Nigeria's Newspapers' Experiment in Digital Publishing: Small Gains, Uncertain Future

Isiaka Zubair Aliagan[1],
Kamaldin Abdulsalam Babatunde[2],
Rizki Briandana[3]

Social & Digital Media Discourse
2020, Vol.1(1), 13-26

URL: http://sdmd.net.ng/
SDMD

Abstract
Distressed newspaper businesses worldwide have been exploring alternative platforms of publishing through the e-paper. Nigerian newspapers have been experimenting, in addition to online publishing format, the e-newspaper as news distribution platform and an advertising source. The country ranks among top 10 countries with more than 100 million mobile phone users in the world, making it a potential market for the e-paper. This study investigated the attraction of Nigerian newspapers to e-paper, the pattern in Nigeria's e-paper alternative and whether e-paper constitutes a viable revenue earning source for Nigerian newspapers. It combined quantitative content analysis of 10 online editions of the newspapers and in-depth interviews with 13 editors of print and online editions and managers to generate its data. Findings revealed that the e-paper format in Nigeria was in PDF files, with similar features as the printed newspaper. Also, of the 10 newspapers sampled, two required app download to access the e-paper, one offered its content for free, while eight had different rates for the e-paper. Finally, the study found that the income from the e-paper was meagre and that a lot of factors were hindering the blossoming of the market for the e-copy in Nigeria. The study concluded that while some legacy newspapers in the developed media market had embarked on platform shift, the situation in Nigeria remains precarious. It however, recommends that Nigerian newspapers should begin to build a strong brand for their e-paper and developing it into a viable revenue source rather than just an extra income source which it presently represents.

Keywords: Nigeria's newspapers, experiment, digital publishing, small money, uncertain future

Introduction

Across the world, newspaper business, faced with threats of survival due to loss of readership and revenue, are evolving survival strategies and new business models in order to break even (Aliagan, 2016b). Although the issue of threatened extinction of the newspaper, in earlier forecasts, is said to exclude Africa and Asia where newspaper business is claimed to be recording a boom, it is evident that for an African nation like Nigeria, its newspaper business is in distress (Sobowale, Sowumi & Emmanuel 2014; Aliagan, 2015; Talabi, as cited in Ashong & Henry, 2017) as a result of the decline in newspaper print-run, readership and revenue. This worldwide development is accentuated by the new challenge of distressed newspaper businesses in Japan and China (two countries renowned for being a strong printed newspaper base in the world) of recent (Villi & Hayashi, 2015; Huang, cited in Sparks, Wang, Huang, Zhao, Lü & Wan, 2016). The problem of threatened newspaper business followed the advent of the Internet and new media technologies. Nigerian newspapers, in order to overcome readership and revenue loss, introduced series of features to court or retain the interest of readers who visit their web-page (Aliagan, 2016a), but as it is in most part of the world, this has not worked for the newspaper business in Nigeria.

The Nigerian newspaper sector, therefore, exhibits some peculiarities identified with newspapers in the developed media world that are undergoing survival challenge as a result of the erosion of

[1] Department of Mass Communication, Kwara State University, Malete

readership and revenue by the Internet and new media technologies. Some of these challenges include prevalence of industrial crisis as salaries are owed due to declining revenue (Sahara Reporters, 2012; Premium Times, 2015); uneconomical bureaus being shut; staff being retrenched to cut cost (The Nigerian Times, 2015; Encomium, 2016) and newspapers shutting down due to insolvency (Sahara Reporters, 2011), among others. Thus, as experienced in most parts of the world, especially the UK and the US, efforts at evolving workable business models to shore up newspaper readership and revenue has not met up with much success (Aliagan, 2016b).

Newspapers in Nigeria have been exploring, in addition to online publishing format, electronic newspaper or digital format as news platform and an advertising source. The country, like some developed media markets, though not technologically advanced, is one of the top mobile phone user countries in the world. It is ranked among top 10 countries with more than 100 million mobile phone users in the world. This makes it is a potential market for the e-paper. The current decline in printed newspaper readership and the slow progress of its online newspaper version makes the e-paper an attraction, and a potential revenue source for the newspapers in Nigeria. The goal of this paper, therefore, is to (a) explore the attraction of Nigerian newspapers to e-paper (b) determine the pattern in their e-paper as an alternative to the depressed printed edition and (c) find out whether e-paper constitutes a viable revenue earning source for the newspaper organizations.

The road to introducing the e-paper or digital newspaper

The newspaper had existed in an undisturbed and profitable business environment (Picard, cited in Åkesson, Sørensen & Ihlstrom, 2018) until the emergence of the Internet and new media technologies. The newspaper in its nearly 400-year history has demonstrated a flexibility that enables it adapt to changing times and technologies. It successfully overcame threats from radio and television, and also from telegraph and computer (Bucher, Büffel & Wollscheid, 2005). The telegraph, invented in 1844, was a major competitor to the newspaper through its short dispatches which were instantaneous. The next was radio and television in the 20th century (Lumbantobing, Budianto & Santoso, 2019). Other technologies that came to rival the newspaper were the computer and satellite television. After more than three centuries, the tradition of printing, pioneered by Gutenberg, is breaking and newspaper is transforming from its physical form to an electronic or digital format. The change in newspaper form had been at the level of production, distribution and reception of news. The transition is, therefore, reflecting in the shift from what is described as 'paperspace' to cyberspace (Bucher, Büffel & Wollscheid, 2005). The printed and online newspaper, as explained by Bucher, Büffel and Wollscheid (2005) is now joined by what is called e-paper or digital edition of the newspaper.

Therefore, the newspaper, according to Lumbantobing, Budianto and Santoso (2019) is converging from print to digital.

In view of the constriction caused by the emergence of the Internet and associated technologies, many newspapers have begun to look for alternative channels of drawing back the disappearing readers. This has made the online an attractive option for their delivery channels, from print format to online format (Cherian, 2015). According to Villi and Hayashi (2015), digital transition for the newspaper refers to the shift from traditional or printed newspaper to publishing content on digital platforms, online and through mobile devices such as laptops, mobile phones and tablet computers. However, at the moment, the digital transition is said to be focused on the mobile platforms, such as smart phones and tablet computers (Villi & Matikainen, cited in Villi & Hayashi, 2015). Digital newspaper is described as an evolving genre with capability that is more than mere electronic presentation of news. The transition from print to digital form strives to exploit the opportunities offered in multimedia and electronic access to newspaper (Anastasia, Dubravka & Daniel, 2012).

In addition, there is the introduction of apps which has boosted news consumption on digital platforms. Since apps came into being, there has been an explosion in the demand for smartphone, tablet computers and other mobile devices. The apps are available in online app stores such as

Appstore for Android, Apple's App Store (Elangovan & Gupta, 2015).

The electronic newspaper as forerunner of digital newspaper

The e-paper is described as a simulation of the printed newspaper, which provides an opportunity to navigate from page to page as known with printed newspaper. The attraction in e-paper is that it requires no additional journalistic effort than that required in producing the printed newspaper. The e-paper appears a positive attraction for newspapers, especially considering the current negative financial climate in newspaper business since the onset of the Internet and new media technologies (Bucher, Büffel & Wollscheid, 2005). The term 'e-paper' is used differently in German and English regions of the world. While in Germany it is used to describe the electronic facsimile version of the printed newspaper, in English, particularly in America, e-paper refers to digital or replica digital edition of the newspaper. It is also used to describe various forms of electronic newspaper presented through a digital device with flat and flexible display screen (Bucher, Büffel & Wollscheid, 2005).

To Panda and Swain (2011), electronic newspaper, otherwise known as e-newspaper, is described as "a self-contained, reusable and refreshable version of a traditional newspaper." Electronic newspaper has different form. This includes the online/web newspaper, which is the online edition of the newspaper available on the web, the PDF newspaper which is an electronic replica of the traditional newspaper, the E-news via e-devices which is an electronic newspaper service supported by e-paper technology such as an e-reader or Amazon Kindle (Panda & Swain, 2011).

At the beginning of the 1990s, there was only one electronic newspaper, the *Star-Telegraph*, in the United States. The *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Daily News*, and *Fox News* were some of the newspapers that popularized the electronic newspaper in America. The rapid growth of e-newspaper in the late 1990s was inspired by ready technology and the viability of the market for e-paper (Panda & Swain, 2011). This however, may mean the web version of the newspaper as different from full digital paper read on specially designed electronic device (Ihlstrom, Åkesson, & Nordqvist, 2004). The *Rhein-Zeitung* in Koblenz, Germany, pioneered the e-paper in that region when it added e-paper to its printed and online version in 2001. By 2003, it had gathered some 2,200 subscribers, aside from recording between 23,000 and 42,000 page hit weekly (Bucher, Büffel & Wollscheid, 2005).

The e-paper presents the possibilities of the printed newspaper experience with those of the online newspaper. The dual character of the e-paper reflects in being able to read the newspaper online and at the same time being able to scroll through mouse click as in flipping through newspaper pages (Bucher, Büffel & Wollscheid, 2005). Bucher, Büffel and Wollscheid (2005) report that more than 20 manufacturers and newspaper publishing organizations use different EDP solutions to produce the e-paper. The output range from PDF file which can be displayed with corresponding additional software and output based on HTML or XML files that can be directly displayed in the browser (Bucher, Büffel & Wollscheid, 2005).

However, the e-paper is not entirely a new experience in Nigeria. In addition to expanding web editions of the newspaper pioneered in the 1990s by the defunct *Post Express* newspaper (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2009), as at 2015, a number of newspapers tried to experiment with the PDF version of the printed newspaper. It was an experiment that was met with minimal success. The study by Aliagan (2016a) revealed that only three of the eight newspapers studied had digital editions. As revealed in that study, while newspapers like *Leadership* and *Daily Trust* had pay-plans for their digital editions, others like *Vanguard* simply gave it out for free, including the past editions of the newspaper. As the study also recorded, *The Punch* directed its readers to download apps on their smartphones to access the digital copy of the newspaper. A newspaper like *Daily Trust* had bundle subscriptions for e-editions for weekly, monthly, quarterly, half yearly and yearly while its PDF copy was available on subscription, and *Leadership* had full digital edition in PDF, E-pub and mobile subscription on weekly and monthly basis (Aliagan, 2016a).

Mobile phone as a boost to digital news dissemination

After many years of online publishing, the production and consumption of mobile news have gained popularity (Westlund, 2013). This development is complemented by the increased growth in the ownership of mobile phones and tablets. The use of cellular phone in Africa increased dramatically over the past decade. It is reported that a quarter of the world's 700 million mobile phones were used in developing countries in 2000, compared to an estimate of three-quarters of the world's four billion total in 2009 (Ekwo, 2011). With the explosion in mobile communication devices across the world, it was reasoned that the new trend would be a boost to the newspaper business through what is referred to as mobile journalism. The 'ubiquitous presence of computer-like devices' made some scholars to consider the mobile device 'a game changer to instant news reporting…' (Westlund, 2013, p. 21). The Pew Research Centre (quoted in Franklin, 2014) states that some analysts predict that mobile devices would supplant the desktop/laptop within two and three years. This prediction has been proven with the growth in mobile news through mobile devices such as the smartphones, iPad, and other devices.

The growth in mobile phone use across the world shows that news and information specifically designed to be read on mobile phone represents a critical 'growth area for the journalism industry' (Bethell, 2010, p. 104-105). This is what made Bethell (2010) to see the mobile phone as likely becoming an important digital tool for journalists in the future. In the Nigerian context, an empirical study from the University of Lagos and Lagos State University (LASU) indicates that more than 90% of students from each of the two universities used mobile devices to read news (Adekannbi & Agbolabori, 2018). In the same vein, a survey in the north-eastern Nigeria showed that almost eighty percent (78.86%) of respondents read news online daily (Mathew, Ogedebe & Adeniji, 2013). Similarly, another study conducted among students of two universities (Nasarawa State University, Keffi and Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai) in the north-central Nigeria shows that majority of the respondents affirmed accessing news through mobile devices (Santas, 2020). However, mobile journalism in Nigeria has not been a complete success story. Of the eight newspapers in a study by Aliagan (2016a), four offered mobile journalism services. Mobile services offered included news alert and daily SMS which were subscription-base. However, the mobile news service by the newspapers was a failure as it was soon discontinued due to poor returns.

It has also been noted that legacy news media in many countries, from South Africa to China, India and Australia offer mobile apps. The *Times of India*, for instance, provided different news apps for iPhone, Android, Blackberry, Symbian and Windows (Westlund, 2013).The use of the mobile devices among newspapers for dissemination of news shows that it is growing and gaining acceptability, especially considering the study by the Pew Research Centre, which confirms that 65% of Internet users paid to download online content, 18% of whom say they have paid for a digital newspaper or magazine article (Haniff, 2012). However, the challenge confronting the use of mobile devices for news dissemination is that like the Internet, the revenue from it is not impressive, particularly as advertisers were skeptical in placing advertisement on the mobile channel (Ihlstrom &Thomas, 2007), though the situation has since changed positively. A study by the Pew Research Centre in 2011 among 40 newspapers found that mobile news accounted for less than one per cent of digital revenue (Pew Research Centre, 2013). This was what made the Pew Research Centre (2013) to conclude that "mobile advertising could just be as disappointing as online advertising has been…" and Frederick Filloux, a media analyst also lamented as follows: "mobile audiences are large and growing… But their monetization is mostly a disaster" (Pew Research Centre, 2013).

The E-newspaper revolution

The introduction of the electronic newspaper is considered as the next stage in the evolution of the printed newspaper. The e-newspaper technology has been described as a new technical innovation that gives similar reading experience as in reading the printed newspaper. During the past decade manufacturers have tried to come up with devices that could replicate the newspaper reading experience. This move has led to the manufacture

of a number of electronic devices known as e-paper or e-newspaper (Moberg, Johansson, Finnveden, & Jonsson, 2009b). In February 2006, the e-newspaper revolution was set in motion with the Flemish daily *Tijd* becoming the first to introduce it, using the iRex Iliad device. The first consumer product for the e-newspaper was the Sony PRS-500, launched in September of the same year (Moberg, Johansson, Finnveden, & Jonsson, 2009a). Scholars have, however, argued that though the e-newspaper may not likely replace web journalism, but certainly it has the potential to replace printed newspaper (Ihlstrom, Akesson, & Nordqvist, 2004).

The e-newspaper device is considered as very special in the newspaper industry because of its capabilities. It is described as not just a new technological platform, but a potential new mobile newspaper service published on an e-paper device (Akesson, 2009). According to Akesson (2009, p.60) "an e-newspaper holds the potential of merging the best of two news genres: the readability and overview from printed newspapers and interactivity multimedia from online newspapers." Akesson (2009) describes the e-paper as thin, flexible, and non-sensitive, does not require high battery performance and the screen image is stable and fixed when there is no electrical voltage applied.

Several device manufacturers such as Sony, Motorola, Jhinke and iRex use the e-paper substrate for their products, the Sony E-Reader, the iRex Iliad, the Hanlin eBooks as well as Motorola's Motofone F3 which in fact is a cell phone targeting the Indian market with a sales price of less than $100 (Moberg et al, 2009b). Example of e-reader devices are Amazon Kindle, Sony Reader, Bookeen Cybook, STAReBOOK and iRex Iliad (Akesson, 2009). As at 2004, there were two technologies for e-paper available in the market. These were electrophoreses and dipolar rotation. A pioneer in the electrophoresis technology was the E Ink of E Ink Corporation, USA which was developed at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) as far back as 1997 (Ihlstrom et al, 2004; Moberg et al, 2009a).

Talking about the advantages of the e-paper, Ihlstrom and Thomas (2007, p.252) note that it includes being 'readable in sunlight, portable, thin, flexible and non-sensitive'. The e-newspaper also has many uniqueness such as having the potential to attract 'very local readers and advertisers' and can meet up with the customer's 'reading habit' with 'ubiquitous update anywhere, anytime' (Ihlstrom & Thomas, 2007, p.256). The properties of the e-device include high resolution, 180^{o} viewing angle, high contrast and aside from the device itself, the e-paper consists mostly of plastic housing, low-power one-chip microprocessor, rechargeable battery, controller boards and implements for navigation such as buttons, jog wheels, joysticks (Mobert et al, 2009a). Many newspapers introduced the e-reader, including the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Le Monde* and *Shanghai Daily* which published on Amazon Kindle. Newspapers on iRex iliad were *The Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *Daily Mail*, *The Age*, *Le Figaro* and *The Irish Times* (Akesson, 2009). At the moment, there does not appear to be any Nigerian newspaper exploring the e-newspaper device. No visible study has also been conducted on e-newspaper on e-paper device in Nigeria.

Methodology

The study adopted the mixed methods research mode beginning with quantitative, followed by qualitative study and triangulating the findings to have a comprehensive and holistic understanding of the research phenomenon. Quantitatively, we content analyzed the e-newspaper web content of 10 national dailies- *The Guardian, Vanguard, This Day, The Punch, The Sun, The Nation, Daily Trust, Leadership, Nigerian Tribune and Blueprint* to understand and identify the nature and pattern of the 10 newspapers' digital offering. All the sampled newspapers, with the exception of *Blueprint*, were among the 10 highest selling newspapers listed in the ADVAN circulation check of 2009 (Zus Bureau Limited, 2009). Specifically, the quantitative stage of the research entailed examination of newspaper web contents to identify the nature and pattern in their digital offering. By digital offering, we mean the electronic version of the newspaper, different from the web version or the printed newspaper, advertised on the websites of individual newspapers sampled in the study.

The analysis of the digital newspaper contents was conducted in December 2020. The study spanned 4 weeks. To equally have all the days of

the week included, two days were randomly selected in every week except the first week in which only a day was picked, resulting in seven days. The selected days of the week are represented as follows: Week 1: Sunday; Week 2: Monday and Saturday; Week 3: Tuesday and Sunday; and Week 4: Wednesday and Friday. These days were selected through composite sampling and informed by the assumption that the features of newspaper websites are fairly constant (Schultz, cited in Aliagan, 2016a). The practice of picking fewer numbers of days for observing the features of the internet newspapers has been a tradition in content analysis of online publications. For instance, while Li's (2006) content analysis of web editions of three newspapers was done for two days, Zeng and Zeng (cited in Aliagan, 2016a) undertook a one-day content analysis of the Internet newspapers to identify their web contents. The content category for our study was the e-newspaper identified as e-paper or e-copy in each of the sampled newspaper, the rates for bundle subscription, individual newspaper's unique offering, and mode of purchase of the e-paper, while the unit of analysis was image count.

Table 1: E-Paper Sites of Nigerian Newspapers

SNo.	Newspapers	E-paper sites
1	Vanguard	https://www.vanguardngr.com
2	Guardian	https://www.epaper.guardian.ng
3	Daily Trust	https://dailytrustepaper.com
4	Leadership	https://epaper.leadership.ng
5	Nigerian Tribune	https://www.trinuneonlineng.com/subscribe-to-our-e-copies-by-clicking-here/
6	Blueprint	https://epaper.blueprint.ng/
7	The Sun	https://www.sunnewsonline.com/?p=*****
8	The Nation	Download app
9	This Day	https://www.thisdaylive.com/
10	The Punch	Download app

Source: Nigerian Newspaper websites

The qualitative - in-depth interviews- aspect of the study was conducted using a purposive sampling method in the selection of the interviewees as proposed by Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006). A purposive sampling method was adopted for the interviewees who were individuals that have demonstrated sufficient knowledge of the newspaper operation and had risen to the post of editor and manager of the newspapers selected for the study. The researchers originally set out to interview 20 respondents at two per newspaper, but this aim was not met. However, all the 10 newspapers, with the exception of *Daily Trust* whose respondents failed to honour the interview schedules, were represented in the interview. Thus, 13 interviews were successfully conducted with nine newspaper representatives, with 65% response rate. The 13 interviewees represent printed and online newspaper editors and managers (at two editors of print and online edition or chief executive for three newspapers, and an editor or chief executive for each of the remaining six newspapers). The inclusive criteria was being editor of print or online edition of a newspaper or being a newspaper chief executive with 10 years professional experience and had spent not less than five years in the newspaper represented in the study. All the interviewees met the selection criteria. In consonance with confidentiality clause, the interviewees were identified by codes which were generated from their positions in the newspaper and the newspapers they represented. All the interviews were transcribed verbatim. For data analysis and presentation, the researchers followed inductive data-driven thematic analysis (Paton, cited in Bowen, 2006), and adopted the suggestions of DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall and McCulloh (2011).

Table 2: Newspapers and the Interviewees

Newspaper	Interviewees
1. The Guardian	• Editor, The Guardian • Head Digital
2. Nigerian Tribune	• Editor, Nigerian Tribune • Online Editor
3. The Nation	• Managing Editor, North • Chairman Editorial Board
4. The Punch	• Editor, Punch
5. This Day	• Editor
6. The Sun	• Editor
7. Vanguard	• Editor
8. Leadership	• Chief Operating Officer
9. Blueprint	• Editor

Source: In-depth interviews

Findings:

Analysis of Content Analysis:

Table 3: E-Paper Offering by Newspapers

S/N	NEWSPAPER	DAILY	WEEKLY	MONTHLY	QUARTERLY	BI-ANNUALLY	ANNUALLY	MODE OF ACCESSING
1.	Vanguard	N50	N350	N1500	N4,500	-	N18,000	Register and opening account
2.	The Punch	N50	-	-	-	-	-	Download free app to access
3.	The Guardian	N50	N350	N1,500	N4,500	N9,000	N18,000	Register to open account
4.	The Nation	-	-	-	-	-	-	Download app to access
5.	This Day	-	-	-	-	-	-	Digital edition is free and displayed on website
6.	Daily Trust	N25	-	-	-	-	-	-
7.	Leadership	-	-	N500 promo	-	-	-	-
8.	Nigerian Tribune	-	N600	-	-	-	-	By subscription
9.	The Sun	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
10.	Blueprint	N40	N280	N1,200	-	-	N12,000 two months free	Sign up for registration

The e-paper format in the newspapers under study was in PDF files, with similar features as the printed newspaper. Of the 10 newspapers sampled, two required download of an app on Apple Store to access the e-paper. These were *The Punch* and *The Nation* newspapers. Those newspapers that required registration and opening of account to access the e-paper were *Vanguard, The Guardian and Blueprint*. One newspaper, *The Sun*, had no display of the e-paper on its website or link to it. While the app creates direct link to the e-paper subscription platform in the *The Punch*, that of *The Nation* only displayed headlines links to news stories. Also, of the nine newspapers whose e-paper could be accessed either directly from the website or through downloaded app, one offered its content for free, while eight had rates advertised ranging from daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, bi-annual to annual. Furthermore, while *This Day* offered its e-edition for free, *Vanguard, The Guardian, Daily Trust, Leadership, Nigerian Tribune* and *Blueprint* had varying rates for their e-paper subscription. The rate varied from N25, N40, to N50.

Also, while five newspapers (*Vanguard, The Guardian, Punch, Daily Trust and Blueprint*) advertised rates for daily or monthly e-paper subscription, *Nigerian Tribune* had a lump sum of N600 for weekly subscription or purchase. In addition, while *Vanguard* and *The Guardian* had uniform rates, *Daily Trust* and *Blueprint* had promotional rates for subscription on their e-paper. For instance, *Leadership* had N500 subscription rate for a monthly bundle and *Blueprint* advertised two months free e-paper for an annual subscription. Also, while e-paper appeared a serious venture in *Vanguard, The Guardian, Punch, Daily Trust, Blueprint and Nigerian Tribune*, it did not appear so for *The Nation, The Sun* and *This Day*. The *Vanguard* was more business-like in marketing its e-paper as it advertised archived e-editions from 2017 to December 2020, which could be glimpsed, but downloading is only effective after online payment. Payment mode for most of the e-newspapers were credit or debit card or bank transfer. In addition, subscribers could select single or multiple publications during subscription.

Analysis of In-Depth Interviews

Analysis of the interview data generated themes that are related to the e-paper or digital newspaper offering of the Nigerian newspapers. These were (a) Digital edition for a fee (b) Monetizing Archive edition (c) Email alert on breaking news (d) Platform shift

Digital edition for a fee

Only five of the nine respondents in the qualitative study had reports on the digital edition of the newspaper. The other four had no concrete information. The five respondents reported that the digital edition was offered for a fee, even though the return from it was not substantial. It was evidenced from the respondents that the digital edition was once offered for free by some of the newspapers before it was eventually monetized. As submitted by respondent NTE of *Nigerian Tribune*:

> It wasn't supposed to be free. It was to be paid for, but a newspaper broke the rank, even as all newspapers tried to ensure that it is not offered free. There was a company that was helping us to do it, but this newspaper broke rank. It was *Daily Independent*, they started giving it free to everybody, for what reason I don't know, and that affected the project. We planned it to be subscription-based.

The rates for the e-paper appeared uniform for the newspapers but there were a few variations. The cost of the digital edition represents barely a quarter of the cost of purchase of the printed paper (N50) for most of the newspapers. Many organizations are however, taking advantage of the cheapness of the digital edition. For instance, according to respondent NTE, "there are some banks that have requested that instead of them buying like 50 copies per day, they will request for an e-copy and then they will share. This is affecting the hard copy sales…." According to respondent HDG, "The electronic version of our newspapers (are) sold daily to thousands of subscribers, mostly in corporate and government institutions." Her newspaper, she said, simply distributes the "exact print versions rather than creating a special digitized edition." The digitized edition, she said, was being distributed through

third party vendors locally and internationally. The income from the e-paper cannot be compared to the printed newspaper in terms of profitability. According to respondent HDG, the income on the digitized edition "is still a tiny fraction when compared to selling hard copies." Thus, even though subscription for the e-paper for some of the newspapers is growing, the return is described as insignificant. Respondent TSE described the income from the e-paper as "just an extra income." He stressed that there were a lot of factors hindering the blossoming of the market for the e-copy in Nigeria, adding that it would take some time for the e-copy to generate as much income as in the sale of the printed newspaper.

Of the nine newspapers in the study, the *Sun* stood out by being creative in the marketing of its e-paper. It simply sold the right to its online digital edition to a local company that markets it to readers via online platforms. As explained by respondent TSE:

> It was just a way of creating a middle man, using his own technology, between the newspaper organization and the readers or those that want to read. So, you find a situation where the company sources for people that want to read the e-copy, buys the right from the newspaper and takes the e-copy to them. That way they are paying to read the e-copy.

The e-paper for most of the newspapers was however, just another way of earning an extra income. It has not been grown into a potential replacement for the distressed printed newspaper.

Archive edition

The study recorded seven newspapers with reports on their archive editions. Of this, four newspapers had monetized their online archive editions, two were exploring monetizing the archive papers, one was unsure if money was being made from the archive, while no report was made from two newspapers. At some point, *The Nation* put its past editions on CD. This was proposed by a private company and the production was done in collaboration with the newspaper. The CDs were distributed free. At a point it was also sold. *This Day* at a time also charged money to access its archive editions. However, respondent TDE was not sure of the cost of purchasing an archive edition of the *This Day*. *Nigerian Tribune* also had its archive editions which it was planning to turn into an e-library online. According to respondent NTE, it would be "a library where you pay before you enter. They are still building it. It is a work in progress. We want to make it a unique kind of library." The newspaper has invested heavily on it, but it is not sure when the e-library would become functional.

Leadership also has archive editions. As narrated by respondent COL, the newspaper had issue with its archive editions. He explained, "when I came in, there were a lot of issues around our e-platform. I had to practically take it over and the person that was the administrator before I came was not ready to release the archives. We are still battling with it for him to surrender the archive." Like other newspapers, the *Sun* also has archive editions. However, it was contracted to a local company that markets it. *The Nation* had archive editions once, stated respondent CEN, but he was not sure if it was functional for now, but effort was being made to revive it. To him, substantial revenue was not coming from the archive editions. Also, *The Guardian* has its archive editions. Generally, however, like the e-paper the archive editions have not been grown into a potential revenue source by most newspapers as the income from it is considered insignificant.

Email alert on breaking news

Six newspapers reported on the e-mail alert services. Of this, four newspapers offered the service for a fee, two newspapers offered the service for free, while three newspapers had no report on this. *The Nation* had email alert services done in collaboration with telecommunication network service providers, but as noted by respondent NBC, "I don't know how functional it is." *The Nation's* e-mail alert did not seem to be really successful as noted by respondent CEN. According to him, the e-mail alert did not have sufficient reach. Respondent TDE was also not sure if the *This Day* had an email alert. *Nigerian Tribune* at some time experimented with e-mail alert and it was paid for, said respondent NTE. According to him, e-mail alerts "encouraged more

people to follow us. In fact, we are still sending news alert on WhatsApp now, and we have thousands of numbers that get that news alert from us." *Leadership* newspaper had an e-mail alert service which it started early 2019. The e-mail alert is paid for, but respondent COL could not give the exact cost of an e-mail alert, but he described the revenue from e-mail alert service as minimal. *Blueprint* newspaper also had e-mail alert for its breaking news, and it was offered for free, as informed by respondent BPE. In the same way, *The Guardian* also had email alert service. According to respondent HDG, it is offered for free.

Platform Shift

Nigerian newspapers have digitized format of their publications from which they derive small revenue. It is not certain if any newspaper is looking at a complete shift to the digital editions. Findings in the study revealed that two respondents were unsure if their newspapers would adopt platform shift, four said it was not practicable at the moment, while there were no report on this by seven respondents. According to respondent TDE of *This Day*, the e-newspaper "has improved the professional standing of the newspaper." As to if the future of the newspaper would be on the digital platform, respondent TDE believed that both the "print and digital platforms would co-exist." Also, respondent COL of *Leadership* described his newspaper's experience with the e-edition as positive. E-edition, he reasoned, was able to extend a newspaper's reach as its circulation could be limited with the hard copy. However, he did not think the e-edition should be a replacement for the printed newspaper as both are complementary. Respondent CEN of the *Nation* was of the belief that platform shift, though is the practice in the developed media, is not practicable in Nigeria now because many people were still attached to the printed copy. However, as to whether platform shift would be the option in the nearest future, he said only time could tell as technology had always determined the course of history. Respondent BPE of *Blueprint* agreed that the future of the newspaper was in the digitized format as projected, describing the experience of the *Blueprint* in publishing digitized edition online as worthwhile. Publishing an e-edition, he remarked, "increases visibility and functionality" of the newspaper. He was not sure if platform shift would be adopted by his newspaper eventually.

Respondent EPD of *The Punch* believed that there were opportunities in any fading field. As bad as the situation might seem, he reasoned that there were untapped opportunities within the print publication. Rather than thinking of platform shift at the moment, he believed that newspaper managers ought to look within to see what areas of the printed newspaper had not been explored. For instance, *The Punch* started a specialized newspaper on sports known as *Punch Sports Extra* in July 2019 and since its debut it had been doing well because it is cheap and affordable to all at just N50 a copy. "If we could do that successfully in sports, that means that there are other areas that we can also carve-out and sell … So, in every of those areas we are talking about, there are opportunities there. You need to think deep to get it," he stressed. The investment in the *Punch Sports Extra* has however, been halted following the financial stress that followed the weeks of lockdown occasioned by COVID-19. As for *The Guardian*, respondent HDG does not see platform shift being possible now.

Discussion and integration of Findings

The study had three main objectives. On the first objective of the study which was to explore the attraction of Nigerian newspapers to e-paper or digital edition, the finding revealed that the e-paper format in the newspapers was in PDF files, with similar features as the printed newspaper in conformity with the description by Panda and Swain (2011). It is however, different from the e-paper identified in the Ihlstrom et al (2004) or Akesson (2009) and Moberg et al (2009a or b). This finding also indicates that the country has not imbibed the full digital culture of an electronic newspaper service supported by e-paper technology such as an e-reader or Amazon Kindle (Panda & Swain, 2011). It further means that the digital newspaper culture in the country is still at infancy as earlier identified by Aliagan (2016a). As for the pattern in the e-paper initiated by the newspapers, which is the subject of the second objective of the study, the finding revealed that of the 10 newspapers sampled in the quantitative

segment of the study, two required download of an app on Apple Store to access the e-paper, one offered its content for free, while eight had rates ranging from daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, bi-annual to annual. Access to the e-paper through mobile apps as initiated by *The Nation* and *The Punch* only shows that they are in the league of newspapers that seeks to boost their news consumption through apps (Elangovan & Gupta, 2015). *The Sun* which is the only newspaper that did not display its e-paper on its website or apps is only being creative about it. It sold the right to its online digital edition to a local company that markets it to readers via online platforms as reflected in the in-depth interview with its representative. The finding on the digital offering of the newspapers however, contrasts with earlier discovery in Aliagan (2016a) in which only three newspapers had digital edition. The current finding signifies an improvement in digitization of newspapers in Nigeria. However, in conformity with the earlier tradition, the newspapers are boosting their promotional rates from one newspaper in Aliagan (2016a) study to two in the current study. In addition, the idea of 'freemium' identified in Aliagan (2016a) is still being sustained in the present study. While *Vanguard* offered its digital edition for free in the 2015 study, it was *This Day* in the present study. A unique innovation in the present marketing of the e-paper by the newspapers is the introduction of online payment mode through debit or credit card and bank transfer.

The third objective which is to find out whether the e-paper constitutes a viable revenue earning source for the newspaper organizations revealed that while the e-paper appears a serious venture in six newspapers, the contrary is the case for three. This finding is complemented with the analysis in the in-depth interviews, though the responses in some instances contradict findings in the quantitative study. The study revealed that a lot of factors might be hindering the blossoming of the market for the e-copy in Nigeria, hence it would take some time for e-copy to generate as much income as in the sale of the printed newspaper. This finding on dismal return from e-paper is not peculiar to Nigeria alone as documented by Wihbey (2013) and Aliagan (2016a). Based on this development, it is not certain if any Nigerian newspaper is looking at a complete shift to the digital format. Findings in the study further revealed that two respondents were unsure if their newspapers would adopt platform shift, four said it was not practicable at the moment, while there were no report on this by six respondents.

Conclusion

While some legacy newspapers in developed media market had embarked on platform shift, the situation in Nigeria is precarious. Newspaper editors and executives are more familiar with the print tradition or more protective of the print culture, and only learning to cope with the alternative in digital publishing. As argued by Picard (2011), decisions on terminal period for printed newspaper would be difficult in view of the fact that digital product and print are products of the same company and they complement one another, same argument offered by some of the respondents in this study. A timeline of two decades was given by Picard (2011) for publishers to decide on full migration to digital platform. However, with the meagre financial allure from online sources, and the lack of courage to charge for online content, the future of printed newspaper in Nigeria still appears intact, at least for some years to come. The study therefore, recommends that Nigerian newspapers should begin to build a strong brand for their e-paper and developing it into a viable revenue source rather than just an extra income source which it presently signifies. This is because the future of the newspaper is in the digital realm.

References

Adekannbi, J. O., & Agbolabori, D. M. (2018). News consumption on the Internet by undergraduate students of public universities in Nigeria. *Indian Journal of Information Sources and Services*, *8*(2), 99-107.

Åkesson, M. (2009, September). Digital innovation in the value networks of newspapers. *Gothenburg Studies in Informatics*, Report 42. Retrieved from http://hdl.handle.net/2077/20887

Åkesson, M., Sørensen, C. & Ihlström, E. C. (2018). Ambidexterity under digitalization: a tale of two decades of new media at a Swedish newspaper. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, ISSN 0956-5221, E-ISSN 1873-3387, 34(3), 276-288

Aliagan I. Z. (2016b). Newspaper business model in digital era: The case of Nigeria. *Media and Communication Review*, 2(1), 75-99.

Aliagan, I. Z. (2015). Examining survival strategies employed by Nigerian newspapers against loss of readership and revenues. *Journal of New Media and Mass Communication*, 35, 9-16

Aliagan, I. Z. (2016a). Free versus fee: the 'freemium' factor in Nigeria's newspapers' contents on the web. *Journal of Communication and Media Research*, 8(1), 1-14.

Anastasia, U., Dubravka, C., & Daniel, S. (2012). "Understanding The Digital Newspaper Genre: Medium Vs. Message" (2012). ECIS 2012 Proceedings, Paper 136. http://aisel.aisnet.org/ecis2012/136

Ashong, A. C., & Henry, O. C. (2017). Content preference among online and hardcopy newspaper readers in Imo state. *Journal of New Media and Mass Communication*, 4(1), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.18488/journal.91/2017.4.1/91.1.1.15

Bethell, P. (2010). Journalism students' experience of mobile phone technology: implications for journalism education. *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, 20, 103-114. Available at http://ro.uow.edu.au/apme/vol1/iss20/10

Bowen, G. A. (2006). Grounded theory and sensitizing concepts. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 5(3), 12-23. Doi/full/10.1177/160940690600500304

Bucher, H., Steffen Büffel, S., & Wollscheid, J. (2005). Digital newspaper as E-Paper A hybrid medium between print and online newspaper. *Ifra Special Report* 6.32. Available at www.ifra.com

Cherian, J. (2015). Emergence of Digital Publishing – A great challenge to the print publications. *Procedia Economics and Finance*, 23, 576 – 586

DeCuir-Gunby, J. T., Marshall, P. L., & McCulloch, A. W. (2011). Developing and using a codebook for the analysis of interview data: An example from a professional development research project. *Field Methods*, 23(2), 136-155. doi/pdf/10.1177/1525822x10388468.

Ekwo, U.A. (2011). The Impact of Media Convergence on Africa's Democracy: A Nigerian Perspective. (Doctoral Thesis), Walden University.

Elangovan, N., & Gupta, H.(2015). Impact of smartphone news apps on print media – A Twin TAM Framework. *IOSR Journal of Business and Management (IOSR-JBM)*, 17(4), 01-09. www.iosrjournals.org DOI: 10.9790/487X-17420109 www.iosrjournals.org

Encomium (2016, June 21). Guardian sacks 130 staffers at the end of June. Retrieved from http://encomium.ng/guardian-sacks-130-staffers-at-the-end-of-june/

Federal Government of Nigeria (2009). *Report of the Vision 2020 National Technical Working Group On Media and Communications*. Abuja.

Franklin B. (2014). The future of journalism. *Journalism Practice*, 8(5), 469-487. doi:1080/17512786.2014.942090

Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods*, 18(1), 59-82. doi/pdf/10.1177/1525822X05279903

Haniff, Z. (2012). "Niche Theory in New Media: Is Digital Overtaking the Print Magazine Industry?" (UNLV Theses/ Dissertations/Professional Papers/Capstones). Paper 1571. Available at digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2572&context

Ihlström E. C., Åkesson, M., & Nordqvist, S. (2004). From Print to Web to e-paper-the challenge of designing the e-newspaper. Proceedings of Conference on Building Digital Bridges: Linking Cultures, Commerce and Science: 8th ICCC/IFIP International Conference on Electronic Publishing held in Brasília - ELPUB 2004, Brasilia, Brazil, June 23-26, 2004. Retrieved from http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:237628/FULLTEXT01.pdf

Ihlström, C., & Kalling, T. (2007). Proposing a business model framework for the e-newspaper introduction. In Proceedings of ECIS (pp. 7-9).

Li, X. (2006). 'News of priority issues in print versus Internet newspapers.' In Xigen, L. (ed.). Internet newspapers: the making of a mainstream medium. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associate, Inc.

Lumbantobing, M., Budianto, D. & Santoso, J. (2019). Digital Newspaper: An Analysis of Technology Acceptance Model – Case Study: Student of Atma Jaya University Yogyakarta. *Journal of Information Technology and Computer Science*, 4(2), 212-221

Mathew, J., Ogedebe, P. M., & Adeniji, S. B. (2013). Online Newspaper Readership in North Eastern Nigeria. *Asian Journal of Social Science and Humanities*, *12*(2).

Moberg, A., Johansson, M., Finnveden, G. & Alex Jonsson (2009a). Printed and tablet e-newspaper from an environmental perspective – A screening life cycle assessment, Environmental Assessment Review, 30, 177-191

Moberg, A., Johansson, M., Finnveden, G., and Jonsson, A. (2009b). Screening environmental life cycle assessment of printed, web based and tablet e-paper newspaper, second edition, Stockholm, Report from the KTH Centre for Sustainable Communications. Retrieved from http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:355962/FULLTEXT01.pdf

Panda, K.C. & Swain, D. K. (2011). E-newspapers and e-news services in the electronic age: an appraisal. *Annals of Library and Information Studies*, 58, 55-62

Pew Research Centre (2013). The State of the News Media 2013: Newspapers: Stabilizing, but Still Threatened. The Pew Research Centre's Project for Excellence in Journalism, July 18. Retrieved from https://www.pewresearch.org/topics/state-of-the-news-media/

Picard, R.G. (2011). Mapping Digital Media: Digitization and Media Business Models, Open Society Foundations, Reference Series No. 5, July

Premium Times (2015, July 7). Journalists protest against ThisDay over non-payment of salaries. Retrieved from http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/186261-journalists-protest-against-thisday-over-non-payment-of-salaries.html

Sahara reporters (2011). 234Next Newspaper To Shut Down Print Edition This Weekend. Retrieved from ttp://saharareporters.com/2011/09/23/234next-newspaper-shut-down-print-edition-weekend

Sahara Reporters (2012, September 6). Angry Workers Ask Former Gov. Daniel To Close Down Nigerian Compass. Retrieved from http://saharareporters.com/2012/09/06/angry-workers-ask-former-gov-daniel-close-down-nigerian-compass

Santas, T. (2020). Consumption pattern of online news media among undergraduate students in two universities in North-Central, Nigeria. *Journal of Media Studies*, *35*(2).

Sobowale, I., Sowumi, N. & Emmanuel, R. (2014). Newspaper readership in Nigeria: Challenges, prospects and the way forward. In Oso, L. Olatunji, R. & Owens-Ibie, N. (Eds.) *Journalism and Media in Nigeria: Context, Issues and Practice (468-480)*. Ontario, Canada: University Press Concord

Sparks, C., Wang, H., Huang, Y., Zhao, Y., Lü, N. & Wan, D. (2016). The impact of digital media on newspapers: Comparing responses in China and the United States. *Global Media and China*, 1(3), 186–207. DOI: 10.1177/2059436416666385 gch.sagepub.com

The Nigerian Times (2015, June 11). Cash crunch: Leadership Newspaper to sack over 300 staff. Retrieved from http://nigeriantimes.ng/news/cash-crunch-leadership-newspaper-to-sacks-over-300-staff/

Villi, M., & Hayashi. K. (2015). "The mission is to keep this industry intact": Digital transition in the Japanese newspaper Industry. *Journalism Studies.* First published online. http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1461670X.2015.1110499

Westlund, O. (2013). Mobile news: A review and model of journalism in an age of mobile media. *Digital Journalism*, 1(1), 6-26. doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2012.740273

Zus Bureau Limited (2009). Newspaper Circulation Check.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

1. Isiaka Zubair Aliagan holds a PhD in Print Journalism from Universiti Sains Malaysia; PhD History from University of Ilorin. He is currently a Senior Lecturer and Acting Head of Department of Mass Communication at Kwara State University, Malete, Nigeria. Aside some two decades of experience in journalism, publishing and public relations at university and government level, Aliagan has published in reputable national and international journals. His main research interests include print journalism, press and politics, new media technologies, social networking media, newspaper political economy.

2. Kamaldin Abdulsalam Babatunde obtained his PhD from University of Malaya, Malaysia and his B.A and MA from Al- Azhar University, Cairo, Egypt. He lectures with the Department of Mass Communication, Kwara State University, Malete, Nigeria. Prior to joining KWASU, he had lectured at Lagos State University. He has authored and co-authored journal articles and book chapters. His research interests are marketing communication, advertising, public relations, consumer psychology, communication ethics and Islamic communication.

3. Rizki currently works in Universitas Mercu Buana, Jakarta, Indonesia. He is an alumnus of the School of Communication, Universiti Sains Malaysia where he obtained his Master and PhD degrees. Rizki's main research interests are film, television studies and new media. He has explored these areas in several research and publications.

How to cite: Aliagan, I. Z., Babatunde, A. K., & Briandana R. (2020), Nigeria's newspapers' experiment in digital publishing: small gains, uncertain future. *Social and Digital Media Discourse*; *1*(1), 13-26.