

Survival and Mortality of Local Newspapers in Rivers State

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Abstract

In view of the steady rise of the new media and its attendant impacts on information dissemination, media scholars continue to express concern about the fate of the hard copy of newspapers in the years to come. This study examines the role played by the new media and other factors in the survival and mortality of local newspapers in Rivers State between 1996 and 2016. The political economy of the media and communication and circulation spiral theories provided the theoretical framework for the study. Four research questions were formulated to guide the study. The population of the study was 134 print media workers drawn from 54 local newspapers in Rivers State. The researcher used the census technique to study the entire population. Data for the study were generated using documents and the questionnaire. The study found out that advantages of online media such as speedy accessibility of information, patronage by young people, visibility and timeliness contributed to survival of local newspapers, while paucity of fund, poor infrastructure and lack of digital knowledge among operators of local newspapers in Rivers State resulted in the extinction of some newspapers. Among others, the study recommended that in order to forestall short lifespan for local newspapers in Rivers State, prospective newspaper proprietors should first ensure that the requisite requirements necessary for the establishment of a newspaper are put in place.

Key words: *New media, survival, mortality, local newspapers*

Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

As cases of proliferation of newspapers abound all over the world, so also are cases of their extinction. The increased rate of mortality of newspapers informed several studies by media scholars, some of which predicted that newspapers may soon go extinct. For instance, having observed the steady regression of daily newspaper reading habit in America from 1970 at about 0.94 percentage annually, Meyer (2009) decries that the trend “shows us running out of daily readers in March 2044” (p.19). The steady regression of daily newspaper reading habit should not be misconstrued to mean that newspapers must have outlived their usefulness. Newspapers still play crucial role in sensitising and mobilising the people on activities of governments and reporting events happening in the polity. For the fact that issues bordering on education, politics, crime, entertainment, religion, health, sports and innovations in science will continue to evolve, reporting must never cease and so newspapers must continue to be relevant in information dissemination. However, the emergence of new technologies poses some influences on the survival and mortality of newspapers as some readers now find comfort in the online technology. The resort to online newspaper due to advancement in technology against the traditional paper publication is what Theodore Levitt refers to disruptive technology. Meyer (2008) espouses that:

The disruption from technology in the newspaper case is more complicated...the problem was one of straightforward product substitution. Cars were faster and more durable than horses, planes were faster than trains, natural gas was cheaper to process and transport than oil. For media, new technologies do all that. They make information faster, cheaper, and, through electronic archiving, more durable. But they also change the nature of the audience (pp.11-12).

Decrying the decline of newspaper in the United States, Meyer (2009) points out that “the glory of the newspaper business in the United States used to be its ability to match its success as a business with self-conscious attention to its social service mission. Both functions are threatened today” (p.9). Meyer explains that in the 1920s, the percentage of daily circulation of newspaper by household penetration was peaked at 130 but by 2007, the newspaper household penetration in the country nosedived to 44%. He notes that even though the household penetration declined, newspaper influence and profitability remained robust for most of the 20th century, but that all are presently in peril. He further expresses concern that “the decay of newspaper journalism creates problems not just for the business but for the society. One problem is basic: to make democracy work, citizens need information” (p.10).

Meyer identifies entrepreneurs who figure out how to use the more favourable cost structure of Internet-based media to provide better services to the same kind of communities that newspapers have served so well as the chief threat to newspapers in the 21st century. He states that the mass audience is drifting away, making leadership audience inevitable if newspapers must exist. The leadership audience will require proprietors of newspapers to devise various strategies to overcome the stiff competition posed by online entrepreneurs and other factors. Some of the strategies, Meyer recommends to save print journalism include the transition of large newspaper companies into side lines of niche publications for specialised audience, and the use of community-based business model where citizens make donations, institute grants and render assistance through foundations and charitable organisations.

Meyer is not alone in observing the persistent decline of newspapers. Other media researchers have undertaken studies on the state of the newspapers in Nigeria and most of the studies found out that the emergence of the online newspaper constitutes a major challenge to the paper version as more readers particularly, the youths embrace the online technology (Aina 2002; Obijiofor 2003; Olukotun 2005; Nwokegi 2009; Aborisade 2010; Ekhareafo, Asemah and Edegoh 2013; Ige 2013; Tommy 2014; Chukwu 2014; Aliagan 2015 and Jimoh 2016).

For local newspapers which is the focus of this study, Nielson (2015) observes that:

...while we have in the past been able to take the existence of local journalism, its practical feasibility and its commercial sustainability, for granted, this is no longer the case. The business models that local newspapers have been based on are under tremendous pressure today as readership is eroding, advertising declining, and overall revenues plummeting. Digital growth has far from made up for what has been lost on the print side of the business. Most newspaper companies have responded by cutting costs to remain profitable or at least limit the operating losses (p.3).

The argument is that local newspapers in some western countries face serious challenges, just as they also flourish in some other countries. For instance, Norwegian newspapers secured financial assistance from agencies and subsidies from the government, just as Swedish government gives production support to its weeklies (HØst 1999). Also, Gorman and Stearns (2018) report that a United States-based Foundation, the Democracy Fund, announced an endowment of \$2 million to fund local newspapers in New Jersey. These financial assistance from agencies and government would help to offset production cost, thus, contributing to the survival of newspapers.

Contrarily, local newspapers in Britain such as *Oldham Evening Chronicle*, *Canterbury Times*, *Enfield Gazette and Advertiser*, *Barnet Press*, *Newmarket News*, *Kensington and Chelsea News* and other editions and titles serving Britain from Saddleworth to Whitstable, from the Wirral to Cleethorpes went extinct. Preston (2017) in a news item entitled “A New Silence at the Grassroots as Local Newspapers fade away,” and obtained at the online edition of *The Guardian* of Britain, decries that local newspapers which are critical to the growth of the communities are shrinking and folding away.

Also, *The Independent* was a famous British newspaper established in 1986 as a morning newspaper published in London. It was published initially as a broadsheet, but later changed to tabloid in 2003. The newspaper won the *National Newspaper of the Year* award in 2004 at the British Press Awards of 2004. It was widely described as free from political party bias and proprietorial influence. The last printed version, however, was published on Saturday, March 26, 2016, before the newspaper commenced online-only publication. A regional daily newspaper in Mexico, *Norte de Ciudad Juárez* which was established in 1990 went into extinction after 27 years following what Linthicum (2017) reported in the *Los Angeles Times* as the incessant murder of journalists in the country. The Editor, Oscar Cantú was quoted as attributing the shutdown of the newspaper to incessant murder of journalists in addition to the arrogant refusal to pay debts contracted for the provision of services. Deductively, the two major factors that resulted in the shutdown of the newspaper were lack of safety of journalists in the country and economic factors.

McElroy in 2016, carried out a study to ascertain the number of newspapers in the British Columbia that could no longer survive and lamented that at the beginning of the decade, there were 36 daily newspapers in British Columbia, but the number of newspapers had reduced to 13. British Columbia which is located in Canada had a population of over four million people.

The several cases of extinction of newspapers notwithstanding, the longest surviving newspaper in the world, according to the Guinness World Record is the *Wiener Zeitung* established in 1703 in Austria. The *Wiener Zeitung* has been publishing for over 300 years (three centuries) now. The newspaper is said to be one of the renowned and oldest newspapers in Europe.

The local newspapers in Rivers State have over the period of twenty years of this study, contributed to the development of the state through the dissemination of information to the people. The conviction that the local newspapers have been critical to the developments in the state is supported by Jimada (2006) in his description of local press as people’s forum that provides the avenue for the people to read more about themselves and development activities around them. Bland, Theaker and Wragg (2004) describe local newspapers as newspapers with small editorial teams that are published weekly, twice weekly and fortnightly. They state that

local newspapers maintain local links with their readers. “Local newspapers can be divided into the traditional ‘paid-for’ publications and the more recent ‘freesheets’, supported entirely by advertising. These are augmented in some areas by community newspapers, sometimes run by volunteers, but sometimes inspired by the local authority” (p.53). Bland et al (2004) add that “local newspapers place a great reliance on a network of unpaid contributors, who provide news of local events and organisations...Most journalists feel that the great national daily newspapers are the most important. In one sense this is true...On the other hand, many members of the public pay more attention to their local newspapers...” (p.54).

The foregoing argument that local newspapers are critical to development at the local level is further given impetus by the submission by Oyedele, Osezua, Abdulkareem and Ishola (2017) that greater number of Nigerian population resides in the rural areas. Therefore, the participation of inhabitants of local areas in local democracy allows for a closer government-citizen relationship and foster development. Underwood (1998) underscores this fact in his submission that “in recent years, many daily newspapers have put a stronger emphasis upon local issues coverage that they believe will appeal to the parochial interest of readers” (p.175). In further assertion to this, Nielson (2014) captures the critical role of the local newspapers thus:

local media have represented their area and helped people imagine themselves as part of a community, connected in part through their shared local news medium, bound together by more than geographic proximity or politically defined administrative boundaries...It provides information about local public affairs, it holds local elites at least somewhat accountable, it provides a forum for discussion, and it ties communities together (p.1).

The period from 1990s witnessed the establishment of more private newspapers in Rivers State starting with the coming on board of *Independent Monitor* by Evans Osi in 1990, *The Port Harcourt Telegraph* by Ogbonna Nwuke in 1999 in Rivers State, among other local newspapers which started appearing on the newsstand in early 2000s. The choice of Rivers State was informed by the fact that apart from probably Lagos State, Rivers State seems to record the highest number of local newspapers in Nigeria. This inference was deduced from the studies of Adamu (1999) and Odorume (2012) including the data obtained at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Newspapers_by_cityji.

The choice of the period spanning from 1996 to 2016 was informed by Meyer’s (2009) observation that the sharp drop in the daily newspaper reading habit and the newspaper business started in the 1990s. In Rivers State, the period witnessed the establishment of many local newspapers. Just as the study covered a period of proliferation of newspapers in the State, there were also cases of extinction of local newspapers. More so, embarking on this study within the period when Rivers State celebrated the golden jubilee of its creation on May 27, 1967, will provide an ample opportunity to assess the role of the local newspapers to the local developments from the time of old Rivers State to the present time.

1.2 Statement of the problem

It creates concern when newspapers sprout, flourish and die at will. While some newspapers are surviving, others are not but go extinct. This fluctuation of publication raises concern about the factors responsible for the survival, extinction and inconsistencies in the production of the local newspapers in Rivers State.

Also, media scholars seem to agree that the emergence of each of the conventional mass medium at various times did not replace the existing one, rather complemented it. The consensus however, has not been the same with the emergence of the new media as several media researchers contend that the advantages of the new media could cause the extinction of the hard copy of newspapers. There was therefore, the need to gain an understanding of how the local newspapers in Rivers State had fared in a period of twenty years. To actualise this, the researcher investigated whether or not the threat of extinction of these local newspapers in Rivers State was close to reality and if so, find out the factors responsible for their survival and mortality. There seems to be little or no extensive studies on survival and mortality of local newspapers in any state in Nigeria. The study of the cases in Rivers State, will therefore, fill the gap of dearth of resource materials in the sub-area of print media.

Put succinctly, the problem of the study is stated thus: what could be the specific factors responsible for the survival and mortality of local newspapers in Rivers State?

1.3 Aim and objectives of the study

This study aims at ascertaining the lifespan and factors responsible for the survival and mortality of local newspapers in Rivers State between 1996 and 2016. The objectives of the study are to:

- 1 Ascertain the lifespan of the local newspapers that were published in Rivers State between 1996 and 2016.
- 2 Find out the factors responsible for the survival of the local newspapers that were published in Rivers State between 1996 and 2016.
- 3 Find out the factors responsible for the mortality of local newspapers in Rivers State between 1996 and 2016.
- 4 Determine the influence of the interaction of the new media in the survival and mortality of local newspapers in Rivers State between 1996 and 2016.

1.4 Research questions

The following research questions guided this study:

- 1 What was the lifespan of the local newspapers that were published in Rivers State between 1996 and 2016?
- 2 What factors were responsible for the survival of local newspapers that were published in Rivers State between 1996 and 2016?
- 3 What factors were responsible for the mortality of the local newspapers that were published in Rivers State between 1996 and 2016?
- 4 In what ways did the new media influence either the survival or mortality of local newspapers in Rivers State between 1996 and 2016?

Overview of newspapers in Africa

The development of journalism in sub-Saharan Africa is said to have fully started later in the 19th Century, making African journalism relatively young when compared to its counterparts elsewhere in the world. The history of newspapers in Africa is traced to the establishment of *Cape Town Gazette* in South Africa in 1800, before others such as the *Royal Gazette* started in Sierra Leone in 1801, the *Liberia Herald* established in Liberia in 1826, the *Umshumayeli Wendaba* published in 1837, the *West African Herald* published in 1857 in Ghana, the *Mokaeri Oa Becuana*, *Le Muleri Oa Mahuku* which started in 1857 and said to be the oldest newspaper in the Tswana language, the first Afrikaans language newspaper, *Die Afrikaanse Patriot*

established in 1876, and the first newspaper in East Africa, *East Africa and Uganda mail* established in Mombasa on the Kenya coast in 1899 and lasted only a year.

Also, the *Isigidimi samaXhosa* was published in 1876 at the Lovedale Mission Press and said to be the first African newspaper that was edited by Africans, *Imvo Zabantsundu* (The African Opinion) which is the first newspaper owned by a black commenced publication in 1884, while *Eclairneur de la Cote d'Ivoire* which published only in 1935 was the first paper in Cote d'Ivoire to be owned and edited by an African.

The African newspapers were recorded to have played significant roles in nationalist movement as most of the nationalist leaders including Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, Kwame Nkrumah and Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria used newspapers as revolutionary tools to articulate their struggle to liberate Africa from colonial rule. The establishment of the *West African Pilot* on November 22, 1937 in Lagos is described by some media historians as a major landmark in the development of African newspapers (Esipisu and Kariithi, 2007).

Two Egyptian newspapers, *Al-Waqa'i al-Misriyya* established in 1828 and *Al-Ahram* established in 1875 and run by the Al-Ahram Foundation are recorded as two longest surviving African newspapers. The issue of inconsistency in the publication and circulation of newspapers in Africa was also a concern to many researchers as Cagé (2014) puts it:

In the Democratic Republic of Congo for instance, while there were close to 700 registered publications in 2012, fewer than 250 appeared on a regular basis. And all these publications tend to have a very low circulation. The largest circulation newspaper – the private weekly newspaper *Le Soft* – has a circulation of only 2,500 copies. Even the largest dailies in Kinshasa such as *Le Phare*, *L'Avenir* and *Le Potentiel*, only print about 2,000 copies. In the same order of magnitude, Chad's only daily newspaper, *Le Progrès* print 3,000 copies a day, and Chad's weekly and twice-weekly newspapers never sell more than 4,000 copies per edition. In Cote d'Ivoire, the government daily *Fraténité Matin* has the largest circulation with 13,000 to 16,000 copies sold per day in 2010, but most newspapers sell only between 2,000 and 10,000 copies per day. Ethiopia's biggest daily newspaper, the government daily *Addis Zemen* has a print run of 21,000 to 25,000 copies; however, most titles in Ethiopia have small print runs of only about 3,000 copies. On the contrary, South Africa has 'only' 43 daily, weekly and bi-weekly commercial newspapers but the *Daily Sun*, the South African daily newspaper with the largest circulation, has a circulation of nearly 300,000 copies a day and an estimated readership of 5,500,000 individuals (p.10).

The Center for Research Libraries conducted an assessment of African newspapers online to determine their availability to North American institutions in 2012 and reported that there was a continuing trend of gradual decline in the subscription of print newspapers. The Centre enlisted some 25 newspapers in Africa as endangered species titles. The newspapers were *Botswana Guardian* in Botswana, *Cameroon Tribune* (both the English and French versions), *Messenger and Post* in Cameroon, *Daily Monitor* in Ethiopia, *Coastweek*, *People and Taifa Leo* in Kenya, and *Daily Times* and *Nation* of Malawi. Other newspapers listed as endangered species were *Express*, *Express dimanche* and *News on Sunday* in Mauritius, *New era* of Namibia, *Soleil*, *Sud quotidien*, *Temoin* and *Wal Fadjri* in Senegal, *African*, *Business*

times, Guardian, Guardian on Sunday of Tanzania, and Times of Zambia, Herald and Sunday Mail of Zambia.

Surviving and extinct newspapers in Nigeria

In Nigeria, the first newspaper, *Iwe Irohin fun Awon Ara Egba Ati Yoruba* which was founded by Reverend Henry Townsend on December 3, 1859, published for eight years before it went extinct in 1867. The *Anglo African* which was the next newspaper published in Nigeria after *Iwe Irohin* was established by Robert Campbell in 1863 in Lagos. The newspaper folded up in 1865, two years after its establishment. Odorume (2012) states that the *Anglo African* “was established in Lagos in 1863 to promote the interest and welfare of Lagosians. Campbell who was a printer was publishing the newspapers in English language and it was a weekly newspaper that was sold for three pence” (p.5).

Some other newspapers that were published in Nigeria during the colonial era included the *Nigerian Pioneer* which was published by Kitoyi Ajasa in Lagos in 1914. The *Nigerian Pioneer* went extinct after the demise of the founder in 1937. The *African Messenger* which was established by Ernest Ikoli in 1921 was later bought over by *Daily Times* in 1926. Herbert Macaulay established *The Daily News* which was described as the first political newspaper published in Nigeria in 1925 (Odorume, 2012). The *Nigerian Daily Times* jointly published by a Nigerian, Adeyemo Alakija and a Briton, Richard Barrow later became an affiliate of *London Daily Mirror* in 1948. Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe established *The West African Pilot* in 1937 in Lagos.

From the Independence era, the *Morning Post* was established by the administration of Tafawa Balewa in 1961 and survived for about five years before it went extinct when the government was toppled in the first military coup in 1966. The Kwara State government started the *Herald* in 1970. The Plateau State government established the *Nigerian Standard*. Benue State established the *Voice of Benue*, Imo published the *Statesman*, the old Anambra established the *Daily Star*, Kano State published *The Triumph*, the old Bendel (now Edo) established *The Observer*, the Cross River State established *The Chronicle*. The defunct East Central State started *The Renaissance*, the old Western region established *Daily Sketch* in 1964. On February 22, 1983, Alex Ibru established *The Guardian* and became the chairman and publisher of the newspaper. He however, died on November 20, 2011, 28 years after he founded the newspaper. It should be noted that *The Guardian* is still publishing despite the demise of the proprietor in 2011. There are other several newspapers that their founders are dead, yet the newspapers are existing. That means that the demise of the proprietor of a newspaper may not necessarily lead to the demise of the newspaper if the affected newspaper is managed properly.

Ige (2013) notes that between 1859 when *Iwe Irohin* was published and 2009, Nigeria had 103 newspapers on its newsstand, while Odorume (2012) states that over 250 community newspapers were established in Nigeria between 1990 and 1999.

Brief history of Rivers State

Rivers State is presently one of the 36 states in Nigeria. The state was created by the administration of General Yakubu Gowon by Decree No. 14 on May 27, 1967. Ogan (2012) notes that “in 1967...General Yakubu Gowon created Rivers State along with the eleven other states” (p.52). By the figure of the last census of 2006 by the National Population Commission, the population of Rivers State stood at 5,184,400. Rivers State has its capital in Port Harcourt which is the largest metropolitan city. The State is bounded by the Atlantic Ocean on the south,

Imo State to the north, Abia and Anambra States on the east, and Bayelsa and Delta States to the west.

Rivers State is a home to both indigenes and non-indigenes alike. Some of the indigenous ethnic groups include: Ikwerre, Ogoni, Kalabari, Okrika, Etche, Ogba, Obolo, Eleme, Opobo, Engenni and Ibani. According to Wikipedia, Rivers State is a predominantly low-lying pluvial state in Southern Nigeria. It has a total area of 11,077 km² (4,277 mi²).

Surviving and extinct newspapers in Rivers State

Nigerian newspapers were said to be buoyant and circulating about 2 million copies daily in the early days of the modern press which started from 1960s but the fortune of Nigerian newspapers started dwindling within the period of 1990s to the second decade of the 21st century (Ige, 2004; Aliagan, 2014). Local newspapers from the time of old Rivers State to the present time were said to be part of the success stories of the Nigerian print media.

Some of the early newspapers that existed in the old Rivers State included the *Eastern Nigerian Guardian* established by Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe in 1940 and the *Nigerian Star* which was a four-page newspaper. Also, the *Nigerian Tide* now *The Tide* newspaper which was established in 1971 in the old Rivers State remains one of the earliest local newspapers in the era of modern press that survives over the years. The *Nigerian Tide* was established by the then Military Governor of old Rivers State, Lt. Commander Alfred Diète-Spiff on August 28, 1971 through Edict No 11. Some of the earliest independent local newspapers owned by indigenes of Rivers State were *Independent Monitor* by Evans Osi (now late) in 1990 and the *Sunray* which became fully operational in 1992.

Anim discloses that the Sunray Publications Limited was run as a private limited liability, with 50,000,000 ordinary shares and well-equipped with evolving printing technology which had made the *Sunray* newspaper an attractive brand at the time of its existence. Edozie (2013) in a report published in *Daily Trust* lent credence to Anim's submission when he adds that the founders of *Sunray* had invested so much in the company as a way of motivating the staff and introducing a new brand of journalism that was comparable with what was obtainable in advanced countries. Anim however, decries that *Sunray* was laid on faulty managerial foundation which caused its collapse in 1997, five years after publication. The newspaper went extinct even with the availability of every necessary resource that would ordinarily, have increased the productivity of any average newspaper.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Political economy of the media and communication theory

This theory has its roots from the field of economics and particularly, the works of classic political economists such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo. Early researchers in the field of economics adopted the critical perspective by applying the Marxist/neo-Marxist theoretical framework in carrying out studies in the political economic approach in media and communication studies. Political economy is any interdisciplinary study which explains how political institutions, the political environment, and the economic system—capitalist, socialist, mixed—influence each other in the production and distribution of wealth. The political economy of the media and communication theory, therefore, has to do with how the political environment and economic system influence the production and distribution of information as commodities.

Citing Murdock and Golding (1974), Wasko (2014) submits that “the mass media are first and foremost industrial and commercial organizations which produce and distribute commodities” (p.260). The theory has grown beyond the marginal approach of studying media ownership and control of resources to a general theme which include the process of marketisation of the media.

Udoakah (2017) re-echoes the foregoing position when he avers that “the media operate within the framework of the political and economic systems of their societies. In other words, the political and economic systems determine the nature of media systems” (p.19). He defines political economy as an approach to studying the ways in which media products are produced, distributed and consumed. McChesney (2008) adds that political economy of the media links the media and communication systems to how economic and political systems work, and how social power is exercised in society.

Udoakah, in a treatise on the political economy of Nigerian journalism, submits that government is the biggest advertiser in Nigeria, a situation which makes the government decides for itself the newspapers that it would place its advertisement in. He points out for instance, that in the early 1960s, the first Prime Minister of independent Nigeria, Tafawa Balewa emulated a policy in which some British administration adopted by stopping the placement of advertisements in newspapers leading to the demise of *Daily Express* and *West African Pilot* in 1964. He avers that “the relationship between the mass media and the advertisers and the economy is very significant to note. Big time advertisers are industrialists and other business gurus behind the economy. So, advertising exerts obvious, though frequently denied, pressure on the media and journalism practice” (p.36).

In providing a summary of the theories and studies related to the political economy of the media and communication, Mosco (1996) concludes that political economy is “the study of the social relations, particularly, power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution and consumption of resources, including communication resources” (p.25). The interplay between political institutions, the political environment, and economic system guided to part of the factors responsible for the survival and extinction of newspapers.

2.1.2 Circulation spiral theory

The circulation spiral theory of the media describes the interaction that exists between the newspapers and the advertising markets and how the interaction affects the circulation of newspapers with smaller readership by contributing to their extinction when they could not withstand the competition from other newspapers.

Gustafsson (1978) points out that the circulation spiral theory was first articulated by Lars Furhoff in 1967 in his study of the interaction between the newspapers and advertising markets under the name *theory of the circulation spiral*. The theory holds that the larger of two competing newspapers is favoured by a process of mutual reinforcement between circulation and advertising, as a larger circulation attracts advertisements, which increase the circulation, and in turn attracts more advertising and again more readers. In contrast, the smaller of two competing newspapers is caught in a vicious circle; its circulation has less appeal for advertisers, and it loses readers if the newspaper does not contain attractive advertising. A decreasing circulation again aggravates the problems of selling advertising space, so that finally the smaller newspaper will have to close down.

Furhoff's (1973) assertion that smaller newspapers lose readers since they are less attractive to advertisers and are poorly circulated as embedded in the circulation spiral theory is central to this study. Thus, the first interpretation of advertising-driven spiral entails that the

survival of newspapers to a great extent, is tied to the size of the audience. This is because the newspapers with larger circulation will attract more economic fortunes but the ones with smaller circulation will lose advertising patronage and may face extinction, while the second interpretation is of the submission that more readers will attract more advertising revenue and enable the newspapers to attain higher quality.

Going by the submission of the circulation spiral theory, local newspapers will ordinarily not survive for too long if they are to depend on advertising for funding. This is because the local newspapers may not suitably appeal to advertisers who are known to be major stakeholders in the funding of mass media and are favourably disposed to newspapers with more readers and large circulation.

3.1 Methodology

The researcher used the historical and survey research designs for the study. Historical research is a type of research that explains the phenomenon of the cause and effect of past events by applying systematic and critical investigation of events, experience and developments, while survey design investigates, studies, reports and describes events, attitudes, opinions, phenomena or characteristics of a target population.

The population of the study was drawn from 54 local newspapers published in Rivers State between 1996 and 2016. The entire production crew of the 54 newspapers comprising publishers, editors, reporters, computer operators and circulation managers which amounted to 134 print media workers formed the population of the study for both survival and extinct local newspapers. The population of the study therefore, stood at 134 print media workers. Due to death and migration which made it difficult to locate some of the persons listed in the categories above, former employees of the newspapers not necessarily the publishers or editors were used to fill the absence of those members of the production crew. Census was used for the study. Census is the process of examining every member of a population.

4.1 Presentation of data

Data obtained from documents and the questionnaire were presented in tables and analysed in simple percentages.

Table 4.1: Lifespan of the Local Newspapers (LN) in Rivers State

Lifespan	No. of Local Newspaper	%
0-5 yrs	7	13
6-10 yrs	16	30
11-15 yrs	24	44
16-20 yrs	7	13
TOTAL	54	100

The data in Table 4.1 above show that the local newspapers with the longest lifespan between 1996 and 2016 were those that fell between 11 and 15 years, while shortest lifespan was between 0 and 5 years.

Table 4.2: Status of the Local Newspapers in Rivers State

Status	No. of Local Newspapers	%
Existing	26	48
Dead	28	52

TOTAL	54	100
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The data in Table 4.2 show that the local newspapers which went extinct within the period of study were higher in number than the ones that existed within the period of study.

Discussion of findings

In response to research question one which investigated the lifespan of the local newspapers in Rivers State as shown in Table 4.1, the study found out that local newspapers with the longest lifespan were those published for over ten years but not more than fifteen years. The period between 11-15 years had 44%, which was closely followed by the local newspapers within 6-10 years with 30%, while those within 0-5 and 16-20 years had 13% each. Table 4.2 shows that majority of the local newspapers went extinct. The implication, is that local newspapers in Rivers State did poorly on the average.

The scenario was similar to the case in British Columbia in which only 13 newspapers survived out of 36 newspapers within a period of 10, according to McElroy (2016). It also lends credence to the study undertaken by the Center for Research Libraries to assess African newspapers online in 2012 which concluded that the lifespan of some African print newspapers was in grave danger.

With regard to research question two which investigated the factors responsible for the survival of local newspapers in Rivers State, the study found out that the factors include: audience interest, revenue generation, viable circulation, improved graphics, moderate taxation policy, minimal cases of harassment, friendly government-press relations and inclusion of features in the contents of publications.

For research question three, the study identified lack of advertisement, inefficiency in management, poor remuneration, delayed payment, inadequate training, lack of investment fund, competition and online presence as factors that were responsible for the mortality of local newspapers in the state under study.

Responses to research question four, revealed that greater number of local newspapers in Rivers State published in paper version only. This failure to migrate to online or combine both the online and paper versions contributed to the extinction of some local newspapers in Rivers State. This is because the online presence of the new media comes with the advantages of speedy accessibility, patronage by young people, global visibility and timeliness. These advantages contribute to the survival of some local newspapers, whereas, the problem of poor infrastructure and lack of digital knowledge with the attendant issue of accessing municipal services were identified as factors that interacted with the new media to cause the mortality of local newspapers in Rivers State.

The intransigence of the local newspapers to combine both the paper and online versions of their contents for wider accessibility by a larger number of readers could amount to the managers of the affected local newspapers being described as laggards. In Everett Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation theory developed in 1962 and which explains how, why and the speed in which new ideas and technology spread, laggards are set of people who make slow progress than desired and expected, and fall behind others. Roger Fiddler in 1997 propounded a theory known as 'mediamorphosis' which states that the new media do not arise spontaneously or independently but that they emerge gradually from existing media, while the older media tend to adapt and evolve continuously rather than to die. The local newspapers are therefore, expected to be seen as adapting to transformation, rather than to die because of innovations.

From the data presented and analysed, the study found out that:

1. The local newspapers with the longest lifespan published for upward of eleven to fifteen years, while the ones with the shortest lifespan existed less than five years.
2. The managers of the local newspapers sourced fund from outside advertisement and subsidies to sustain their newspapers due to commitment to reach the local populace. The funds from other sources other than patronage from advertisement constituted the major source of revenue and the commitment to reach their audience was the primary factor responsible for the survival of local newspapers in Rivers State between 1996 and 2016.
3. Lack of regular fund was identified as the main factor responsible for the mortality of local newspapers in Rivers State between 1996 and 2016. This is because funds generated from other sources were not sustainable.
4. The new media influenced the survival of local newspapers through their interaction with other factors such as speedy accessibility of information, patronage by young people, visibility and timeliness. The new media also influenced the mortality of local newspapers which had paucity of fund, poor facilities and lack of digital knowledge in Rivers State between 1996 and 2016. This implies that local newspapers which were not viable enough to witness the competition posed by the new media went extinct.

Recommendations

Consequent upon the findings of the study, the following recommendations were considered useful:

- 1 In order to forestall short lifespan for local newspapers in Rivers State, prospective newspaper proprietors should first ensure that the requisite requirements necessary for the establishment of a newspaper are put in place. This recommendation is premised on the finding that the majority of the newspapers did not do well on the average.
- 2 Publishers of local newspapers in Rivers State should embark on periodic review of their responsibilities to the local populace, revenue drive, interface with government on favourable economic policy and safety engagement to ensure sustainability of their newspapers.
- 3 The business community should inculcate the habit of advertising its products with local newspapers to expose residents of the local populace to the products and in same manner contribute to generate funds for the local newspapers to survive.
- 4 Local newspapers that run electronic version of their newspapers should consolidate their use of the new media with the adoption of new techniques that can link different users with their contents. At this digital age, local newspapers that are yet to embrace the new media to complement their paper version should do so without further delay. This is because the new media provide added advantages of the speedy dissemination of information and provide platform for interaction to complete the communication process. Local newspapers should be seen to assist in closing the digital divide which affects the rural dwellers more than urban inhabitants.

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