Old Wine in a New Bottle: A Mediamorphosis Approach to Realizing Nigerian Newspaper Potentials in an Online Era

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Abstract

Information plays a key role in every society. The media of every society is responsible for transmitting assorted information to a wide range of diverse audiences through multiple channels, including newspapers, magazines, radio, television and of course the new media (internet). In a world where the internet is becoming the fastest growing medium, technologies like computers and smart-phones now enable people access online news sites to read stories and share with others. Printed newspapers, particularly in Nigeria, have managed to thrive over the years, despite projections of its extinction by some communication experts. Using the Mediamorphosis theory as base, this study takes readers on a journey to understanding the survival strategies employed by older mediums like the printed newspapers, to weather the new media storm. Opinions of purposively selected respondents from Zaria, Kaduna state (n=115), who are among consumers of both online and hard-copy news were analysed to determine motives behind their preference of either of the mediums. Findings revealed that in many settings still, there will be those who prefer to read news the old way, and that the new media as at this time, mainly serve as a functional compliment and not an outright replacement to traditional newspapers. The study recommends fact-checking, better marketing as strategies to bridge a credibility gap reported by respondents to exist in the use of both mediums.

Keywords: Mediamorphosis, Media Convergence, Newspaper Readership, Nigeria

Introduction

In a world where the internet is becoming the fastest growing medium as a result of convergence of computers and other telephony technologies, the mode of accessing news and information is experiencing a major shift. Technological advancements have allowed people easy access to the news on multiple devices such as computers, smart-phones, tablets, to mention but a few. These advancements have in one way or the other, influenced patronage of printed newspapers.

Historically, the idea to record daily happenings or occurrences can be traced back to Caesar's reign in the ancient Rome. At the time, stories of the day were written on a tablet and posted on a wall at the end of each senate meeting. This record or publication was called "*Acta Diurna*". Since the information was simply posted on one wall, (Baran 1999) as cited in (Nwodu, 2006) informs that there was no reliable measure of its total readership. Those who desired to read about the announcements of the day had to all converge at that particular wall where it was posted. It wasn't until the year 1620 that the one-page publication called the '*Corantos*' was published to carry events of the day in north-western Europe. Furthermore, the 19th century industrial revolution saw to the growth and expansion of the newspaper industry as copies underwent changes in style, structure, depth of coverage and reach. Urbanization as a result of the industrial revolution equally contributed to literacy rate and widespread readership and patronage. Among these early papers were the *New York Sun* launched in 1833 by Benjamin Day, t*he New York Times launched in 1835 by James Gordon Bennett and the New* York Tribune by Horace Greeley in 1841, thus marking the early days of modern press.

In Nigeria, newspapers can be said to have began in 1859. The first publication is credited to Rev. Henry Townsend, a European missionary who published the *Iwe-irohin* in Abeokuta, Nigeria. The full name of the publication was "*Ìwé Ìròhìn fún àwọn ará Ẹgbá àti Yorùbá"*- simply meaning newspaper for the Egba and Yorubas (Akpobo, 2012). Nwodu (2013) writes that the success of *Iwe Irohin* paved way for other newspapers to follow, such as the *Anglo African Newspaper* published between 1863 to 1865 by Robert Campbell*, The Nigeria Pioneer* published by Kitoye Ajasa between 1914-1937, the *African Messenger* by Ernest Ikoli in 1921, the *West African Pilot* by Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe in 1937. Today, over 250 newspapers are in circulation in Nigeria, some

of which include *Vanguard, The Guardian, The Punch, The Sun, ThisDay, The Nation* etc (Aliede, 2010:129) as cited in (Nwodu, 2013)

With the invention of the World Wide Web by Tim Berners-Lee in 1989, the navigation and use of graphics on the internet meant that the Internet could begin to function as a medium for mass communication. The Internet has over the years provided users multiple sources to access and also to disseminate information online through web-pages such as websites, blogs, wikis etc. McQuail (2010) stated some features of the internet which accordingly, are part of the reasons that give online newspapers an edge over their print counterparts. They include interactive potential, low degree of regulation, interconnectivity, ubiquity, low cost, as well as instantaneity among others. He added that online newspapers have the potential of reducing the cost of production, especially when compared with their print counterparts. It has reduced the cost of publishing, overcome the constraint of distribution and circulation, gives instant interaction with the reader and made convergence possible. Now, readers could not only read newspapers, but could as well listen and watch their contents at once. Internet sites supplement traditional "hard copy" sources in a variety of ways, but they also provide bibliographic access to "hard copy" sources. We may now access on-line newspapers throughout the world, enabling us to find information or track down an elusive title or reference; where once we would have to dig into the volumes of various guides of periodicals (Talabi, 2009).

These advancements have in one way or the other influenced readership habits of news consumers. While many researches seem to approach the online-hardcopy discourse from a comparative perspective, this study approaches it from a collaborative view so as to chart the interdependent and interrelated interaction between both mediums.

Literature Review

Baran (2004) observed that young people are future readers of newspaper, but how to lure them to read them was a problem. Online news sites according to him might be the solution. Readership of online newspapers is an information sourcing and sharing activity (De Waal, 2004). In 2001,

John Pavlikas cited in (Ndangam, 2008) stated that in the rapidly changing world of on-line publishing, where newspapers around the world increasingly operate web versions of their hard-copy, more and more people with a means of connecting to networked computers will turn to the Internet for news, the number of newspapers on-line would increase substantially.

Fortunati (2005) found that newspapers in Italy have gone on-line as a means of attracting young and adult audiences who refuse to spend money on the hard-copy. Kayany and Yelsma (2000) reaffirm that the amount of time spent on watching television, talking on the telephone and reading hard copy newspapers decreases as a result of using on-line media. Online news outlets according to (Uwakwe, 2010) have slowly begun to usurp the place that older media occupied, which was as the primary source of information. Hence, with the advent of this new technology, circulation and readership of print newspaper is significantly declining every day (Uwakwe, 2010). Studies continue to show a decline in print newspaper readership even in developed countries of Europe and North America, that many newspapers have either ceased publication entirely or shifted to online-only editions (Franklin, 2008). Dominick (2011) is of the opinion that some have attributed this overall decline to increased mobility of Americans, the increase in single person households, more expensive subscription and per-copy prices, a general decline in the literacy of young people and competition from other media especially the internet. According to McQuail (2010) there has been a gradual worldwide decline in newspaper readership over the last decade, despite the increase in literacy and with the rise of internet probably playing some part. According to a study by Pew Research Centre (2018), the share of Americans who prefer to get their news online is growing. In 2018, about 34% of U.S. adults said they preferred to get news online, whether through websites, apps or social media, an increase to the 28% that said same in 2016. In Nigeria, similar studies such as that of (Mathew et-al, 2013) cited in (Sani, 2017) which examined the level of online newspaper reading in Nigeria, found that majority (78%) of Nigerians read online newspapers; concluding that online newspaper is gaining acceptability among Nigerians.

In contrast to the above positions is Abplanalp (2005) cited in (Talabi, 2009) who found that public's commitment to the print format seems to be stronger than expected; based on a survey he conducted to study print competitiveness in the marketplace. In a study by Mueller and Kamerer (1995), students asked about the San Jose Mercury News published online were reported to have said "the electronic newspaper was unappealing to browse leisurely, inappropriate for all news

material, uncomfortable to travel through, not preferable over traditional newspaper and more difficult to read than a traditional newspaper" (Mueller & Kamerer, 1995). Corroboratively, the Online Publishers Association in 2004 conducted a similar research on 25,852 visitors of forty one main U.S. news sites and found that in a 2-to-1 margin, online media were found to be deemed less pleasing, less friendly, and less pleasurable than offline media (Online Publishers Association, 2004). Their findings are in line with that of (De Waal, Schoenbach & Lauf, 2004); (Chyi & Lee, 2012), whose respondents equally preferred print newspaper and rated it higher than other media platforms.

Weighing in from a different perspective is (Biggs 2006) as cited in (Talabi, 2009) who argued that on-line publication isn't about old media versus new media; it's about cheap media versus expensive media. Biggs write-ups look at newspaper from the cost perspective to discuss both on-line and hard-copy. From a media interdependence point of view, (Rosengren and Windahl, 1989; Stempel et al., 2000 as cited in Talabi, 2009) suggested that on-line media are a "*functional supplement to traditional media instead of a replacement or displacement mechanism*"

These contradictory findings have given rise to diverse opinions about the future of new and conventional newspapers and this study attempts to shed light on the questions surrounding this issue by exploring the link between traditional newspapers and the use of online news platforms as explained in the Fiddler's mediamorphosis theory of communication.

Background of Mediamorphosis Theory

Mediamorphosis' was coined by Roger Fiddler in 1990 but propounded as a theory in 1997 by the same scholar. Extensive explanation of the theory is found in Fiddler's book titled *Mediamorphosis: Understanding the media* (1997). According to Fiddler (1997), mediamorphosis is "*the transformation of communication media, usually brought about by the complex interplay of perceived needs, competitive and political pressures, and social and technological innovation*". This term, also known as '*digital metamorphosis*' is the transformation from oral literature to digital. According to Fiddler, the mass media is constantly undergoing change, but contextual and

critical analysis of the change was yet to be done. The theory is aimed at providing a comprehensive framework that charts the evolution and interaction between media forms.

Related Assumptions of the Theory

- New media do not arise instantaneously or devoid of external influence. New media are linked to old ones. This means that every news platform must have evolved from a pre-existing medium of communication. For instance, E-editions of newspapers are simply duplications of the printed copies in digital format. The idea behind these printed copies could as well be traced back to the handwritten newspaper, Acta Diurna.
- When new media emerge, the old ones do not die; they continue to evolve and adapt and retain the traits from the domain within which they evolved. Simply put, new media emerge gradually from the metamorphosis of the old media.
- Rather than doing away with older forms, new forms of communication have instead, diverged and added to the media mix and this leads to increase in media consumption

From the stated assumptions, we can gather that the theory under discussion encourages the examination of all media forms as members of an interdependent system. There is a relationship that exists among the past, present and evolving forms.

Strengths of the Theory

- Mediamorphosis explains how new and old media come together to enhance effective communication. Social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook and YouTube influence the development of existing forms such as newspapers and books.
- The theory encourages old media to adapt to new trends.

Weaknesses and Criticisms of the Theory

- Delayed adoption: To some degree, mass user migration contradicts Fiddler's 20-30 years adoption principle. Fiddler has predicted that for a new media to be adopted by the mass audience, it has to take at least 20-30 years. This prediction is faulty because the present

acceleration for adopting online social media outstrips the 20-30 year time frame theorized by Fiddler for widespread application and commercialization success of new technology.

- Undefined terms**:** The theory does not clearly identify what is termed the new media and what is referred to as the old. What may be considered new today might be old tomorrow.

Significance of Mediamorphosis Theory to Online/Hard-copy Interplay and Patronage

The propounder of the theory, Roger Fiddler, stated that there could be a unified way of thinking about the technological evolution of communication media by studying the communication media as a whole. For instance, centuries ago there was nothing like the mass media as we have it today but due to technological development, the print media came into being, followed by electronic media (radio, television) then internet. The new media emerged for the purpose of updating and upgrading the old media. In this sense, we can argue that the online news sites are mainly improvement upon the hard copied newspapers that was previously in vogue. It is clear that the new media did not arise spontaneously or independently but as a result of gradual improvements on either an old medium or the idea surrounding it. This historic pattern of change within the communication system prompted Fiddler to state that the emergence of a new medium or technology does not mean that the end or death of an existing old medium. This assertion is true because despite the emergence of podcasts, blogs, YouTube and other live audio-visual streaming platforms, the mainstream media still enjoys heavy patronage globally. In comparison with the Darwinian theory of evolution, Fiddler explains that new media forms emerge to meet the changing environmental needs but the new ones in turn, influence the older one which tends to survive. For example, the decline in hardcopy newspaper patronage due to the advent of the internet prompted some experts to predict the death of the newspaper industry yet in contrast, newspapers adapted to the internet technology. Print media (newspapers, magazines, books and so on) have made significant transformation over the past few years as a result of new technologies that allows for media convergence. With the new media (internet), we can watch online TV news; listen to radio, read online versions of newspapers, books and magazines. This is because every personal computer or mobile smart-phone offers users the ability to blend texts and still images into audio

and video clips as well as opportunity to conveniently delve into the global network and access vast stores of textual and audio-visual information.

In the same way that it takes a long time for an animal to be fully matured, so also the development of the media takes time. Communication technologies would not have been possible if the birth of each new medium had resulted in the death of the old medium.

What print publishers are doing to stay in business

Several studies have been put forth to discuss some survival models employed by publishers to remain in business. A 2006 survey report published by the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) shows other business models that newspaper publishers engage in. They include:

Outsourcing: Their findings indicate that many publishers now outsource nonstrategic activities such as telephone marketing, pre-press, printing, transport, information technology, catering, and security, leaving out only their editorial activities and advert sales.

Cooperation Activities: In efforts to reduce production, this report indicated that majority of publishers indicated that were engaged in more than one type of cooperation activities with other media partners. Such as Cooperation in advertising, content generation, and distribution, printing, content and technical investments.

Mergers and Acquisitions: The report also indicated that publishers were involved in merger and acquisition activities.

Furthermore, Economic scholar; (Kranenburg, 2004) equally highlighted the following survival strategies adopted by publishers to include:

- *Information Technology*: The possibility for reusability of information across customers has increased as a result of Information Technology. This allows publishers offer a range of products and services to their customers, thus, facilitating some competitive advantage. New technologies such as the internet and online subscription services make it possible to combine old and new media into one product with an additional element that was missing

in the earlier markets; interactivity. Interactivity allows for a greater personalisation of relationships between customers and publisher. Among the services publishers could offer include: interactive forum, searchable news archives, online transactions, up-to-the minute information, and audio/video content presentations. Kranenburg noted however, that to use these technologies in a competitive way, substantial investments in capital and expertise is in most cases required.

- *Marketing and reputation:* Kranenburg found that rigorous marketing enlarges the readership of newspapers as it helps create a brand image and loyalty of customers. Image and loyalty are related to the notion of 'reputation' (Kranenburg, 2004). Among the ways of building up good business reputation is through consistent policy, marketing and highly qualified products and services. News deals with facts, therefore newspaper publishing companies offer products (news contents) that may make or mar their reputation and reliability. Therefore accuracy, objectivity and balance play key roles in building good brand reputation. Furthermore, publishers get to leverage or capitalize on their reputation as bargaining power to negotiate lower prices for their production inputs or diversify into number of unrelated and related businesses.

- *Innovations:* Innovation give companies temporally monopolies because they have no competitors on the same playing field until a company duplicates or betters the innovations or products. These temporally innovations are essential for the publishing companies because they can protect or increase the market share. For instance, diversifying into magazine production and other print products such as booklets, brochures, business cards, calendars, catalogs, cards, envelopes, flyers, tags, labels, notepads posters, banners, diaries, jotters, etc.

Johnson and Gutiérrez (2010) presented some currently obtainable business models that modern day newspaper publishers around the world adapt to weather the new media storm. They include:

- *Advertising e-business model:* In many news websites today, advertisements such as banner ads or sponsored links are featured. This model is most effective when the number of traffic to the website is large or specialized.

- *Subscription model & utility model:* With the subscription model, newspaper publishers charge certain fees to subscribe to contents. Options to read-only or to download a part or all of the content could be made subject to the amount paid.

- *Community Business Model:* Newspaper publishers could go on to create discussion forums for its readers. According to Johnson and Gutiérrez (2010), since the community model is based on user loyalty to the business, users develop deeper relationships with current readers, potential readers, and commercial customers who are emotionally invested in the online community. With this model, revenue can be based on selling ancillary products and services or revenue could be tied to contextual advertising and subscription for premium services (Johnson & Gutiérrez, 2010).

- *Brokerage:* The scholars, Johnson & Gutiérrez propose that Industries such as print publishing industries could adopt Rappa's brokerage model for web-based enterprises, where a newspaper, by capitalizing on its archives, equipment, and brand image could act as a broker bringing buyers and sellers together and facilitating transactions.

In addition to all the above, Johnson and Gutiérrez (2010) further proposed ways in which native and new e-commerce models can be further harnessed by publishers. They include finding ways to monetize archive information beyond users paying for access to old articles, developing profile habits and interests based on IP address of users and offer to advertisers for direct marketing, create paid tools useful to readers business needs such as simple accounting software and financial budgeting tools, offer online video rental services, music downloads, and the likes. Lastly, provide website hosting and other internet services for businesses; allow for upload of press releases to special business area of site and charge companies a fee for service (Johnson & Gutiérrez, 2010).

These strategies and more shows why the newspaper business may not be going extinct as many have projected.

Methodology

Using survey research method and through purposive sampling, this study selected 163 residents within Samaru community in Zaria, Kaduna state, who consume online or hard-copy news stories

and are willing to partake in the survey. Validity was assessed by subjecting the questionnaire used to review and corrections by other researchers. Descriptive statistics involving tables, charts, percentage distributions and frequency patterns are used to present the outcome of the responses from the questionnaires.

Data Presentation and Discussion

Table 1 (Bio-data presentation)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	73	63.5%
Female	42	36.5%
Total	115	100%
Age		
15-24	16	14%
25-34	6	5%
35-44	31	27%
45-54	34	30%
55-64	24	20%
65& Above	4	3.5%
Total	115	100%
Education		
Diploma	22	19.1%
HND/BSC	42	36.5%
Post-Graduate	51	44.3%
Total	115	100%
Marital Status		
Single	9	7.8%
Married	102	88.7%
Divorced	4	3.48%
Total	115	100%
Do you read news stories?		
Yes	115	100%
No	0	0%
Total	115	100%
Major News Source/Preference		
Online	66	57.4%
Hard-copy	49	42.6%
Total	115	100%

Data from the above table indicates that there are more male (63.5%) than female (36.5%) respondents for this study and the highest of all the age groups are 35-44(27%) and 45-54 (30%) respectively. Virtually all the respondents are educated, with majority (44%) being post-graduate degree holders. The data also indicates that 66 respondents (57.4%) prefer access and read news online as opposed to the 49 others (42.6%) who prefer Hard-copy. This reaffirms the study by John

Pavlik as cited in (Ndangam 2008) which states that in the rapidly changing world of on-line journalism, where newspapers around the world increasingly operate web versions of their hard-copy, more and more people with a means of connecting to networked computers turn to the Internet for news. Almost every Nigerian possesses mobile phones, laptop, I-pads and other devices that enable internet browsing.

Careful analysis of the retrieved questionnaires indicated that young and mid-aged people within the age range of 25-45 years constitute the major consumers of online news stories, while those above 45 years of age prefer hard-copy. This may be attributed to the high rate of sophisticated internet enabling devices that the young and mid-aged generations make use of.

The findings corroborates Fortunati (2005) who stated that newspapers go on-line as a means of attracting young and adult audiences who refuse to spend money on the hard-copy.

What reasons are behind users' preference and patronage of online news?

There are several obvious reasons why news readers may prefer to access and read news online. Our 66 respondents (57.4%) who indicated preference for online news were asked to state why. The below figure contains their responses:
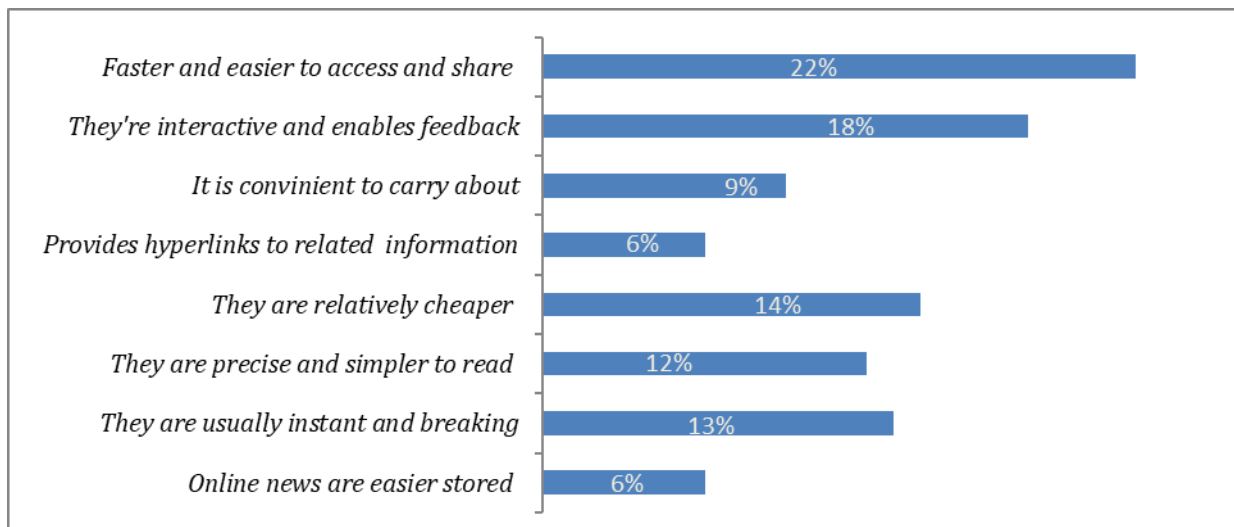
As can be seen above, some 15 respondents (22%) consider and read online news because of its ease of access while 12 (18%) other prefers online news because it is interactive and enables feedback. This is in line with Khan (1999) cited in (Talabi, 2009) who argues that given the increasing use of internet technology globally, the development of online news as a new way of mass communication has introduced a new, efficient and fast way of disseminating and accessing

news stories. This finding also confirms that of corroborates the study by Flynn and Tetzlaff, (1998). To them, online news media is preferred to traditional newspaper because it is interactive and provides searchable features as well as the ability to cross-reference through hyper-linking and provides other multimedia features.

Also from the table, 6 respondents (9%) prefer online news due to its convenience, while 4 others representing (6.1%), prefer it because it provides links to other information. According to a study by Pew Research Centre (2006), Online news is valued most for headlines and convenience, not detailed, in-depth reporting. This means that while the hard-copy papers are preferred because of its in-depth and detailed reports, online news is valued for its ability to provide breaking news headlines, thus corroborating the 8 respondents (13%) who prefer online news simply because it is instant and breaking.

Another vital factor that influences the decision to access the internet for news is cost and this is why some 9 respondents (13.6%) prefer online news because it is relatively cheap to get. This very much tallies with the findings of Biggs (2006) who views that on-line publication isn't about old media versus new media; it's about cheap media versus expensive media. In Nigeria, the price of a single newspaper range from ₦200 to ₦500 depending on the location it is being sold, while an internet data bundle of ₦100 on a mobile phone is sufficient to read news stories from at least 10 different news websites.

What are the reasons behind users' preference and patronage of Hard-copy news?

Just as some prefer online copies, there are a number of people who still prefer to read printed papers for variety of reasons, chief among the reasons being accuracy and credibility. Our respondents who prefer to read hard-copy (42.6%) were asked to state the reason for their choice. The below table contains the responses they gave:
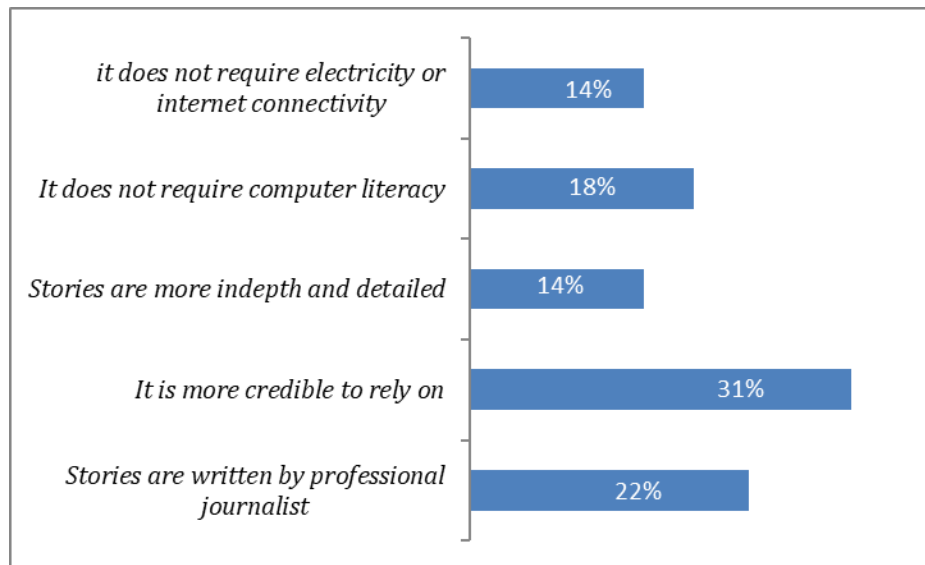
As can be seen in figure 2 above, 11 respondents (22%) prefer hard-copy because it is more stories therein are in most cases prepared by certified journalists who investigate, gather and write their stories in conformity with the ethical code of conduct of their profession as well as the editorial policies of their organizations. This may not be the case of some online news sites, as some of them are managed by ill-trained or unprofessional news writers. Also from the figure, 15 others (30.6%) prefer it because it is more credible to rely on. This is particularly true because the news stories that emanate from hard-copy reflects the reputation and integrity of the producing firms, which in most cases are firms licensed and registered in accordance with the laws of the country. Some 7 respondents (14.3%) prefer hard-copy because its stories are more in-depth and detailed, 9 other (18.4%) prefer it because reading newspaper it does not require computer literacy while the remaining 7 respondents (14.3%) prefer it because reading newspapers does not require electricity or internet connectivity. Given the epileptic power situation of Nigeria coupled with poor internet network in many communities in Nigeria, it becomes understandable that some will prefer hard-copy papers that don't require the availability of any of the aforementioned to be used.

Will hard-copy papers go extinct or be replaced by online news sites?

Despite the fact that 57.4% of the respondent for this study responded in favour of online news, there is still a substantial (42%) who prefer the traditional newspapers. This implies in any setting, there will always be those that value hard-copy more and that the online news as we have it today is not yet a replacement of traditional newspapers; rather they play complementing roles. Corroborating this claim is Chan, J.K & Leung, L (2005) who wrote that *"on-line media are a*

functional supplement to traditional media instead of a replacement or displacement mechanism". Also, according to tenets of the Mediamorphosis theory used as framework for this study, when new media emerge the old ones do not die; they continue to evolve and adapt and retain the traits from the domain from which they evolved. In accordance to some of the survival strategies by publishers earlier discussed, traditional publishers could always consider outsourcing, investment in information technology, rigorous marketing, expansion into other print production and embracement of new e-commerce models as measures to stay in business.

Conclusion

The need to communicate has brought in several innovative news format as well as devices to access them, online news platforms can be classified among these innovative means and it has played a part in shaping human reality. According to Marshall McLuhan, we shape our tools and our tools shape us. This implies that man designed these technologies, such as the internet and its digital devices, now the usage of these technologies has overtime shaped and influenced our manner of doing things. With the advent of Internet, on-line news has turned out to be a vital communication instrument to society. However, this research work has shown that although online news has affected the patronage of traditional newspapers, there are various ways in which publishers can harness the new media technologies to not only maintain their brand and relevance but also to maximize profit.

Recommendations

This study will not be complete without the provision of some measures that could be adopted by publishers as strategies to improve readership.

1. Online news editors should ensure contents appeal not only to the younger readers but to everyone in general. The age-preference gap as observed in this study must be bridged.
2. One of the major motivations for readership online is because news is updated faster. Therefore, all and not just some of the hard-copy news publishers must own and operate a

complementary online news website and treat it as part and parcel of their newspaper outfit so as not to limit themselves to daily publications only.

3. A holistic approach should be taken towards the quality of news reportage and services rendered to readers.

4. Reading online is very dynamic therefore, regular audience survey must be carried out to ascertain the changes the different target audience would want implemented.

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