political messages. That scenario tends to mirror a trend already evident in some countries within the last decade. Rosen (2006, p.16) warns that:

The veritable deluge of information criss-crossing the airwaves across the globe on internet websites is increasingly becoming a huge source of worry to the newspaper industry which is watching, with mounting alarm, copy sales dwindling as people turn to more convenient and less cumbersome sources of news. It is certainly no idle speculation that in 10 to 20 years from now, the newspaper printed on newsprint as we know it today, may cease to exist altogether as people access news and other media products through their cell phones, laptops and other pocket gadgets being churned out with breath-taking speed by the technologically advanced countries like Japan, United States, China, etc.

Indeed, the last decade has witnessed the deaths of even more newspapers in Nigeria. Surviving dailies like the *Daily Independent* and several Akwa Ibom-based tabloids like *The Censor* have adopted a number of measures to cushion the adverse effects of digital technology, including increase in cover price, cutting back print issues, merging reportorial desks and duties or paying reporters based on multimedia skills. Yet the industry still faces significant economic challenges. Newspapers like *Community Quest* folded up at some point, after print patronage nosedived and advertisers left.

In the light of the foregoing, this paper seeks to ascertain the effect that media convergence has had on the readership of print newspapers in Akwa Ibom State and the measures that key players in the industry are adopting to survive.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The future of the newspaper has remained a major source of concern to publishers, editors and indeed practitioners, in recent years. After watching with suspicion and sometimes with disdain the rise of citizen journalism, social media and the more dramatic media, namely, radio, television and now, the internet, newspaper journalists have become increasingly aware of the enormous threat facing the industry.

With convergent media increasingly offering personal, on-demand multimedia contents in Really Simple Syndication (RSS) and podcasts via personal digital assistants (PDAs), more people can be informed at more times and in more places about the world better than even the world's best run print media could.

Newspaper readers now get their news from the Web, which they claim provides greater speed, ease and depth than the traditional newspaper as well as empower them to control and interact with the news. Above all, the media in all formats – including the traditional formats of print and broadcast communications – have been moved online. The result of this is the creation of multiple online platforms for the presentation of news and other types of information needed by the citizens to keep abreast of events and developments in their polity.

With some Nigerian newspaper publishers reporting a drastic drop in readership, diminished advertising revenue, dwindling copy sales, a dearth of experienced hands and an increasingly fragmented audience, Murdoch's (2010) prediction that in less than a decade or so the traditional newspaper may go extinct if they do not evolve seems no idle speculation. While Murdoch's prognostication in the light of technological realities in Nigeria may sound presumptuous, far-fetched and questionable to some, the fact that Nigerians are increasingly accessing free news and other media products through their cell phones, laptops and other pocket gadgets raises serious concerns for the print business model. But the school of thought that believes newspapers have a future seems unperturbed by such dystopian views. In fact, it contends that no new medium can be seen as an absolute functional alternative to another, since each medium has distinctive features to serve different audiences in different contexts and thus complement other media in satisfying their diverse media-related needs (Nguyen & Western, 2006)

These issues, therefore, call for a critical research to find out whether this environment of 'communication abundance' (Blumler & Gurevitch, 2005, p.85) has had any major effects on the readership of the print newspaper, once the most reliable and trusted means of accessing the news of the day. So, does development really impact negatively on print newspaper readership in Akwa Ibom State? In other words, are the adverse influences of media convergence on print newspaper patronage in Akwa Ibom State as gloomy as feared? If so, what are the strategies the industry is adopting to stay afloat?

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study were to:

Ascertain the perceptions that newspaper readers in Akwa Ibom State have about print newspapers and media convergence

Determine the extent to which media convergence influences the readership of print newspapers in Akwa Ibom State.

Ascertain the strategies adopted by print newspapers to survive the economic threats facing the industry.

### **Research questions**

What are the perceptions that newspaper readers in Akwa Ibom State have about print newspapers and media convergence?

To what extent does media convergence influence the readership of print newspapers in Akwa Ibom State?

What are the strategies adopted by print newspapers to survive the economic threats facing the industry?

### **Theoretical Framework and Literature Review**

#### **Technological Determinism Theory**

Marshal McLuhan's technological determinism theory offers a useful insight for explaining the root of changes we find in society. McLuhan (1962) posits that the medium changes people more than the sum total of all the messages of the medium. The theory also assumes that channels of communication or "machines and their development" as Baran (2012, p.22) puts it, are the primary cause of cultural changes. McLuhan explains that we learn, feel and think the way we do because of the messages we receive through the available technology. He argues that in each cultural era, the medium in which information is recorded and transmitted is decisive in determining the character of that culture. Thus, proponents of technological determinism would argue that changes in our cultural landscape today are the inevitable results of new technology.

However, others see technology, as more neutral and claim that the way people use technology is what gives it significance. This perspective accepts technology as one of many factors that shape economic and cultural change; technology influence is ultimately determined by how much power it is given by the people and culture that uses it. This disagreement about the power of technology is at the heart of the controversy surrounding new media, digital technology and ICTs (Baran 2012). When McLuhan himself prognosticated that technology and developments in electronic media, especially the internet would turn the world into a global village, he attracted several dissenting voices. Today, however, anyone with the most rudimentary knowledge of ICTs can attest to the truth of McLuhan's postulation. Not only has print journalism moved from papyrus to paper, but the use of internet to project online newspapers and hone a new digitally-driven audience has revolutionised the whole business of mass communication. In order to survive the effect of technology, print newspapers are evolving, converging and coexisting – print and electronic (online) – to cater to the needs of an increasingly niche audience.

## **Effects of Media Convergence on the Newspaper Industry**

Over the years, there has been the fear that traditional media could be obliterated by technological innovations. Some predicted a perfect storm scenario, where for example, the invention of television would herald the death of books and reading. More recently, e-books were projected to dislodge print books; television would kill off radio; home video would fold up the theatres, and digital news delivery would drive the final nail into the coffin of print newspapers.

***Decline in Print Newspaper Readership.*** The exodus of newspaper readers to free news sites has dealt a deadly blow to the revenue stream of print newspapers. And despite attempting to evolve with technology, the marriage of print journalism to the web has not yet proved financially successful for the older medium. Though it has been argued that no new medium can send the old one packing, independent media research reports at the beginning of the millennium had tended to suggest a bleak future for print journalism. For instance, a study by the Pew Research Centre (2006) had predicted that print's dwindling fortune could lead to high mortality in the industry, with some titles having just less than a flash in the pan poke at the newsstand. According to the report, one-in-three Americans regularly get their news online; preferring speed and convenience over detail (Talabi, 2014). Ganiyu (2010) observes that the situation in Nigeria is fairly similar and though readership statistics are far-fetched, editors and publishers have not held back their fears. Within the last decade, several Nigerian tabloids like *234next* had joined other online-only newspapers like *Saharareporters*, *Elendureports*, *Premium Times* and *Elombah*, citing diminishing resources and poor print patronage, before it eventually died.

***Concentration of Ownership and Conglomeration.*** Ownership of media companies is increasingly being concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. Baran (2012) reports that through mergers, acquisitions, buyouts and hostile takeovers, large conglomerates are owning more and more of the world's media outlets. Bagdikian (2007) reports that the number of media corporations with "dominant power in American society" was 10. Hinchey (2006, p ar. 2) had observed that

changes in media ownership have been swift and staggering. Over the past two decades the number of major US media companies fell by more than one half. Most of the survivors are controlled by fewer than ten huge media conglomerates. As media outlets continue to gobble up these giants, the market of idea shrinks. New and independent voices are stifled. And the companies that remain are under little obligation to provide reliable, quality journalism. Stories that matter deeply to the country's well-being have been replaced by sensational murders and celebrity gossip.

Closely related to concentration is conglomeration – the increase in the ownership of media outlets by large non-media companies. According to Straubhaar and LaRose (2004), telephone, computer, cable TV and media firms are merging and forming partnerships and sometimes going out of business at dizzying rates in an effort to get the upper hand in the race to control the future of the media and to fight off challenges from upstarts who threaten their dominance. Newspaper publisher - Tribune Company - is transforming itself into a multi-media news company by combining newspaper, television, cable and internet operations in major cities. According to Moyers (2008, p. 16),

The threat is clear as conglomerates swallow up newspapers, magazines, publishing houses and networks and profit rather than product becomes the focus of corporate effort, news organisations particularly in television are folded into entertainment divisions. The “news hole” in the print media shrinks to make room for advertisement, and stories needed by informed citizens working together are pulled in favour of the latest celebrity scandals because the media moguls have decided that uncovering the inner working of public and private power is boring and will drive viewers and readers away to greener pastures of pabulum. Good reporters and editors confront walls of resistance in trying to place serious and informative reports over which they have long labored.

**Loss of Competition.** Print journalism has witnessed a dramatic decline in competition. This has taken two forms: Loss of competing papers and concentration of ownership. Baran (2012, p. 101) reported that in 1923, 502 American cities had two or more competing dailies. Today, only 20 have separate but competing papers. With circulation and advertising revenues levelling out for urban dailies, very few cities can support more than one paper. The situation in Nigeria is not different either. Anim (2006, p. 4) recalls that in the 1970s and middle 1980s, every state of the federation had a small daily or, at worst, a weekly. But today newspapers have very short lifespans (Anim, 2006; Udoakah 2001). The result is a narrower range of information and entertainment available to people of all ideologies (Plate 2003.)

**Audience Fragmentation.** Print journalism is becoming more fragmented with more narrowly defined segments. It is becoming less of a mass audience (Baran, 2012; Jenkins, 2006; Lepore, 2009; Nkana, 2012; Straubhaar & LaRose, 2004). Before the advent of television, radio, magazines and newspapers were national media. Big national radio networks brought news and entertainment to the entire country. Magazine such as *Life*, *Look* and the *Sunday Evening Post* once offered limited text and many pictures to a national American audience. According to Straubhaar and LaRose (2004), television could do these things better. It was radio with pictures. It was magazine with motion. To survive,



radio, magazine and the newspapers were forced to find new functions. No longer able to compete on a mass scale, these media targeted smaller audiences that were attracted to specific advertisers. So now we have magazines such as *Ski* and *Internet World*. In fact, there are magazine titles in every area of human endeavour, targeting smaller, narrowly defined audiences. Modern newspapers tend to have borrowed the idea. This phenomenon is known as narrowcasting, niche marketing, or targeting.

**Challenging Careers.** Convergence makes jobs and careers highly volatile as companies continually reengineer themselves and compete on a global scale (Straubhaar & LaRose, 2004). The authors had predicted in 2004 that students considering a professional career in print journalism, radio, film or television will eventually have to acquire new skills for several very different professions, because old career tracks will disappear and others will require dramatically different skills. This is already happening in print journalism. In particular, blue collar jobs such as pre-press technicians who set type and compose pages for newspapers and magazines will shrink mostly owing to improvements in information systems and automation. They argue that

At first glance, prospects in the mass media field can look a little bleak. No general expansion of the field is expected because of industry mergers and a growing reliance on labour saving computerized production techniques that could eliminate many of today's media jobs. Where growth is expected for writers, actors and directors, the new jobs may no longer carry the same pay and prestige that their old counterparts did. However, digital multimedia production skills will be in great demand in television and film. Traditional typesetters are becoming obsolete, but the demand for desktop publishing skill is growing. Steady growth is expected for visual artists and designers as web designers and webmasters who create and maintain multimedia websites on the internet. Computer skills may also hold the key to finding a second career for those who do not become media stars (p. 104).

This is informed by the fact that as many as one in 50 of all jobs are now dependent upon computer literacy and the internet (University of Texas 2000).

**Dwindling Advertising Revenue.** The ultimate effect of all these challenges is the drastic drop in advertising dollar for the print media. According to Gold (2004), cited in Farhi (2005, par. 2), "a crisis of confidence has combined with technological revolution and structural economic change to create what can only be described as a perfect storm." The result being that the print media is dying off as younger readers turn toward free tabloids and electronic media to get news. The impact of this exodus on advertisers and the industry can only be imagined. According to Chittum and Sass (2009, p.10)

In 2008, newspapers' print editions earned \$34.7 billion in non-classified ad revenue, or \$709 per subscriber. Add subscription income, and a print reader

is worth \$940. Newspaper's online ad operations earned \$3.1 billion while averaging 67 million unique monthly visitors, or \$46 per reader. In other words, even though the online newspaper audience is at record highs, growing by more than 60% between 2005 and 2008, a print reader is worth 20 times the revenue as an online reader.

Straubhaar and LaRose (2004) aver that it is the fear that the print media industry will fail to successfully weather the storm that drives owners and their investors to cut out those characteristics - especially good journalism-- that once defined newspapers. According to them, the internet has proven most directly financially damaging in its attack on newspapers classified advertising business- which before now had been the exclusive domain of local newspapers. The import of this has been the high mortality of the print media, not only in Nigeria, but also all over the world. Fulton (2002, p. 103) summarised these challenges succinctly:

Of my many fears about the future of journalism, this is the one that scares me the most: that journalists and their companies will keep their eyes on the horizon of the next deadline, the next pay check, or the next quarterly shareholder report and fail to understand the horizon of history, which could yet yield a journalistic renaissance. I worry that now- profitable journalism companies will join the online fray, then pull out or cut back too soon, when they don't get immediate result or definite answers. I worry that the profits that now support the great journalism a democracy needs will disappear into niche businesses run by people with little interest in journalism but more imagination or staying power. I worry that too many of the best journalists will cling to the past, which will work about as well as it did for the guilds in the industrial revolution. And I worry that the most successful innovators - the ones who will write the rules for the new medium- will be technophiles who don't give a damn about the difference between a news story and an ad and who think the First Amendment is a license to print money.

### **Convergence, Online and Multimedia Journalism**

Media convergence simply means the integration of mass media, computers and telecommunications. It is the blending of various media of communication technologies, operations or businesses. Baran (2011, p.44) defines the term as the erosion of traditional distinctions among media. Nkana (2012, p.21) says the term refers to specific types of media, such as print, audio and video, all converging into a digital form. Convergence, according to Wikipedia (2012), involves the interlocking of computing and information technology companies, telecommunication network and content providers, from the publishing worlds of newspapers, magazines, music, radio, television, films and entertainment software. It is the idea that different types of media, namely computer,

television, radio and newspaper are combining into a single media because of the progress of technology. This mixture, coming together or becoming more alike is called convergence, multimedia or integrated media (McQuail, 2010; Rich, 2011). For the purpose of this paper, however, the term is constructed broadly to encompass more than simply a technological shift, to include how it alters the relationships between existing technologies, industries, market, genres and audiences (Jenkins, 2006). This definition subsumes the various dimensions of the issue, including technology, media, users, industries, markets, genres and content.

The average reporter today is an online journalist. Whether they work for a newspaper, a broadcaster or an online outlet, their stories, picture, audio and video appear online-- either on a social media or a blog-- and what started out in print becomes achieved on the Web. But how different is online journalism from traditional news reporting? Bradshaw and Rohumaa (2011) list the following as the defining characteristics of online journalism:

- Journalists use the internet as a platform for their stories.
- Hyperlinks-- the click-through connections that flow information across networks.
- Non-linear storytelling. Readers determine how, when, what and where they consume content. They decide their entry point to a story when they access it via a link or a search engine. Online journalists break out (or chunk) parts of the story to reflect this and provide readers with different entry points, depending on the angle that might interest them.
- Multimedia in the form of text, pictures, audio, and video can be used.
- Journalists can report a story in real-time and distribute that story concurrently to several sites on several platforms. The story might start with a tweet of a breaking news story and might be read via a news site, a blog, a Twitter feed on a laptop or as a news alert on a phone.
- Interactivity- readers can engage with journalists, leave comments, talk to each other on forums, create or reinforce community.
- Accessibility- information can be accessed globally and around the clock.
- Transparency- journalists can use hyperlinks to give readers access to documents, press releases as well as supply attributions, quotes, facts and figures.

Like print and broadcast reporters, online journalists skilled in multimedia journalism ferret out background material, interview sources and observes. But they do more than write. They also record with a camera (still or video) and/or a digital audio recorder. Their words, photos, audio and/or video can be used to produce different versions of a story for print, radio and TV as well as for the web and wireless applications. Bradshaw and Rohumaa (2011, p.31) see a multimedia journalist as someone who has the skills to work in print, television, video and online. Itule and Anderson (2011) have christened these breed of reporters backpack journalists. Nicholas Kristof of the *New York Times*, they posit, exemplified this breed -- with his ability to write, shoot and record.

Thanks to new, lightweight equipment, Kristof could file multimedia op-eds from Sudan and other remote locations around the world. There are many *kristofs* today offering content across multimedia platforms. Few journalists today concentrate on only audio or print, irrespective of what their initial interest was. The typical radio station, for instance, will have a website, Facebook page, a Twitter page (as well as for the individual programme and journalists) and any average newspaper worth its name will have a website where journalists can blog and provide video and podcasts.

The advent of convergent newsrooms providing journalism across several platforms means that a specialization in one area is less important than media literacy in as many fields as possible. Increasingly, journalists have to think stories in terms of the reader (how they get to the story); the medium (using appropriate content); and the platforms (this could be a computer, e-reader or mobile phone). Where previously a journalist would know what medium they were going to use whenever they encounter a story, now they must first identify which tools and techniques might be most appropriate. Is the story best told with text or video? Are there strong images that need bringing out with photography or video? Will users want to interrogate the background through podcast, raw data, maps, links, flash interactivity, micro blogging, live web chats, mapping or mashups?

### **Methodology**

This study adopted the survey research design. The population for this study comprised residents of Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. The National Population Commission puts the projected population figure for Akwa Ibom at 5,218,213. Since studying the entire residents of Akwa Ibom State was not feasible, a representative sample was taken for the study. Consequently, 431 respondents representing 0.008 percent of the entire population, were selected purposively from three cities -- one in each of the state's Senatorial Districts, namely: Uyo, Ikot Ekpene and Eket, to form the sample for the study. To elicit informed responses, inclusion in the sample was based on perceived respondents' media literacy skills, exposure to digital media and ownership of digital devices. This was due to the technical nature of the study and the fact that media literacy and internet broadband penetration in the country is still low (Adepetun, 2015; Sobowale, Amodu, Aririguzoh & Ekanem, 2015). Consequently, respondents were sampled from among practising journalists, mass communication lecturers and civil servants drawn from Uyo, Ikot Ekpene and Eket, respectively.

Table 1

Distribution of Respondents Drawn as Sample

| S/N          | Senatorial District | Class of Respondents Selected                               | Total Number | Sample Selected |
|--------------|---------------------|---|--------------|-----------------|
| i            | Uyo                 | Practicing Journalists/Editors                              | 646          | 258             |
| ii           | Ikot Ekpene         | Mass Communication Lecturers at Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic | 18           | 7               |
| iii          | Eket                | Civil Servants  | 417          | 166             |
| <b>Total</b> |                     |   |              | <b>431</b>      |

To reach the subjects, a multi-stage cluster sampling procedure was adopted. The sampling techniques were stratified, purposive and available. First, the researchers relied upon the Senatorial Districts division of Akwa Ibom State, namely: Uyo, Ikot Ekpene and Eket. From each Senatorial District, the researchers purposively selected a class of respondents who by their occupation, exposure and socio-economic status were deemed fit and knowledgeable to fill the questionnaire. Tongco (2007) asserts that purposive sampling technique is the most effective when one needs to study a certain cultural domain where knowledgeable experts are involved. From Uyo Senatorial District, the researchers chose practising journalists; from Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District, mass communication lecturers at Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Ikot Osurua were selected; and from Eket Senatorial District, respondents were drawn from among civil servants at Eket Local Government Council. Finally, the available sampling technique was used to select 40 percent of the respondents from each category. A return rate of 100% was recorded.

### Findings

Respondents were asked to rate on a 5-point scale whether digital media technology offers greater access to news than do print newspapers. More than half of the respondents (58%) strongly agreed (see Table 2).

*Table 2*

**Ownership of Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) Leads to Greater Access to News**

| Response          | Number of respondents | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | <b>25</b>             | <b>6.00</b>    |
| Disagree          | <b>38</b>             | <b>8.70</b>    |
| Undecided         | <b>20</b>             | <b>4.60</b>    |
| Agree             | <b>98</b>             | <b>22.70</b>   |
| Strongly agree    | <b>250</b>            | <b>58.00</b>   |
| Total             | <b>431</b>            | <b>100</b>     |

Table 3 details respondents' opinions on whether PDAs as news channels will deplete the economic viability of print journalism. From the findings, 182 (42.22%) strongly agreed.

*Table 3*

**Digital Media will Deplete the Economic Viability of Print Journalism**

| Response          | Number of respondents | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | <b>60</b>             | <b>13.92</b>   |
| Disagree          | <b>131</b>            | <b>30.40</b>   |
| Undecided         | <b>5</b>              | <b>1.16</b>    |
| Agree             | <b>53</b>             | <b>12.30</b>   |
| Strongly agree    | <b>182</b>            | <b>42.22</b>   |
| Total             | <b>431</b>            | <b>100</b>     |

The fact that 222 (51.5%) respondents strongly disagreed that the need to retain the patronage of an increasingly savvy audience will eventually push all print newspapers online suggests that in the foreseeable future, both print and converged versions of the newspaper will perhaps continue to exist side-by-side in Nigeria to address the information needs of diverse sets of audiences.

*Table 4*

**Need to Keep a Digital Media-Savvy Audience will Eventually Push all Newspapers Online**

| <b>Response</b>          | <b>Number of Respondents</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Strongly Disagree</b> | <b>222</b>                   | <b>51.50</b>          |
| <b>Disagree</b>          | <b>99</b>                    | <b>23.00</b>          |
| <b>Undecided</b>         | <b>3</b>                     | <b>0.60</b>           |
| <b>Agree</b>             | <b>72</b>                    | <b>16.80</b>          |
| <b>Strongly Agree</b>    | <b>35</b>                    | <b>8.10</b>           |
| <b>Total</b>             | <b>431</b>                   | <b>100</b>            |

*Table 5*

Both Print and Online Newspapers Will Continue to Exist

| <b>Response</b>          | <b>Number of respondents</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Strongly disagree</b> | <b>22</b>                    | <b>3.10</b>       |
| <b>Disagree</b>          | <b>23</b>                    | <b>5.30</b>       |
| <b>Undecided</b>         | <b>-</b>                     | <b>-</b>          |
| <b>Agree</b>             | <b>121</b>                   | <b>28.08</b>      |
| <b>Strongly agree</b>    | <b>265</b>                   | <b>61.49</b>      |
| <b>Total</b>             | <b>431</b>                   | <b>100</b>        |

Despite the speculated threat of extinction facing the print newspaper industry, a majority of the study's respondents (60.1%) hold the view that both the print and online versions of the newspaper will continue to exist and complement each other.

Table 6

New Media Technology has More Negative Effects on the Newspaper Industry

| <b>Response</b>          | <b>Number of respondents</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Strongly disagree</b> | <b>76</b>                    | <b>17.64</b>      |
| <b>Disagree</b>          | <b>82</b>                    | <b>19.02</b>      |
| <b>Undecided</b>         | <b>69</b>                    | <b>16.00</b>      |
| <b>Agree</b>             | <b>84</b>                    | <b>19.49</b>      |
| <b>Strongly agree</b>    | <b>120</b>                   | <b>27.85</b>      |
| <b>Total</b>             | <b>431</b>                   | <b>100</b>        |

Almost half of the respondents (47.3%) thought that new media technology negatively impacts the newspaper industry (see Table 6 above).

### **Discussion of Findings**

#### **Respondents View on Print Newspapers and Media Convergence**

Respondents' perceptions about print newspapers and media convergence are several and varied. From our findings, digital media technology, particularly personal digital assistants (PDAs), offer greater access to news than do traditional newspapers. This finding corroborates the position of Gold (2004) that not only do digital media provide readers with more information, more depth and with greater speed than the traditional newspaper, but they also empower readers to control and interact with the news, making them their own editors-in-chief.

Respondents strongly believe that digital media poses a significant threat to the economic viability of the print business model, in line with earlier conclusions by media futurologists like Bloomberg (1998) cited in Brown (1999), Murdoch (2010) and Rosen (2006). Despite the economic challenges the industry is enmeshed in, respondents do not think the pressure to keep a digital media-savvy audience will eventually push all newspapers online. They are of the view that both versions of the newspaper will continue to complement each other, since, perhaps, they appeal to distinct sets of readers.



This position corroborates the assertion by Nguyen and Western (2006) that no new medium can be seen as an absolute functional alternative to another; since each medium has its distinctive features that enable them to serve different audiences in different contexts and thus complement other media in satisfying the audiences' diverse needs. Digital news delivery is rapidly becoming the standard and print newspaper journalism is definitely changing and may even witness more intense economic decline, but the industry will coexist in its own right with other traditional media of communication. The displacement effect that media futurologists, Nguyen and Western mooted concerning a medium once the most reliable and trusted means of accessing the news of the day is increasingly likely but as the authors quickly added, there will be no replacement or displacement in absolute terms and the historical coexistence of the print newspaper as an old medium with the new media will continue in the internet age. Converged media will complement the print newspaper in serving people's seemingly insatiable news and media needs.

### **Impact of Convergence on Readership of Print Newspapers in Akwa Ibom State**

From table 6, it could be seen that 47.3% respondents felt that new media technology has had more negative than positive effects on the newspaper industry. It is not yet two decades since Rosen (2006, p.14) warned that 'the veritable deluge of information criss-crossing the airwaves across the globe on internet websites' had become an increasingly huge source of worry to newspaper editors and financiers who had watched, 'with mounting alarm, copy sales dwindling as people turn to more convenient and less cumbersome sources of news'.

The challenges of economic decline facing the Nigerian newspaper industry are not limited to the drop in copy sales. Publishers and editors have over the years reported a diminishing advertising revenue base, a dearth of experienced hands, challenging careers, a shift in media paradigm and an increasingly fragmented audience (Straubhaar & LaRose, 2004) While the predictions of print's demise has not entirely taken effect, several Nigerian newspapers have closed down even though the industry still manages to remain in business with survivors adopting several strategies.

### **Survival Strategies Adopted by Nigerian Print Newspapers**

Journalists and editors confirmed that their newspapers have adopted a number of strategies to cope with the enormous economic threat facing the industry. Some of the strategies in the findings of this study are novel, while others agree with earlier submissions by Aliagan (2015). The strategies analysed thematically are as follows:

1. **Increase in cover price:** This is the most basic strategy adopted by all print publications and confirmed by all respondents.
2. **Online presence:** This involves having some form of web presence either as a website, a blog or microblogging sites so as to cater for the online audience and attract online advertisements.
3. **Print run cuts:** In the light of the drastic drop in print patronage, this is adopted to reduce the volume of copies returned as unsold.
4. **Occasional publishing:** Some newspapers operate no known frequency from issue to issue. Their editors and publishers “go to press” occasionally to mark some state or political function. This, it was learnt, qualified them for any handouts or largesse which may accrue from such events.
5. **Downward review in wages/pay cuts:** This is a trend common to several private establishments in the country. What is most disturbing, though, is the blatant refusal of many media establishments to pay their staff, with some journalists being owed up to 20 months’ salary areas (Udoakah, 2017).
6. **POWA, that is, publish only with advertisement:** POWA was coined to help explain the long absence of some titles on the newsstands. Tabloids adopting this strategy publish only when they have advertisements to compensate for the cost of production.
7. **Headlines online, details in print:** Some local tabloids break important news stories as headlines online and then enjoin readers to “grab a copy” for details. This strategy works best in scoops or exclusive reports.
8. **Collapse and merger of beats:** This entails merging news beats to cope with shortage in manpower.
9. **Cuts in home delivery:** Print newspapers which decide to stop their print editions in order to re- evaluate their finances also halt copy delivery to subscribers and urge them to visit their websites.
10. **Strategic adjustments in running cost:** This involves keeping the wage bill small by reducing overheads and avoidable everyday expenses to the barest minimum. For example, relying on online news sources rather than engaging reporters and correspondents which could lead to an over-bloated budget. Some editors reported limiting their internet supply to a single mobile port from which its editorial staff who are within its premises could hook up to by Wi-Fi.

11. **Journalists as advertisement canvassers:** This was hitherto the sole responsibility of the commercial or business departments (Udoakah, 2017). Today, in a bid to cushion the effect of dwindling revenue, newspaper houses recruit Journalists who double as advertisement canvassers whom they pay on commission basis.
12. **Award Ceremonies:** Newspapers were found to engage in annual-award giving ceremonies, which afforded them the opportunity to exact from their carefully selected recipients what one respondent described as “reward for award”. Aliagan’s (2015) study corroborates this finding and listed such awards to include: ‘Man of the Year’, ‘Best Governor of the Year’, etc.

### **Conclusion/ Recommendations**

From the findings in this study, it is clear that the Nigerian newspaper industry like its counterpart elsewhere faces a herculean task to save itself and remain in business. Newspapers that hope to weather the economic storm and feature in the media of the future will have to evolve with technology and adopt the findings of this study as they relate to their peculiar situation. This would entail a great deal of creativity on the part of editors; for instance, inventing interactive, engaging and youth-friendly print contents, like interactive DVDs inserted in some print issues as has been experimented elsewhere. Results could be tremendous where such newspaper contents also focus primarily on their immediate surroundings, giving local readers exactly what they want – such news stories that are either not readily available on the web or are routinely overlooked by the mainstream media.

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