

# **Remediation or Replacement: Masthead Stakeholders' Perception of News Digitalisation in Nigeria**

By

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## **Abstract**

The global news media landscape is experiencing significant digital innovations and shifting technological paradigms. The digitalisation of news is causing varying degrees of change in the news media industry across different countries. While extensive research efforts have been made to examine changes occurring in different news media landscapes, local African contexts have remained underexplored. Thus, this study explored how news digitalisation is affecting traditional news media and what it portends for the sustainability of mainstream newspapers in Nigeria's media landscape. Since Nigeria is highly influential in sub-Saharan Africa, occurrences in its media landscape may be used as a point of reference for the sub-continent, rather than being patterned after developed countries with different realities. This research examines within the contexts of remediation and replacement, from the broad academic debate about the implications of news digitalisation on mainstream news media platforms. To address the overarching objective of the study, perceptions of stakeholders were elicited in semi-structured interviews. Twenty Nigerian mainstream masthead stakeholders across four sub-categories (strategic partners, owners, special interest group and employees) were selected to participate in the study. Collected data were thematically analysed. Findings show that social, institutional and individual factors contribute to stakeholders' perception of news digitalisation as complementary to traditional news systems. Hence, the news media landscape is witnessing remediation, rather than replacement. Stakeholders also largely agree that while it may be difficult to set up new print newspapers at this time, established print newspapers remain sustainable in the Nigerian news milieu, as they already possess significant social relevance. This thesis also found that digital engagement strategies of conventional mastheads are not optimal, causing them to be less relevant in the digital space. Ethical breaches, such as plagiarism and copyright violations, in the digital space further erode the relevance of conventional newspapers, threatening their

sustainability. Thus, this thesis recommends that conventional mastheads should optimise their news digitalisation process to maximise their relevance in the digital space, given that the news media landscape is experiencing traditional-digital complementarity. There is also a need to strategically enhance accountability and professionalism in the digital news space. Broadly, this project contributes to the ongoing discourse about the future of mainstream newspapers and the changes occurring in the media landscape from an African perspective which has rarely been explored.

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## **Declaration of Originality**

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. Besides, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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Ayodeji Boluwatife Aiyesimoju, September 2020

## **Dedication**

To the memory of Ayodeji David Aiyesimoju, my late father who taught me the values of patience and selflessness.

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## **Glossary**

**ACCE:** African Council for Communication Education. The largest group of media and communications lecturers in Africa.

**APCON:** Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria. The professional body in charge of licensing and regulating advertising practitioners and agencies in Nigeria.

**Digital-only:** This term is used to describe online news sites that do not operate print newspapers

**Iwe-Irohin:** This is the title of the first newspaper to be published in Nigeria. It is the direct Yoruba transliteration of newspaper.

**Ibadan:** A commercial centre in South-western Nigeria

**Kaduna:** A commercial centre in North-west Nigeria

**Mainstream-digital:** Mainstream digital news platforms are online news sites of conventional mainstream mastheads.

**Masthead:** Masthead refers to the title of a newspaper publication. Since, it is common practice for newspaper corporations to be known and addressed as the titles of their publications, the term can be used to identify both the producer and the product. This study uses the term as a generic concept to refer to newspapers while underscoring the importance of the individuality of various brands and titles that make up the industry.

**NGE:** Nigerian Guild of Editors. The umbrella body for all former and present editors of mainstream news channels in Nigeria.

**NUJ:** Nigeria Union of Journalists. The special interest group that seeks to improve the practice of journalism and welfare of journalists in Nigeria.

# Chapter One

## Introduction

### 1.1 Introductory Background

The dominance of legacy media platforms in the news space is being challenged by ongoing developments in digital news dissemination. There has been extensive scholarly debate about the changes occurring in news media environments, and whether digital news media forms are replacing legacy media or complementing them. Contributions to this debate tend to make generic inferences even though they are based on experiences from specific (in most cases, developed) countries (see, for example, Coffey & Stipp, 1997; Bolter & Grusin, 2000; Kayany & Yelsma, 2000; Dutta-Bergman, 2004; Okwechime, 2007; Conboy & Steel, 2008; Newell, Pilotta & Thomas, 2008; Silverman, 2014, Ngendakumana & Mutimudye 2015; Shah, et al., 2017). This debate will benefit from explorations that incorporate contextual perspectives, considering differences in local situations and experiences. Thus, through this study, I contribute to the debate by exploring how masthead stakeholders perceive news digitalisation in Nigeria, the changes it precipitates and how the local newspaper industry is responding to these changes.

A hallmark of twenty-first century media has been the convergence of computer and telecommunications technologies enabling improved interactions and access to information globally. In assessing the history of media development, Shaw (1991) suggests that it follows a pattern of growth–dominance–decline. He explains that no media form is entirely radically innovative; rather new media forms grow on the idea of existing ones, dominate the media landscape and may eventually decline in popularity. He explains further that the growth of new forms of media does not mean the extinction of old ones; instead, earlier forms of media may change their processes in response to technological development and diffusion, and find

their place in the heterogeneous media marketplace.

One more recent technological change that has impacted the news industry is the digitalisation of news content. The concept of news digitalisation in this study is used to describe efforts at making news content available through digital channels - diffusion of digital news media platforms. In Rogers' (2003, p. 5) exploration of diffusion of innovations, he defines diffusion as "the process in which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system". Diffusion here has to do with the spread of new technological phenomena within a geographical space with an identifiable population. Ekdale et al. (2015) point out that innovations often overlap or are introduced in a group, rather than individually. While adopters may recognise the differences between each innovation, such distinctions may be understood more easily as an interdependent bundle of innovations. The innovation of digital news media is an integral part of this study and the manner with which it operates and penetrates specific populations is what I describe as news digitalisation. This digitalisation of news media has led to a debate on the possible fates of traditional news media, with one stream (including Coffey & Stipp, 1997; Dutta-Bergman, 2004; Nguyen & Western, 2006; Bolter, 2007; Albarran et al., 2010) positing media complementarity or remediation and another – such as James, Wotring and Forest (1995), Kayany and Yelsma (2000) and Silverman (2014) - suggesting outright replacement.

While there is debate about the effects that digital news media will ultimately have on traditional news media, media scholars agree that digitalisation of news media is changing the way news and information are produced and disseminated. Given the increasing diffusion of internet technologies, the development of online news platforms has introduced a new and more efficient way of disseminating and accessing news (Khan, 1999; Thiel, 1998). The

characteristics of hypertextuality, immediacy, interactivity, and convergence that are intrinsic to online news distribution have necessitated a paradigm shift in journalism and media usage (Massey & Levy, 1999).

With leading newspapers across the world having an online presence, the growth of digital news platforms has become even more pronounced. There was a surge in online news readership during the 2003 Iraqi War when the desire for immediacy created demand for supplements to television and print media news, particularly among middle-aged working-class readers and younger news media audiences (Palser, 2003). Dimitrova and Connolly-Ahern (2007, p. 153) describe this war period as a “defining moment for media coverage of international conflict, especially in the context of internet-based news coverage” because of the surge observed in web traffic patterns which indicated the “importance of the internet as a source of in-depth, up-to-the-minute and alternative news”. In essence, the extent of news digitalisation available at the time of the war influenced the practice of international news reporting. Digital news outlets availed news audiences deeper analyses, real-time access to information as well as a wider range of framing options from the usually stereotypic local traditional narrative. For instance, the findings of Dimitrova and Connolly-Ahern (2007) show that while local Arab media condemned the war, most foreign online media maintained neutrality and objectivity in their reportage. This plurality enhanced by digitalisation increased news audiences’ options, allowing them to get the news in different frames. Ever since this historical point in digital news dissemination, the internet has witnessed major innovations and exponential growth as a source of news.

Digital technologies have greatly influenced operational systems of industries, including news media platforms as the internet lies at the centre of media convergence.

Communication, whether technologically mediated or not, allows for shared meanings, as well as the exchange of ideas, goods and services, feelings and thoughts. In contemporary times, this can be done seamlessly with internet connectivity and little physical effort.

Okwechime (2007) views modern mass media as being technology-driven. He explains that newspapers, magazines, periodicals, the radio, television, cinema and all other media forms now rely on information and communication technologies (ICT).

Digital platforms alter news media ecology. They provide convergent features - bringing together originally separate media forms into one. Jenkins (2004) explains that media convergence is more than a technological shift that simply modifies media environments; it affects the relationship between existing technologies, industries, markets, genres and audiences. Jenkins further describes convergence as a “topdown corporate driven process and a bottom-up consumer-driven process” (2004, p. 37). On the one hand, news media corporations are working to enhance news flow through emerging delivery channels to increase revenue, improve audience reach and enhance consumers’ loyalty. On the other hand, consumers are working to keep abreast of technological advancements; learning how to use emerging dissemination technologies to be in greater control of media content and frames, and to interact with other users and media corporations. This corporation–consumer relationship is contributing to defining news cultures and further changing the ecology in which news media operate beyond technological developments to include social involvements especially through the improved features of interactivity and timeliness.

King (1999, p. 26), explains that interactivity reflects two essentially unrelated characteristics of online media. According to him,

Interactivity is used to describe the process of empowering users

with additional control over the sequence in which information is presented to them. This definition relates to increased interactivity with content. But the term also refers to an increase in the interaction news consumers can have with news producers, a definition relating to increased feedback.

Both levels of interactivity may have contributed to the popularity of new media platforms since media users are no longer only interpretative recipients but also contributors to issues of interest, further embedding the role-reversal feature of communication into the news media. It is worth noting that traditional media did not entirely lack interactivity before the advent of digital platforms; they have always had feedback routes to feel the audience's pulse and reflect public opinion. Such mechanisms as letters to the editor and phone conversations have been in use, depending on the medium. This correspondence usually comes in reaction to issues previously reported, and is intended for reportage. The volume of feedback that can be reviewed or even made public through these traditional news media platforms is limited, due to limited human resources, space or airtime constraints. News organisations had the room to select publishable feedback, while other submissions may not make it past the editor's desk. With the diffusion of digital media platforms, however, media users have increased desire and avenues for interaction with news organisations. Parmelee, Roman, Beasley and Perkins (2017, p. 2) note that "news organisations that regularly interact with the public are seen as more credible and current and have an increased chance of growing and maintaining loyal audience" (p. 2). It is now the standard for mainstream news media platforms and journalists to have digital platforms where users can interact with them (Xu & Feng, 2014).

Digital media platforms do not only offer improved interactivity; they also offer timely access. Audiences can obtain the news as it breaks, rather than waiting until the following

day to read about it in print. Digital media has created room for real-time reporting. Users can follow up on emerging stories; they can also choose to be notified when certain events occur. While timeliness is identified as one of the major advantages of digital media platforms (Karlsson, 2011), it is also a major challenge because the time for verification and editing has reduced, as most corporations want to be the first with the news (Vis, 2011). However, Karlsson (2011) suggests that the timeliness characteristic of digital news media allows a better level of journalistic transparency. Timeliness gives room for users to be part of a building story because their views and versions can be shared instantly, influencing the form and frame of such stories. The timeliness feature also enhances the popularity of citizen journalism or “random acts of journalism which are characterised by specific practical and technological affordances” (Bruns, Highfield & Lind 2012, p. 4). Non-journalists are able to report situations around them or bring issues they believe are not getting necessary or timely coverage to the fore. Improved features of digital news media mark key areas of differences from traditional news media and are contributing to the changes in production and dissemination of news in different parts of the world. In order to assess how the diffusion of new media technologies and platforms have affected media practice in various places, it is important to elicit the experiences and perceptions of stakeholders within different localised media industries.

As noted earlier, various researchers (James, Wotring & Forest, 1995; Coffey & Stripp, 1997; Thiel, 1998; Khan, 1999; Kayany & Yelsma, 2000; Dutta-Bergman, 2004; Nguyen & Western, 2006; Bolter, 2007; Albarran et al., 2010 and Silverman, 2014) have carried out studies exploring the implications of news digitalisation on legacy media and its future. Most of these studies have been carried out in developed contexts, especially in the United States of America and some parts of Europe. There is, therefore, a gap in the literature focusing on

the historical terrain of newspapers, stakeholders' experiences and perceptions about new media diffusion, and how mainstream media are faring in the wake of growing online news media in Nigeria. Wasserman and De Beer (2009) make a similar observation in noting Africa's underrepresentation in journalism studies which is further enhanced by digitalisation, causing the world to be seen and treated as a "mediapolis" (Silverstone, 2007) in Wasserman and De Beer (2009).

Some scholars claim that simply following the cases of developed countries - especially the United States of America - is enough to determine what to expect in other parts of the world. For instance, Gerber in Mdolongwa suggests that "by understanding trends in the USA in particular, media leaders in Africa can prepare for the changes that will come to the continent and pre-empt some of the negative consequences for the industry" (2009, p. 7). Based on this premise, Gerber concludes that "doing business as usual will simply see the continent's (Africa) legacy media industry decline as other players, despite their different agendas and social roles." However, many scholars across various fields, especially concerning technological advancements, have argued that continent and country-specific research is needed to take into account unique characteristics, particularly in developing countries (Sahay & Avgerou, 2002; Musa, Meso & Mbarika, 2005; Musa, 2006; Vorkinn & Riese, 2001; Wasserman & De Beer, 2009).

Therefore, rather than assuming that Nigerian news media will replicate the USA's trends, this study explores how newspapers are responding to the increasing penetration of online news media in Nigeria. In particular, I seek to determine whether the relationship between hardcopy and online news media is predominantly perceived by masthead stakeholders as one of remediation or replacement. This project thus aims to aid in understanding trends in

Nigeria based on the unique local news environment, rather than by assuming it will automatically follow trends in other news media landscapes.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

This study aimed to explore the perceptions of masthead stakeholders about news digitalisation and its implications for the future of newspapering in Nigeria; if newspapers will remain a viable platform for disseminating news considering the continued expansion of online news media. The primary question of this research is - what are the perceptions of masthead stakeholders about increasing digitalisation of news and how are print news corporations responding to the resultant changes? To explore this overarching question, the following specific research questions are posed:

Research Question One: What are stakeholders' perceptions of the ongoing digitalisation occurring in the news landscape?

Research Question Two: How sustainable are traditional mastheads in Nigeria's media landscape?

Research Question Three: How effectively are traditional mastheads deploying digital strategies in reaction to continued digitalisation of news?

Research Question Four: What are the implications of the prevalent digital news diffusion on:

- a. the legal and ethical atmosphere of the Nigerian news media, and
- b. the current state of media education in Nigeria?

These research questions guided the data collection process to ensure a high degree of relevance of collected data. As discussed in chapter three, four classifications of stakeholders were identified and interviewed in order to address the research questions. In particular, I investigate current experiences in the Nigerian newspaper landscape, what newspaper

industries expect in the future and how they are preparing for it. The study principally assesses whether masthead stakeholders see the future of newspapers in Nigeria as remediation through, or replacement by, digital news media platforms.

Furthermore, I explore digital strategies newspaper organisations adopt and how effectively they deploy them to engage and retain their audiences in response to continued growth of digital news media platforms in Nigeria. Examining these strategies helps to develop an understanding of changes in newspaper processes as reactive measures and also to identify areas that may need further development in response to the changing news media environment in the country. In this project, I also discuss what news digitalisation portends for journalism practice in Nigeria, particularly as it concerns media law and ethics as well as media education.

### **1.3 Research Problem**

Although news media are becoming more global in outlook and operation, the role of local circumstances remains undeniable in media operations both at source and audience levels. To suggest that Nigeria will fall into line with news media trends in developed countries is to ignore this local context and to deny local stakeholders their importance and influence in the news media industry. While technological incursion in the Nigerian news environment is undeniable, the effects cannot be uncritically assumed to follow the pattern of countries whose technological development is more advanced; rather the experience-informed perceptions of stakeholders are key to understanding the effects so far and possible outcomes of technological advancements in the Nigerian media industry. It is also necessary to pay attention to local stakeholders to understand the responses of local mainstream news media to digital news media development and diffusion in the country. Because Nigeria wields a high

level of influence in sub-Saharan Africa, changes to the news media environment may be used as a point of reference for the region, rather than comparing to countries such as the United States of America, which have very different populations and cultures.

The gap in knowledge here is demonstrated by the absence in literature of a collective stakeholder position on online news media expansion in Nigeria, whether it is one of remediation, revolution, or replacement. The perceptions of stakeholders are important in assessing mastheads' responses to online news media growth and investigating adaptation strategies. This study thus investigates what perceptions masthead stakeholders have about the emergence and continued expansion of online news media and what it portends for hardcopy editions in order to understand the media industry's response to the growth of digital news technologies.

The term "stakeholder" is a broadly used one and has been defined in a range of ways. This study adapts the definitions of Brooks, Milne & Johansson (2002) and Weiss (2014) to describe people whose activities and perceptions are capable of influencing a specific subject matter. For this study, the phrase 'masthead stakeholders' is used to describe individuals or groups of people who are involved in and influential – directly or indirectly – on the management and operations of the core services of news organisations. In essence, masthead stakeholders are persons or groups that are involved in and can influence editorial and reportorial processes of a newspaper company. In this study, I classify them into four groups – owners, staff/employees, strategic partners and special interest groups. While I note that newspaper audiences are also important in determining the future of newspapers, they are outside the scope of this study because of its focus on stakeholders who have direct experience of and engagement with the operational and managerial elements of newspapers. However, while the nominated stakeholder categories have an interest in newspaper

operations, they are also part of the news audience, so are able to provide audience-based insights as well. Thus, I have excluded newspaper audiences from this study as a separate stakeholder category.

#### **1.4 Purpose of the Study**

This study explores the perceptions and responses of stakeholders associated with Nigerian traditional mastheads to the growth of online news media, and their understanding of how newspapers can best proceed as internet penetration figures continue to rise. As the most populous country in Africa, Nigeria has seen significant growth in internet penetration. Within the period of this study, internet penetration rates have moved from 47.7% in 2017 to 61.4% in 2019 (World Internet Stats, 2019; Nigeria Communications Commission, 2019). This may have been facilitated by a surge in mobile phone usage as a result of the reduction in phone prices. The average price of a smartphone in Nigeria is about US \$95, down from US \$216 in 2014. This drop in price is reported to be as a result of increased entry of Asian brands, which appear largely preferred by the Nigerian market, perhaps because of their low pricing strategy (Jumia, 2019). Increasing internet penetration in Nigeria is facilitating a rise in social media usage. Currently, of over 127 million internet connections, 27,120,000 are active facebook users (Internet World Stats, 2020). This is over 21% of active internet connections. Instagram has 6,972,000 users, amounting to 5.5% of internet users in Nigeria (NapoleonCat, 2020). Twitter has an estimated usage of 1,600,000 people in Nigeria, which is 1.3% of internet users (Datareportal, 2020). This study intends to look at what this increasing internet penetration means for the Nigerian newspaper industry by examining stakeholders' perceptions of the growth of online news media. As Willis and Jost (2007: p. 99) explain, "the goal of interpretive research is an understanding of a particular situation or context;" this study takes an interpretive approach within the qualitative research paradigm to assess perceptions of masthead stakeholders in the Nigerian local news industry regarding

growing digital news media diffusion in the country.

### **1.5 Significance/Contribution to the discipline**

This study contributes Nigerian (and to an extent, African) perspectives on the remediation versus replacement dialectic. Digital media research is a popular topic in media studies, and a sub-set of this focuses on how mainstream news media platforms respond to continued news digitalisation. However, as touched upon earlier, much of this research has been conducted in more developed contexts than that of Nigeria. The economy, politics, culture and social realities of Nigeria differ significantly from those of developed nations where existing research is focused, and from which general conclusions are often made about the global media industry.

It is pertinent to note that the global news media is made up of very different parts with various media corporations reflecting the cultures and backgrounds of their audience. This project looks beyond standard Western media theory to explore the Nigerian news media landscape using relevant theories (media convergence, remediation and stakeholder theories) within the local context. This makes it significant to the study of news media: as Nigeria is an integral part of sub-Saharan Africa, this project provides empirical research on the implications of news digitalisation for the local news media landscape. By exploring whether hardcopy newspapers in Nigeria have indeed become “endangered species” as portrayed by some scholars in the field (James, Wotring & Forest, 1995; Kayany & Yelsma, 2000; Mdlongwa 2009; Silverman, 2014), the project provides a greater understanding of the dynamics of the local news terrain in which news corporations function to guide decisions and operations. This position aligns with Nyamnjoh (2015), who proposes exploring African journalism in its local context, rather than uncritically struggling to meet foreign standards.

Another key significance of this research is in the insight it provides around the dynamics of traditional and digital news media. It may help direct the focus of concerned agencies of government such as the Nigerian Communications Commission and Nigerian Copyrights Commission towards the creation of contemporary yet locally oriented information technology and copyright policies to provide a much needed operational and regulatory framework for digital communications in the country. Additionally, this research may contribute to strategic reorganisation efforts in Nigerian news media, providing insights into how they might approach operational and management issues, given the changes news digitalisation is bringing to the news media industry.

### **1.6 Research Design**

This project adopts a qualitative approach. Qualitative research fits within the framework of media convergence and the broad context of cultural studies. As this study is an enquiry into perceptions of stakeholders, the use of a qualitative approach for this work is supported by the work of Alasuutari (1995) and Denzin and Lincoln (2008a; 2011) in that it allows for detailed responses to be elicited from participants. These data reveal current trends in print media processes and how these processes are being affected by digital news media emergence and diffusion in Nigeria, along with newspaper stakeholders' perceptions of news digitalisation, and adaptation strategies that could be utilised.

Semi-structured interviews were used as the data collection method. This method is appropriate to collect data in qualitative research, especially within the framework of media convergence (Jenkins, 2004). Interested participants were selected according to their classification in one of four stakeholder groups and were interviewed with the aim of addressing the research questions raised in section 1.2. As explained in section 1.3, four groups were considered relevant to provide answers to the questions of this research, which

are centred on operations of the newspaper industry in response to digital news media diffusion. Hence, owners, employees, strategic partners and special interest groups were included as stakeholder groups, while newspaper consumers/clients were excluded. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five individuals in each group to achieve the aims and objectives of this study. More detailed explanations about the classification of and selection criteria for the different groups are provided in chapter three.

### **1.7 Chapter Summary and Overview of Subsequent Chapters**

This chapter introduces the subject of this project and provides background to the issues to be explored. The research centres on the traditional versus digital news media debate. It is aimed at exploring how masthead stakeholders perceive the growth of online news media technologies and how these are altering the traditional media scenery in Nigeria, with consideration of whether the longer-term outcome will be a case of remediation or outright revolution. The study is placed within the framework of media convergence, remediation and stakeholder theories. A qualitative approach as supported by Alasuutari (1995), and Denzin and Lincoln (2008b, 2011) is adopted, with data collection and analysis inquiring into perceptions of media stakeholders about the diffusion of digital news media in Nigeria and how mainstream media are being affected.

Subsequent chapters provide further exploration of how news digitalisation is playing out in the Nigerian news media landscape. Chapter two gives a historical overview of newspapering and digital news platforms in Nigeria to provide some context to aid understanding of the contemporary news media scenario. To give more depth to the contextual background, chapter two discusses the history and nature of Nigeria's newspaper industry, factors that have contributed to shaping the local news environment as well as the level of freedom of the press. The chapter also reviews relevant literature and theories, and points out gaps in

existing literature and how this study contributes to filling these.

Chapter three explains the approach of this research, and how a qualitative method is most suitable to explore the questions raised. The chapter also provides a description of research participants, the instrument of data collection and how the data was analysed. Ethical considerations as well as procedures of data collection and management are also discussed in this chapter.

In chapter four, I present findings gathered from the data collection process under four key themes. The first theme incorporates data focusing on stakeholders' experiences and perceptions of news digitalisation. The second theme presents participants responses on the sustainability of conventional newspapers, considering history, current experiences and stakeholders' insights into the future. The third theme shows efforts of conventional newspapers in responding to news digitalisation, particularly about how they are adopting digital technologies. The fourth theme revolves around how news digitalisation is affecting issues of media ethics as well as the adequacy of the current state of media education in Nigeria.

These themes set the stage for the discussion in chapters five and six, with chapter five focusing on the first two themes and chapter six on the second two. These discussion chapters help to dig deep into the data, considering it in the context of the literature and theoretical backdrop to the research.

Finally, in chapter seven, I highlight some implications of the findings and draw relevant conclusions. I also make some recommendations based on findings of this study, point out its limitations and identify possible ways to further contribute to this research area in the future.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Exploring Nigeria's Media Landscape: Historical and Theoretical Underpinnings**

This study aims principally to explore how masthead stakeholders in Nigeria perceive the digitalisation of news media platforms, how this has affected traditional media practice and what it portends for Nigerian mainstream newspapers. In this chapter, I lay a historical and theoretical foundation that provides context to achieve this key aim. I compare the concepts of replacement and remediation from the broad academic debate about the implications of technological advancements in news media industries and examine relevant literature around both concepts. I also discuss the history of traditional news media in Nigeria, leading up to the emergence of digital news media. With this background on the local context in place, I discuss the theoretical framework within which the study is positioned.

#### **2.1. Replacement versus Remediation**

Traditional news media environments are undergoing continuous metamorphosis with the emergence and diffusion of digital technologies. Newspapers in particular, having been a significant medium for news dissemination for over 150 years (Åkesson & Thomsen, 2015), are now challenged by the digital economy (Conboy & Steel, 2008; Pearson & Kosicki, 2017; Picard, 2006). Åkesson and Thomsen further point out that “significant uncertainty exists in the ecosystems of newspapers in digital environments” (2015: p. 1), giving rise to a debate on the sustainability of traditional newspapers (Coffey & Stipp, 1997; Dutta-Bergman, 2004; Picard, 2014).

As noted in the introductory chapter, scholars have contributed a range of perspectives to this traditional media sustainability debate. Some (James, Wotring & Forest, 1995; Kayany and

Yelsma, 2000; Dimmick, Chen & Li 2004; Silverman, 2014) posit a replacement of traditional media with digital platforms, while others (Coffey & Stipp, 1997; Dutta-Bergman, 2004; Nguyen & Western, 2006; Bolter, 2007; Okazaki & Hirose 2009; Albarran et al, 2010; Åkesson & Thomsen, 2015) believe that it will be a case of remediation, where digital platforms complement traditional media platforms. The replacement position in the study of traditional media sustainability is that emerging news media technologies have a competitive displacement effect on traditional news media in providing regular news for audience consumption, “with the largest displacements occurring for television and newspapers” (Dimmick, Chen & Li, 2004, p. 19). This position stems from niche theory, which was adapted from animal ecology to describe “how populations compete and coexist with limited resources in an ecological community” (Dimmick & Rothenbuhler, cited in Okazaki & Hirose, 2009: p. 80). Dimmick, Kline and Stafford (2000, p. 22) leverage niche theory to explain the competitive relationship between interactive and traditional media in the provision of news, stating that “the consequence for the older media consists of exclusion, or replacement or displacement.”

The remediation school of thought, however, holds that new media emerge as a result of refashioning the form of the old media (Bolter, 2016). Dutta-Bergman (2004) draws on Bolter’s description of remediation to support ‘selective exposure theory’ and suggests a symbiosis in the media ecosystem in an attempt to create an understanding of the metamorphosing media landscape. He explains that “the relationship between two media forms can be understood in the context of gratification and gratification opportunities they offer” (Dutta-Bergman, 2004, p. 48). He points out that the gratifications that are derived from each media form are likely to be different considering the distinct features of each form, thus creating more room for media complementarity between traditional and digital media

forms rather than an outright replacement of the former.

Most studies carried out to date reflect the situation of media landscapes in developed countries, especially the United States of America and parts of Europe (James, Wotring & Forest, 1995; Coffey & Stipp, 1997; Kayany and Yelsma, 2000; Dimmick, Chen & Li 2004; Dutta-Bergman, 2004; Nguyen & Western, 2006; Bolter, 2007; Okazaki & Hirose 2009; Albarran et al, 2010; Silverman, 2014; Åkesson & Thomsen, 2015). These studies have then been leveraged by other scholars to portray a singular global media outlook. There is no doubt that the development of global digital news media affects traditional news media in different parts of the world. However, the effects may differ from place to place given different political, legal, cultural, social and economic contexts. Factors such as infrastructural availability, audience profile, systems of government, cultural orientations and even (post) colonial postures may combine to determine the performance of local media industries. The remediation-replacement discourse as such is variegated given the heterogeneous natures of different countries and regions of the world.

In this project, I focus on contributing perspectives and experiences from the Nigerian media landscape to the broad remediation versus replacement dialectic. To an extent, this contributes an African perspective to knowledge. I illustrate how news digitalisation is occurring in the Nigerian news media industry, while considering the local context in which media operate. Consideration of the historical background of Nigeria's media environment will contribute to understanding this local context and serve as a foundation to the discussion that follows.

## **2.2. A Historical Overview of Traditional Mastheads and Digital News Media in Nigeria**

Characteristics of dominance and socio-political vibrancy in the local media market are noticeable in various accounts of newspaper evolution and development in Nigeria (Omu, 1978; Sobowale, 1985; Ogbondah, 1992; Adesoji, 2010; Bourne 2018). However, Talabi (2011) and Hassan and Azmi (2018) note that the growing diffusion of digital news platforms now appears to threaten the continued existence of mainstream newspapers, resulting in uncertainties in the traditional print media industry.

Historically, newspapers have been at the epicentre of Nigerian political struggles and have recorded remarkable successes over the years (Ogbondah 1992). The significant roles of newspapers in the political history of Nigeria mark pivotal points in the country's press history. Thus, it is more helpful to discuss these pivotal points in the broader history of the Nigerian press than to present a history of individual newspapers. Opuamie-Ngoa (2010) explains that newspaper operations up until the restoration of democracy in 1999 could be classified by the core of their political involvements: liberation struggle (1859-1960), ethnic supremacy or independence era (1960-1966), early military intervention (1966-1979), second freedom taste (1979-1983), and heart of the struggle (1984-1999). Similarly, in this overview, Nigerian press history is captured based on the crux of press activities since the restoration of democracy in 1999 to present, covering traditional print resistance (anti-colonial struggle and military opposition) and online alternative. This historical overview serves as useful background to understand the perceptions and responses of traditional press stakeholders to contemporary digital news diffusion.

### **2.2.1. Traditional Print Resistance: Colonial and Military Opposition**

The history of traditional print media in Nigeria may be seen as a series of struggles and

active oppositions. The press appears to have been constantly working to resist political misrule, prioritise citizens' wellbeing and demand public accountability and good governance. This activism approach was the key characteristic of the Nigerian press under colonial and military rulership.

The press in Nigeria did not necessarily start in a watchdog capacity; it was more of an attempt to improve literacy and religious engagement in the pre-colonial period. According to Falola and Heaton (2008), Nigerian newspapering started with the establishment of *Iwe Irohin fun awon ara Egba ati Yoruba* (Yoruba translation of *Newspaper for the Egba and Yoruba people*) in 1859. The title was later shortened to *Iwe Irohin* (meaning *News paper*). It is important to note that the establishment of this newspaper came before the formal commencement of colonial annexation of the geographical location, which was later grouped with other areas to become a country and was named Nigeria. However, the newspaper laid the foundation for the activist composure of similar publications in Nigeria (Falola & Heaton, 2008).

According to Duyile (2019) the first edition of *Iwe Irohin* was published on December 3, 1859, and this marked the origin of formal journalism in the region that later became Nigeria. *Iwe Irohin* was established by an English missionary, Reverend Henry Townsend of the Church Missionary Society. Akinfeleye (1985) points out that perhaps because of its quasi-religious outlook as well as being the second predominant printed text to be circulated after the Bible, readers exercised extreme faith in the newspaper's contents. Although it was set up principally for disseminating religious information and engendering literacy development, the newspaper later started to report on political issues, creating a sense of political consciousness among its readers, who then developed a readership culture. As

literacy gradually grew, political consciousness also developed. Citizens began to confront the British colonial system and the newspaper continued its criticism of the government, setting a public anti-colonial agenda and ultimately giving rise to agitations for self-governance. The colonial government responded to the situation with repressive mechanisms, such as prohibitive ordinances and heavy taxation that contributed to the death of *Iwe Irohin* after eight years. Although the newspaper stopped publishing, it had started a readership culture and passion for activism. It was highly catalytic to the establishment and nationalistic editorial standpoint of most publications that came after it. Other newspapers have since been established, and they continue to fight government restrictions (Ojebode, 2011).

Some other masthead titles that were established during the pre-colonial and colonial periods were Robert Campbell's *Anglo-African* (1863), Richard Blaize's *Lagos Times and Gold Coast Advertiser* (1880), Bagan Benjamin's *Lagos Observer* (1882), Owen Macaulay's *Eagle and Lagos Critic* (1883), Adolphus Marke's *The Mirror* (1887) and John Payne Jackson's *Lagos Weekly Record* (1894) among others. Duyile (1987) reports that some of these early newspapers worked towards sustaining colonialism while others were more nationalist.

With the increasing nationalistic perception of newspapers during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, more Nigerians established newspapers to serve as anti-colonial media. This nationalistic stance angered colonial governors and they added more stringent taxation policies and gagging contrivances such as the 1909 Seditious Offences Ordinances, Criminal Code Ordinance of 1916, and Newspaper Ordinance of 1917 as barriers to newspaper sustainability (Sambe & Ikoni, 2004). Despite these repressive actions against newspapers, more were established. Nationalists such as Herbert Macaulay, Nnamdi Azikiwe and Obafemi Awolowo established newspapers, and these were at the forefront of the political activism that

portrayed colonial administration as unendurable and undesirable.

One fundamental trend noticeable in this era from various historical accounts (Duyile, 1979; Sobowale, 1985; Ogbondah, 1992; Adesoji, 2010 and Bourne 2018) was the ownership of newspapers along political and tribal divides. For instance, the *West-African Pilot* began publication in 1937 and was published by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, a frontline nationalist who was also a co-founder of the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) and the National Democratic Party (NDP). Duyile (1987) noted the popular acknowledgement that Azikiwe's successful media practice was a pedestal to his political career as he became the first President of the Nigerian Senate (1<sup>st</sup> January 1960- 1<sup>st</sup> October 1960), first indigenous Governor-General (1960-1963) and eventually first President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1963-1966). He was also the publisher of the *Southern Nigerian Defender*, *Eastern Nigerian Guardian* and the *Nigerian Spokesman*. In a similar fashion, Obafemi Awolowo established the *Nigerian Tribune* in 1949. He was the leader of the Action Group (AG) and Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN). He also became Premier of the Western Region (1954-1960) and later Federal Commissioner for Finance (1967-1971). The *Nigerian Tribune* remains in publication and is considered the longest surviving newspaper in Nigeria.

Media historians recount that most pre-independence era media platforms were used by activists/nationalists to critically challenge the legitimacy of colonial governments, and they vigorously mobilised support across political, cultural and religious backgrounds for independence not only in Nigeria but also across the West African sub-continent (Akinfeleye 1985; Opuamie-Ngoa, 2010 and Daramola 2013). The concerted nationalistic efforts of various groups and individuals, with newspapers at the centre, may be deemed to have yielded positive results as Nigeria was declared an independent state on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1960.

Although the colonial government handed over to a democratically elected one upon independence, the democracy was truncated when the military seized power in 1966, six years after independence. Consequently, considering the political activism standpoint of existing newspapers, they had more work to do, because even though the country became self-governed, governance under the military was largely patterned after the colonial system. Olorunyomi (1998) observed that the history of Nigeria in this era was significantly one of press-military conflict. According to him, “if Nigerians continue to invest an abiding faith in the press, it is partly because the press has always represented a vital matrix for their civil society, going back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century when Lagos newspapers argued for democracy and independence” (1998: p. 57).

Continuing their characteristic activism, newspapers and magazines led the unrelenting clamour for return to civilian rule, which the military government continued to tactically reject. “The press became one of the first institutions to wrestle for its freedom and engage the dictatorship in low-intensity internal warfare by reinventing dissent through a return to the investigative tradition” (Olorunyomi, 1998 p. 57). As a response to some of the press’ sustained clamour for democracy, the military government, in 1992, allowed for the creation of two political parties: the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC). The head of state at this time declared himself the “military president” and tried to create a democratic outlook. Eventually in 1993, he approved a presidential election, the result of which he later annulled, with the acclaimed winner, M.K.O Abiola, jailed for treason. After intense public outrage and pressures from the press, the military passed power to an interim civilian government in August 1993 (Falola & Heaton, 2018).

By November 1994, the military struck again in its sustained show of force and impunity.

Another coup d'état was staged and General Sani Abacha emerged as the new head of state. This government was infamous for human rights abuses and the unfair arrest, trial, imprisonment and killings of many notable journalists and politicians. Ajibade et al (1999) wrote about the unfair treatment meted out to journalists, especially themselves, under the Abacha regime. According to their account, corroborated by Olorunyomi (1998), like many other journalists, they were charged with treason, tried at military tribunals and sentenced to life imprisonment and in some cases, solitary confinement. Upon the death of the head of state in June 1998, journalists who were deemed to have been wrongfully jailed were released and governance was finally handed back to a democratically elected government in 1999. The intermittent military regimes were a difficult period for journalists, given the overbearingness of these regimes. Successive governments were not transparent in their activities, and were ruthless in dealing with journalists and newspapers that pried into government activities or the lives of government officials. Ogbondah (1992), Eribo and Jong-Ebot (1997) and Olorunyomi (1998) noted that just after the military government took over, it promulgated several draconian anti-press laws. The *defamatory and offensive publication decree*, for instance, gave the government unlimited authority to arrest and detain journalists whose reports were deemed a threat to national security. Another example is *decree 17 – Newspapers (prohibition of Circulation)*. According to Agbese (2007), this decree gave the government authority to summarily prohibit the circulation of newspapers if their content was believed to compromise national security or embarrass the government. Ojebode (2011, p. 268) cited the example of General Babangida's military government of 1992 that proscribed more than twenty mastheads and promulgated five decrees punishing anyone who investigated or made comments about government activities:

Notable among these were Decree 29 which set a penalty of death for anyone who spoke or wrote anything capable of disrupting

the society, and Decree 48 which proscribed 17 publications owned by five newspaper organisations perceived to be anti-military. Others were decree 23 which proscribed *The Reporter*; Decree 35 which conferred on the president the power to confiscate or ban any publication, and Decree 43 which set up stringent regulations for registration of newspapers.

Under same military administration, news distributors and readers were also subjected to unfair treatments. For instance, Collins (2001) recounts that some news readers were arrested for having photocopies of an edition of *The News* after agents of the military government thought they had seized and destroyed every copy of the paper. Likewise, in 1995, a newspaper vendor was arrested and charged for transporting copies of newspapers and magazines. Even relatives of journalists were targeted and dealt with by the same military regime. All these kinds of treatments demonstrate the extent of the intolerance the government exercised towards the press and connected industries and individuals. Obliterated as they are, some elements of these draconian decrees promulgated since the colonial and military eras have continued to be passed on to succeeding governments as reflected in recent Press Freedom Ranking data. Available details of Nigeria's press freedom ranking on the website of Reporters Without Borders' (RSF) covers the last seven years (2013 - 2020). Over these years, Nigeria's ranking has consistently been between 111 and 122 out of 180 countries. Currently, Nigeria takes the 115<sup>th</sup> position in the World Press Freedom Index (RSF, 2020). The website describes Nigeria as a climate of permanent violence, given the continued attempts to inhibit activities of journalists.

Despite the notoriety and overbearingness of successive military governments, the press appeared unrelenting in its adversarial reportorial temperament. Rather, it prioritised its social

responsibility to the people: to publish the truth, no matter how difficult it was. Because of such popular perception of unwavering people-consciousness, readership of these newspapers grew to become a culture over the years. People read newspapers not only to be informed, but also as a mark of “abiding faith” in the press and solidarity to the struggle and empathy to newspaper staff who were being harassed, tortured, and killed (Olorunyomi, 1998: p. 57; Duyile, 2019). Readers were aligned with newspapers’ editorial policies and tried to understand their perspectives, choosing to follow them based on the papers’ alignments in the struggle for democracy.

This historical background through to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century provides insight into the severe opposition newspapers have faced both during colonial rule and under self-governance. It helps to show the unwritten social contract that ensued between newspapers and their readers, as well as to understand the position of mainstream media outlets on government regulation. This background shows how various factors contributed to the existing nature of journalism in the country and traces key points in Nigeria’s press history and aids in the understanding of current realities in the media landscape, especially as it concerns the inter-relationship between traditional and digital news media.

### **2.3. Online Alternative: Evolution and Operation of Digital News Media in Nigeria**

In Nigeria, the internet started to gain popularity in the 2000s, with about 200,000 users as at December 31, 2000 (Internet World Stats, 2019). Before this, the *Post Express* newspaper explored early online entry in 1996 when it created an internet-based platform to share its news content. Although it is believed to be the first Nigerian newspaper to digitise its content, the newspaper closed soon afterwards. By the early 2000s, when the internet started to gain popularity as a result of the availability of mobile telephony and data, almost all traditional

newspapers had ongoing plans and efforts to plug into the digital trend while holding on strongly to their print versions. Kperogi (2012) notes that the digitisation wave that swept across newspapers at this time was aided by a Washington DC-based multimedia content service provider – allafrika.com. This company provided easier access to host web platforms in the United States as there were no such facilities in Nigeria.

Kperogi (2012) further highlights that traditional newspapers, even though they were able to digitise their content at this point, did not maximise their technological advantage; rather they treated online news as a trend that was expected to fade. Also, there was a significant level of technical inadequacy that affected operations of news sites as a result of a lack of skilled hands in digital technology in the country. Interactivity features were insufficient or non-existent on these digital news platforms; the sites were not updated in real-time, especially as the newspapers mostly waited to produce their print edition before selecting the stories to duplicate online.

Furthermore, post 1999, about the time when the internet started to become popular, the Nigerian mainstream press started to lose credibility, with readers beginning to see newspapers as publicity tools rather than catalysts for social change (Bourne, 2018). The dwindling credibility at this point had more to do with the governmental transition from military dictatorship to democracy than rising internet popularity. During the junta era, government officials, including media advisers, commissioners and ministers, were mostly senior military officers. After the hand-over to a civilian government on May 29 1999, elected Nigerian politicians joined in the globally popular trend of appointing front-line journalists into various offices at both state and federal levels (Jatula, 2017). However, these appointments caused a broad perception that many journalists switched sides from being the

people's advocates to the government's mouthpieces. Journalists who had been provocateurs against colonisation and military rule, including many who had been jailed, found a reward in becoming messengers of the government. A key effect of this was that they used their influence within the media landscape to promote government and party activities, and were behind the cover-up of many scandals. Most traditional media houses were positioned to use their platforms to service alliances and ownership interests, which were largely along political and regional lines. Political parties and geo-political regions have continued the idea of being represented by a voice (newspaper) and successive governments still appoint editors and journalism veterans as their mouthpieces.

This system caused a decline in the manifestations of the tenets of objectivity and fairness in news reportage. Most newspapers that provided national coverage were associated with politically influential owners, resulting in an objectivity and investigation deficit in newspaper content. This sort of alignment watered down the doggedness of the press - the fourth estate appeared unoccupied as the watchdog had seemingly switched sides, leaving the audience seeking objective and investigative information. Some online news platforms started to fill this lacuna, and they grew in popularity, because they presented viable alternatives that appeared more like what news audiences were used to and consequently were perceived as more trustworthy (Kperogi, 2011).

It is worth noting that the arrival of mobile telephony, which has now become the most common source of internet connection in Nigeria (Agboje, Adedoyin & Ndujiuba, 2017), coupled with the dearth of adequate content and technological skills in mainstream newspapers, aided the incremental acceptance of digital news platforms. The initial penetration rate was very slow due to the high cost of connectivity and limited availability of

internet infrastructure (Bolat, 2019). Edo, Okodua and Odebiyi (2019) argue that as connection costs reduced, online connection increased. However, connection remains inadequate for a range of reasons, including highly varied purchasing power, differing literacy levels throughout Nigerian society and imbalance in rural-urban infrastructure.

Nonetheless, the increasing ubiquity of digital connections provided an opportunity to engage news audiences by providing deeper analyses and investigations, creating space for ‘alternative media stance’ (Couldry, 2012). A alternative media can be described as media that provide a platform for sharing information, views and opinions as well as critical sides to stories that mainstream media platforms have suppressed or only briefly reported (Atton, 2002). News platforms like these are usually developed by people who may not be trained in journalism, but who are willing to unearth information so that others have adequate access to news (Atton, 2002; 2008). Couldry (2000) and Harcup (2003) affirm that alternative media give ordinary citizens the opportunity to become media producers. Some Nigerians living in diaspora saw the opportunity in the internet and started online news platforms. This move significantly affected the operations of mainstream newspapers, because the diaspora-operated digital news media platforms were not only more sophisticated in their look and feel than early Nigerian efforts, but they also carried out many investigations and uncovered scandals. The creation of selected notable digital news platforms as well as their alternative media style of operation is explored in depth next to provide further background into how digital news media have evolved for the Nigerian audience.

### **2.3.1. Notable Pioneer Digital News Platforms**

As earlier noted, traditional newspapers were among the pioneers in the provision of online news, but were limited in their digital reporting and technical skills. Consequently, these

news sites were not popular with readers. Most successful online news sites operated from diaspora. Spiegel (2011) explains in the *New York Times* that there was a growing number of exiled journalists based in New York, “taking advantage of cheap and easy web-publishing technology and growing access in the developing world to report with impunity from afar.” They grew rapidly and enjoyed wide acceptance given their alternative media stance and activist journalistic performance. Kperogi (2012, p. 446) identifies some notable examples of these online diasporic news sites as: [elendureports.com](http://elendureports.com), [saharareporters.com](http://saharareporters.com), [timesofnigeria.com](http://timesofnigeria.com), [nigerianvillagesquare.com](http://nigerianvillagesquare.com), and [pointblanknews.com](http://pointblanknews.com). Although some of these platforms no longer publish, those still in existence “have continued to break sensitive news stories that have radically altered the journalistic practices and politics of Nigeria” (Kperogi, 2012, p. 446).

In the *New York Times* story, Spiegel (2011) reported on the establishment of [elendureports.com](http://elendureports.com) as one of the early attempts at providing digital news to a Nigerian audience. The news site was created in 2004 and was publishing from Lansing, Michigan, USA, by two exiled Nigerians: journalist Jonathan Elendu and activist Yele Sowore. Kperogi (2011) describes their news website as a continuum between the typical Nigerian mainstream newspaper and digital news media. It posted only text and still images without audio or video files and it did not have a comment section. However, it operated in real time, providing up-to-date news. Spiegel (2011) noted that it focused mainly on dubious and ostentatious activities of Nigerian politicians abroad, “publishing photographs of extravagant houses and luxury car collections allegedly bought with the spoils of corruption and following paper trails to offshore accounts.” Kperogi (2011) reports that between May 2005 and January 2011, [elendureports.com](http://elendureports.com) published about 900 investigative political stories. The news site had its objectivity questioned when the publisher accepted a media consultancy role

for a state governor who it had earlier exposed for corruption. This taint resulted in the exit of Elendu's partner, Omoyele Sowore, who then set up saharareporters.com.

Other than his stint with elendureports.com, Sowore had no previous journalism training or experience when he started the news site. However, saharareporters.com is regarded as one of the leading Nigerian-focused online news platforms (Dare, 2011). Being a former student leader and activist, Sowore brought a combative approach to the news site, motivated by the revolutionary mainstream media composure pre 1999 (Aiseng & Akpojivi, 2019). In an interview with *The New York Times*, Sowore ascribed his motivation to the robust news landscape in Nigeria, especially during the military dictatorship. He said: "I have always been a lover of the media. These guys were very daring. They would publish what they wanted, and were not afraid of the military. The newspapers just refused to allow themselves to be proscribed." However, he further said that "now that we have, so to speak, democracy, you would expect the media to be more vibrant, but the opposite is the case" (Spiegel, 2011).

Spiegel (2011) says that "when the news breaks in Nigeria, Omoyele Sowore is there." Despite working from a far-away office in Manhattan, his website is a "major player in the Nigerian press." Mainstream editors and reporters monitor this site closely for news stories to re-write and publish or to point them towards news sources. Sometimes, when editors have tried to kill stories, reporters have simply forwarded them to Sowore, who has published them anonymously on his platform. Kperogi (2011) reports that mainstream newspapers initially resisted the news site and tried to undermine its credibility but the resistance efforts further popularised the site. Some citizens who did not have personal computers went to internet cafes to read from the site and some even printed stories and made copies to distribute to people who could not afford to access the internet.

*The Times of Nigeria* was another prominent online news platform operated from diaspora. It is acclaimed as the first online-only Nigerian newspaper. It was set up in 2005 by Sunny Ofili, a former reporter at the defunct *African Guardian* who migrated to Maryland, USA. Unlike most other online news platforms, timesofnigeria.com was reportedly operated to traditional patterns, especially in writing styles. It also featured regular advertisements from state governments, said to have been a “reciprocal acknowledgement of the site’s compliant reporting” (Kperogi, 2011 p. 151). The website fizzled out of existence when the publisher returned to Nigeria to accept a state government (Delta state) appointment as media aide.

In a slightly different fashion, other Nigerian migrants in the United States of America set up the nigeriavillagesquare.com as a discussion forum, similar to a village square or town hall where people share their views about issues of relevance (Albert, 2008). More contemporarily, it perhaps can be likened to newspaper vending stands in most parts of Nigeria where people gather every morning to read news, discuss their views and sometimes also discuss events not reported in the news. Contributions on nigeriavillagesquare.com are open to the general public. The site has a news portal feature where it posts eye-witness accounts collated from citizen reporters from different parts of the country. Although the site places emphasis on news commentary and opinions, it also serves as a platform for news reporting by contributors and a launch pad for budding online news publishers. For example, the founders of both saharareporters.com and huhuonline.com started by publishing their reports on the site before developing their own independent websites (Kperogi 2011).

Comparable to the case of Sahara Reporters, a team of Nigerian migrants in the United States established pointblanknews.com to promote access to information the government wanted to suppress. The site provides links to stories from websites of Nigerian newspapers on its front

page. It also publishes exclusive reports from citizen journalists. Some of its exclusive reports have instigated follow-ups by other digital news media outlets and even traditional newspapers. Kperogi (2011) reports that the online publication's reputation was damaged following cases of inaccurate reporting. For example, a very popular exclusive story was found to be untrue due to misleading reports from a citizen crime reporter in Nigeria who attempted to use his reportorial position for blackmail. Several other online publications have been similarly accused of blackmail; however none have been convicted of libellous publication within Nigeria for as they are operated or hosted outside the country, and attempts to try them in American courts have proven abortive.

Some of these pioneer digital news platforms are either no longer publishing or are not as popular as they were in their early years. Elendureports.com for instance is no longer online, while timesofnigeria.com, nigeriavillagesquare.com and pointblanknews.com still publish but are not as popular as they used to be. Saharareporters.com is still a leader in digital news dissemination, while other news sites have sprung up relatively recently and are competing well with the more established online news sites.

An example of a site that has had some success is premiumtimes.com, which was established in 2011 and has grown into a credible online news platform. The news site operates a mix of traditional and digital media styles in its publications, perhaps because of the editor's extensive experience at various traditional media platforms. Premiumtimes.com claims the site's focus is to use journalism to "advocate for best practices, good governance, transparency and human rights," pointing at the decline of professional and unbiased reporting among traditional news platforms and highlighting this as the gap it has come to fill (premiumtimes.com, n.d.).

Another currently popular online news platform is thecable.ng, launched in 2014 to champion the delivery of “knowledge-driven journalism in the pursuit of Nigeria’s progress” (thecable.com, n.d.). Thecable.ng publishes online only and is operated in Nigeria. The site lists its editorial values as independence, impartiality, integrity, defence of the public interest and respect for diversity. This news site operates similarly to the traditional print media in Nigeria, with a known office location and reporters who work in a similar manner as print media reporters. The only difference is that they publish only through their website. The news site also operates social media accounts that they use to direct traffic to their news site.

Consistent themes across this first series of digital-only news platforms include how the internet contributes to restoring the watchdog role of the press, reducing the chances of suppressing news stories under the guise of gatekeeping, and reporting on government misdeeds without necessarily risking attack. The internet has created the opportunity to source, package and disseminate news in a different manner from older news formats. In the Nigerian experience, as elsewhere, the internet has created new markets for news media. It has further popularised the concept of citizen journalism, with opportunities to create user generated content allowing users to also be producers (Dare, 2011; Talabi, 2011).

With the internet influencing news processes, this study explores how conventional mastheads perceive and respond to the penetration and growth of digital news platforms in Nigeria and what the future of newspapers could be alongside the emergence of these digital platforms for Nigerian online news audiences. Addressing this aim within an African context will help to fill gaps in the study of news media digitalisation. The next section (2.4) discusses the usefulness of considering African contexts in the light of Afro-complementarity to enhance a more holistic discourse.

## **2.4. Afrocentricity versus Afro-complementarity**

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, this project focuses on the negligible representation of African contexts in the remediation versus replacement dialectic. There is a scarcity of African contributions to the traditional media sustainability debate. Rather, analyses of African media are often uncritically patterned after western countries, especially the United States. Shaw (2009, p. 491) argues that this bandwagonism “hinders the analytical theorisation of journalistic precepts that have evolved locally in most countries of the developing world”. Obonyo (2011) similarly notes that anchoring African media discourse in western archetypes has caused local issues to be discussed without adequately incorporating realities from the continent.

Although news media are becoming more global in outlook and operation, the role of local demographics remains undeniable in media operations. To say that technological replacement will occur in Nigeria, based on news media trends in some developed countries, is to deny the importance of local situations and stakeholders in the workings of the media industry. Efforts at describing the media landscape should be contextual rather than based absolutely on standard western media theories. Adopting the western system as an archetype excludes developing countries from the scholarship radar, leaving out vital and perhaps varying dimensions they may contribute to the discourse. This study thus argues that the ongoing debate about the relationship between digital news media and traditional news media is yet to adequately contextualise the variety of environments within which various media industries operate.

Obonyo (2011, p. 1) proposes that “as communication scholarship in Africa matures, it requires examining how the realities of the continent can contribute to the development of a

theory that best matches this environment”. This proposition suggests the need to complement existing literature with experiences and perspectives from Africa. This aim of this study is in line with Obonyo’s proposition of contributing African perspectives to literature towards developing models or theories that better describe the African media landscape and its interrelationship with media industries and experiences in other parts of the world. While this research effort does not propose such theory by itself, it contributes to understanding of Africa’s local context by providing insights into historical and contemporary experiences in Nigeria, towards exploring what the future of the news media may look like in the wave of growing news digitalisation.

This contribution may be viewed in the light of complementarity, or “Afrocomplementarism” as Omojola (2010, p. 176) puts it, rather than Afrocentricity. The philosophy of Afrocentricity is built upon the notion that Africa is often decentred from its own narrative; thus moves to systematically displace foreign paradigms and consciously replace them with African ones whether or not they are in line with the principles of the western research tradition (Asante, 1991; Asante, 2017; Mazama, 2001; Reviere, 2001). Omojola (2008) proposes the concept of “Afrocomplementarism”, which he describes as a contrasting perspective to Afrocentricity that acknowledges the acceptability of valid research traditions and seeks to contribute African perspectives to existing and ongoing discourses to enhance broader yet harmonised knowledge. Omojola (2008) explains that the epistemology of Afrocentricity appears confrontational, especially as it is presented in opposition to conventional systems of research without necessarily providing political, social and economic structures that drive the philosophy. This study is more Afrocomplementary than Afrocentric because it acknowledges the positions of similar research carried out in other media environments. Rather than attempting to displace earlier research efforts, this research seeks

to contribute an African perspective or dimension to the broad subject area of the implications of news digitalisation. It explores whether newspapers can thrive in the midst of growing penetration and development of digital systems in the Nigerian media environment and contributes an African perspective to the traditional media sustainability dialectic, given that Nigeria has the largest population of internet users in the African continent (World Internet Stats, 2019).

### **2.5. Examining Replacement and Remediation in Existing Literature**

To contextualise the Nigerian perspective presented here, and provide further background, this study now examines existing literature to determine positions of researchers across different countries who have investigated relationships between traditional and digital media. Beginning in dominant western media markets, this section also explores research focusing on other countries in Asia and Europe.

For example, Dimmick, Chen and Li (2004) examined the competition between the internet and traditional news media by analysing data collected in a telephone survey of 211 respondents in the Ohio metropolitan area of the United States of America. Based on the findings of their study, they argue that the internet has a “competitive displacement effect on traditional media in the daily news domain with the largest displacements occurring for television and newspapers” (Dimmick, Chen & Li, 2004, p. 19). Similarly, Gaskins and Jerit (2012) in another study in the USA suggest that a replacement of traditional media outlets by online outlets is occurring. In contrast to Dimmick, Chen and Li, Gaskins and Jerit show that the tendencies towards replacement are “strongest” (p. 206) with newspapers and radio rather than with television. They suggest that the internet provides better user gratification in that there are more opportunities for variety and convenience in meeting users’ demands for

content. However, Dutta-Bergman (2004) presents a contrasting view from his secondary analysis of data gathered from a national survey of 3142 Americans by Pew Research Centre for the People and the Press. He claims that the results of his research demonstrate support for media complementarity, stating that people interested in particular news areas expose themselves to different media platforms that carry information on those areas. These findings note the complementary use of both traditional and online news media forms in the areas of sports, politics, business and finance, science and health, entertainment, and international; and local news.

Nguyen and Western (2006) investigate the effect of online news and information use on traditional news media platforms in Australia. They carried out a secondary data analysis of a national survey of 4270 Australians and their findings reveal a positive association between online news consumption and traditional news platforms. They argue that their study provides “strong evidence against claims that the internet, as a ‘powerful’ news and information medium, would replace traditional sources in the long run” (p. 19) since “those who relied on the internet the most for news and information still used traditional sources substantially” (Nguyen & Western, 2006, p. 1).

In what they describe as a pioneering attempt to explore the situation in Japan, Okazaki and Hirose (2009) collected data from 992 “Japanese general consumers” (p. 96). Their argument, based on their research findings, is that traditional media and internet media generally have complementary effects. They explain that consumer attitudes towards both media forms were consistently positive regardless of the medium type and features, portraying harmonious coexistence between traditional and internet media.

Within the South Korean media context, Kim and Johnson (2009) set out to assess the

perceptions of politically interested internet users about media platform credibility – that is, whether they consider one media form more credible. From data gathered in a survey of 249 respondents, they report that Korean internet users judged traditional sources as more credible and trustworthy. Kim and Johnson (2009) noted that this result is in contrast to earlier studies in America that found news consumers perceive online news sources to be more credible than traditional ones (citing Johnson and Kaye (1998) as an example). Kim and Johnson (2009) suggest there is a situation of complementarity both at dissemination and usage levels with traditional newspapers adopting online versions and readers complementing the use of one form with the other.

Åkesson and Thomsen (2015) explore the challenges of newspapers in digital platform ecosystems in the Swedish media landscape. They argue that “since the Second World War the print newspaper market has been mature and apart from evening press very few new newspapers have started or shut down since then”, indicating stability in the print media ecosystem (Åkesson & Thomsen, 2015, p. 2). The notion that the global newspaper industry may be threatened by digital media, provoking great need for innovation in the industry, precipitated their study. The qualitative study explored the challenges of newspapers in adapting to digital platform ecosystems and maximising technological developments for sustainability. Their approach is quite different from the others that have been considered here, as they interacted with “actors” (p. 2) in the ecosystem using group discussion and interview methods. They discussed two challenges in the adaptation process. First is the identity crisis of newspapers, where newspapers have enjoyed market dominance but are now uncertain of how they will fare in the digital ecosystem, posing a challenge to the possibilities of a synergy between newspapers and digital platforms. Issues of “openness and platform control” also pose a challenge to adaptation (Åkesson & Thomsen, 2015, p. 10). Newspapers

enjoy full control within their platform or niche but the openness of digital space may limit control. Akesson and Thomsen's data show that as much as newspapers acknowledge the need for networked business, they also show difficulty in accepting the conditions for adaptation. Akesson and Thomsen's study portrays competition and territorialism between newspapers and digital platforms but both media forms appear to enjoy a reasonable level of relevance.

From the studies considered, it is evident that surveys are a common method to examine the relationship between traditional and digital news media. Quantitative analyses, either wholly or in part, are also common among authors who work in this area. They arrive at conclusions that describe the situation but lack details of factors that influence the type of relationship they report. Only Åkesson and Thomsen (2015) used an entirely qualitative approach to dig into details of the relationship between traditional and digital news media. Their study also departed from the popular path of basing the relationship between both media forms on audience perspectives and usage. They used direct interactions with those who they describe as actors in the media ecosystem to elicit responses that paint a clearer picture of the scenario. Although the authors did not offer explicit explanation about the criteria for selecting informants for their study other than being ecosystem actors, their inquiry provides deeper insight as to why there is a level of complementarity in media use as both traditional and online news media forms exist in their respective niches. It also explains that the competitive relationship between both news media forms may be better understood by collecting data directly from stakeholders in the news industry who influence production and dissemination decisions based on their experiences and perceived realities.

This study uses Åkesson and Thomsen (2015) as a guide for designing research into the Nigerian media context to explore the relationship between traditional newspapers and digital

news platforms, whether it is one of replacement of the former by the latter, or remediation of the former through the latter. This exploration is carried out by analysing perceptions of stakeholders in the news media industry whose actions and decisions are capable of affecting the news media landscape in Nigeria.

## **2.6. Theoretical Underpinnings**

Stakeholder perceptions of and industry reactions to the emergence and growing diffusion of online news media platforms as explored in this study can be viewed through the lens of media and management theories that illustrate broad interrelationships between mainstream legacy media and digital media platforms. Issues around changes occurring to the media landscape have received wide research attention and have been theorised by authors in media, journalism, sociology, communication and other related fields of study. This study primarily utilises three relevant theoretical contexts – media convergence, remediation and stakeholder theory. This combination further helps in analysing and creating an understanding of the digitalisation discourse, especially as it plays out in the Nigerian milieu.

### **2.6.1. Media Convergence**

Media convergence reflects a continuous process of how different media forms intersect and interact with one another, negating the perception of a predetermined or fixed relationship (Jenkins, 2006). Convergence is an ongoing process; it describes how various media forms increasingly work together to make their content more accessible with the aid of new media technologies. Jenkins describes the process as a culture, rather than an action, in the light of coexistence and cooperation of media systems, allowing for fluidity in content flow (2001).

Jenkins, Ford and Green (2013) suggest that although technological innovations and advances in digitalisation are required for media convergence to occur, they are not absolute

determinants for its occurrence. Convergence is a more holistic process that may be influenced by various factors such as technology, economy, social, cultural, and global conditions (Jenkins, 2001). This explanation underscores the importance of context in the media convergence discourse. Even though digital advances are facilitating the centralisation of media efforts, socio-political contexts play significant roles in understanding how such centralisation takes place in different cultural environments.

Van Dijck (2013) similarly explains that occurrences in the digital media landscape are influenced by surrounding social factors: “the online ecosystem is embedded in a larger sociocultural and political-economic context where it is inevitably moulded by historical circumstances” (Van Dijck, 2013, p. 9). The local environment within which media industries operate influences their modes of operation and the kind of changes that occur as a result of digitalisation. Hence, convergence occurs at the intersection of traditional and digital media. Digital media technologies may be broadly similar or even the same, but the traditional media forms they are colliding with have developed in socio-cultural contexts, spanning long historical periods. Jenkins’ argument in the presentation of this theoretical concept is that media convergence is indeed capable of influencing the operations of traditional media, but it is not in itself an act of replacing them. He proposes that an established media form “will not end with the invention of a single medium” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 16). Jenkins thus explains convergence as a process, not an endpoint.

In illustrating media convergence, Fortunati (2005, p. 27) discusses the impact of the internet on the traditional news media in terms of “mediatisation” and “internetisation.” These terms illustrate a symbolic and symbiotic crisscrossing between traditional and digital media. On the one hand, she explains the mediatisation of the internet as the “invasion of the internet by

the press” and how the press reinforces the internet as a medium for news distribution (Fortunati, 2005, p. 27). On the other hand, internetisation of the mass media has to do with the trans-medial features of the internet that influence the style and operation of traditional media. For Fortunati, this interwoven relationship shows how both media forms converge. Georgi (2015) considers convergence a phenomenon that could occur in different contemporary cultures. She examines Jenkins’s notions of participatory culture and transmedia storytelling to discuss the implications of convergence. Participatory culture essentially explains the continuously blurring lines of demarcation between content production and usage, as users do not simply stay at the receptive end of the communication flow but are also becoming more actively engaged in the encoding and dissemination of messages. Contemporary communication is taking on more active cyclical forms than a simple linear flow, and convergence is at the heart of this shift. Bruns (2008, p. 5) describes this interwoven relationship in the Web 2.0 context as “produsage”, a combination of production and usage roles. Web 2.0 has greatly influenced the convergence of media forms, and users’ roles have become more active than passive. Popular content sources on the internet go a long way in demonstrating how the same person can be producer and user at the same time. YouTube, for instance, allows users to have their own channels and upload video content while also viewing other user-generated content across the site. Beyond creating a platform for the sharing of user-generated content, YouTube allows other users to interact with the content using the like, view and comment functionalities. Georgi (2015, p. 16) adopts the description of Jenkins, Ford and Green (2013) of this interaction: “in their interaction with media content, today’s consumers thus assume and smoothly shift between the roles of ‘translators,’ ‘multipliers,’ ‘appraisers,’ ‘lead users,’ ‘retro curators,’ ‘pop cosmopolitans,’ etc., to name but a few functions”.

As well as the interconnected roles of users, convergence has enhanced solidarity in message reception. A sense of community has been created that has shifted users' perspectives from seeing media content consumption as a personal or individual affair to a "networked practice" Jenkins (2006, p. 244). Even though users mostly access media content individually, there is a greater awareness that such reception is increasingly communal. Digital media further enhances this communality by showing how other users interact with the content and also allowing content to be shared with other users. This sense of networked consumption has a "democratic potential" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 247). For instance, within online channels of traditional mastheads, readers often engage in the forum or comments section, freely expressing their opinions on published news stories. Access to and consumption of media content and the social connection it creates signifies the inherent democratic leanings of convergence. In essence, media convergence enhances information democratisation because of the increased access, as well as opportunities for exchange of views, it offers (Jenkins, 2006).

One of the ways convergence enhances media access is through the multiplicity of channels within the convergence spectrum. This channel variety has popularised the concept of cross-media dissemination. Davidson (2010) explains that this concept is demonstrated through the convergence or integration of media experiences across multiple platforms and with the emergence and development of the internet, cross-media interactivity has been incorporated into transmedia experiences. He notes further that cross-media is not necessarily a novel concept, but it has become highly relevant to enhance experiences of users of internet-based media platforms. Media users can access the same message through different channels such as films, games, comics, animations, websites, and so on. Although the study of transmedia is predominantly focused on presentation of audio-visual content, this study explores it in the

light of news distribution, especially with cross-media opportunities that exist in the digital space. Instead of re-transmitting news stories in a single format, news content can be distributed in different forms across platforms that allow for additional perspectives and a more immersive user experience despite a storyline being familiar. Jenkins, Ford and Green (2013, p. 1) propose that content creators need to focus on developing stories that are optimised for the various channels they wish to use, for their messages to thrive and their brands to remain relevant, because “if it does not spread, it is dead”. The cross-platform imperatives of transmedia storytelling provide room for audience multiplicity, with users accessing information on their preferred platform. In the case of news distribution, this strategy offers the possibility of news content optimisation for improved audience engagement. The use of multiple platforms to share stories further supports the idea of remediation over replacement, with media forms complementing each other to create a holistic media outlook (Jenkins, 2006; Ryan & Thon, 2014).

It is worth noting that with the growing emphasis on optimising messages for adoption across media channels, the importance of originality is fading (Georgi, 2015; Pratten, 2011).

Variants of a message in the story-world may have the same acceptance level as the original, or in some cases, may end up becoming even more popular. Participatory culture also makes it increasingly difficult to control content usage by media industries. Roles of producers and consumers have become intertwined, causing some operational principles and practices to become obsolete, as “produsers” are not necessarily bound by the same policies as producers (Bird, 2011). While the interwoven roles of users and producers may be an advantage of convergence culture, they also pose some risks. Bird (2011) observes that the culture appears to be paying less attention to the original (producer) and promoting the produser, creating uncertainty over the prospects of conventional media systems.

Apart from being a possible threat to the continued relevance of mainstream conventional media in this manner, this “produsage” phenomenon has ignited other levels of uncertainty and pressure in traditional media spheres, resulting in “a range of social, political, economic and legal disputes because of the conflicting goals of consumers, producers, and gatekeepers” (Jenkins 2001, p. 93). For example, Akesson and Thomsen (2015) point to the intersecting roles of digital and legacy media and the core differences in their production technologies and operational models as a challenge that threatens newspaper survival. One way or another, the overlapping functionalities of media forms and producers and users appear to further fuel uncertainties in legacy media industries regarding their operations and sustainability.

Likewise, Westlund and Färdigh (2015) investigated patterns of public media usage in Sweden. They explain that news digitalisation is causing the democratic functions and business models of conventional news media to diminish in relevance, thereby creating a sense of uncertainty around what to expect in the industry. In their findings, they report that the public mostly engage with single media rather than consuming cross-media news, with older audiences sticking to newspapers, middle-aged audiences accessing news through their computers, and younger audiences utilising mobile devices while also being cross-media users. This outlook further fuels the uncertainty about the sustainability of conventional newspapers because it remains unclear if middle-aged audiences will prefer print copies as they grow older or if newspapers will fade after the older generation passes.

The notion of uncertainty of the context of news production and consumption is central to the purpose of this research, which aims to understand how mainstream news media stakeholders perceive the relationship between traditional and digital media forms and how the latter affects the sustainability potentials of the former. This approach aligns with Newman, Dutton

and Blank (2012), who argue that it is vital to explore the implications of such new genres for the popularity of older ones that refuse or limit consumer participation. This position is also in line with the perspective that it is important to understand the social and cultural potential of convergence culture as well as the way it affects the mutual relations between the media industry, producers and consumer (Jenkins, 2006). Jenkins' identification of stakeholders and cultural context demonstrates their importance in understanding the dynamics of the convergence phenomenon in varying media landscapes.

### **2.6.2. Remediation**

Similar to the concept of media convergence, remediation acknowledges the continuous development of media technologies and explains the interrelationships between various old and new media forms. Examining the development of communication models over the years, from linear (Lasswell, 1948; Shannon & Weaver 1949; Newcomb 1953; Gerbner 1956; Westley & MacLean 1957; Berlo 1960) to transactional (Watzlawick & Beavin, 1967; Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson 1970; Barnlund, 1970) to constitutive models (Craig, 1999), the concept of remediation is evident in the way the newer models were developed by pointing out shortcomings in older ones and addressing them based on more contemporary experiences. According to Bolter and Grusin (2000), remediation defines a genealogy that can be traced back to the invention and renaissance of linear perspectives of communication. The three communication models explain how communication works, but each successive model builds on an existing one to provide further insights into how communication may be better understood and utilised.

Furthermore, considering the pace of technological development, features of communication have become more pronounced and media messages are now more ubiquitous, following the

proposition of McLuhan (1964). In recent times, communication may be seen as more constitutive than it has ever been, given increasing access to media content and considering how societies are greatly influenced by the information about and around them. This constitutive line of thought holds that everything in our social world is based on how we communicate, which contributes to the struggle for supremacy and relevance between the conventional media and new media platforms (Craig, 1999).

Advancements in communication media have been marked by enhancements and improvements in the methods and channels through which information is disseminated. From cave sculpting and paintings, to symbols and cuneiforms, to smoke signals, carrier pigeons, the postal system, newspapers, radio, telegraph, telephone, television and internet, every medium was established in remediation to the previous. Fidler (1997) posits that all media are constantly experiencing “mediamorphosis” because of the interrelationships between different media platforms. “New media do not arise spontaneously and independently – they emerge gradually from the mediamorphosis of old media. And when newer forms of communication media emerge, the older forms do not die – they continue to evolve and adapt” (Fidler, 1997, p. 23). Fidler explains that new media platforms are not developed as radical inventions; rather, they are developmental innovations that build on existing ones. He further points out that the development of new media platforms does not automatically send older ones to extinction; rather it is resistance or inability to change or adapt effectively in response to the emergence of a new medium that endangers the older platform.

As an illustration of this position, Fidler (1997) cites the example of the success of frequency modulator (FM) radio. Despite the rising popularity of the television in the 1940s, radio’s innovative response of specialised content and unique advantages of portability helped it to

remain not only in existence but popular:

Instead of trying to hold on to the dwindling and fragmenting market of the large general audience, AM radio stations, many small, semi-automated FM stations were created. By narrowcasting specialised content for niche audiences, these owners discovered a market not being fulfilled by other media forms... Even though television usurped radio's position as the dominant mass medium, radio's mobility and variety of offerings have made it the most popular medium in history (Fidler, 1997, p. 132).

Fidler's observation above shows that radio's response to the emergence of television was to carve a niche for itself to fill a gap left by television. Certain specialised topics were perhaps not big enough news for the wide coverage of television but were crucial to their areas of proximity, hence, radio focused on serving this need and has proved effective in connecting with local audiences. This response illustrates the complexity of the interrelationship between media forms. Again, such interrelationships may be described as remediation in the sense that television added picture to voice, remediating radio. Radio refashioned itself to serve a niche that seemed unattended by television. Thus, as remediation leads to the development of new media, old media must also refashion themselves to enhance complementarity than competition, and to remain relevant in the media landscape (Fidler, 1997).

Bolter and Grusin (1999) explain the concept of remediation in a similar light. They explain that new media are not 'new', but are developed to perform better based on the perceived flaws of existing ones. Although Bolter and Grusin explain remediation based on the emergence of digital media, they note that it has been "the same process throughout the last

several hundred years” (1999, p. 11). Bolter and Grusin further describe remediation in terms of immediacy and hypermediacy that “although each medium promises to reform its predecessors by offering a more immediate or authentic experience, the promise of reform inevitably leads us to become aware of the new medium as a medium. Thus, immediacy leads to hypermediacy” (Bolter & Grusin 1999, p. 20).

To Bolter and Grusin, communication media platforms refashion themselves to develop newer, remediated media and “the practices of contemporary media constitute a lens through which we can view the history of remediation” (1999, p. 21). Bolter and Grusin (1999) explain the new media paradox - embedding new experiences in old media methods; in the sense that new media “provides the unmediated experience that all previous media sought but failed to achieve” (p. 270). They propose that new media essentially is a simulation of old media with new features and functionalities:

What is in fact new is the particular way in which each innovation rearranges and reconstitutes the meaning of their earlier elements.

What is new about new media is therefore old and familiar: that they promise the new by remediating what has gone before (Bolter & Grusin, 1999 p. 270).

In comparing the remediation concept of Bolter and Grusin (1999) with Jenkins’ (2006) media convergence, it is clear that both theories demonstrate an interrelationship between media forms and not a simple changeover or substitution, signifying a connection between traditional and digital media forms. As earlier considered in section 2.6.1, Jenkins argued against the presumptions of the digital revolution paradigm that new media would displace old media. Rather, he argues that “the media convergence paradigm assumes that old and new media will interact in even more complex ways” (2006 p. 6). This position aligns with

the accounts of Bolter and Grusin about such media interaction that rather than replacement, media landscapes will witness an interdependent relationship where both old and new media mutually remediate each other.

### **2.6.3 Stakeholder Theory**

In order to investigate the interactions between traditional and digital news media and to explore the replacement/remediation dialectic within a specific context, it is necessary to consider who the stakeholders are and how they play key roles in determining the experience in the industry within which they operate. Hence I adapt stakeholder theory from management studies to identify key players in the local media context and discuss how their activities influence perceptions and practices in their operational environments. Essentially, stakeholder theory aims to systematically identify and manage individuals, groups, institutions, organisations or societies that are capable of influencing or being influenced by occurrences or decisions in a particular environment or setting (Mitchell, Agle and Wood, 1997). Although this theory is more commonly used in organisational and management studies, it helps to create a useful insight into this research effort by identifying relevant stakeholders in the media industry and examining their perceptions and how these affect actions, reactions and interactions within the media landscape.

As mentioned earlier in section 2.5, Åkesson and Thomsen (2015, p. 2) did not explicitly explain who ecosystem actors are and what qualifies them to be labelled as such. However, the usage of “ecosystem actors” in their study relates closely to the stakeholder concept in management studies. To fill this gap, I explain the stakeholder concept, as adopted from management studies, and extrapolate from Brooks, Milne and Johansson (2002) and Weiss (2014) to provide insights into who stakeholders are in the media industry, how they are

classified, and how each group is capable of influencing the media landscape.

Stakeholders are considered the lifeline of every organisation and industry, without which such organisations or industries may not exist or continue to exist. In business ethics and stakeholder studies, the media is widely identified as a stakeholder (secondary or external) to every kind of organisation and industry; this makes media stakeholders indirect stakeholders across industries (Bourne, 2009; Weiss, 2014). The media is also seen as an integral tool for stakeholder communication and management across every type of organisation. However, there is inadequate literature spelling out who the stakeholders in the media industry are. The media, being one of the most affected industries by technological advancements over the centuries (Albarran et al., 2010). is very dynamic. Who the stakeholders are, their relevance in/to the industry and the levels of their salience are changing.

While many research projects focus on inquiring into the activities of journalists and audiences both individually and jointly, as well as interactions between mainstream and digital media, media use, audience research, journalism, media content and so on, (see Deuze & Witschge 2017; Pavlik & McIntosh, 2018; Sustain, 2018; Gerbuado, 2018) there is very little literature that addresses who key media stakeholders are, their relevance to the industry and their levels of salience. It becomes pertinent with the shifting technological paradigms in contemporary media practice to identify who has what stake in media operations to ensure a holistic approach to media research and policy development.

The term “stakeholder” is broadly used and has been the subject of extensive research. Mitchell, Agle and Wood (1997, p. 856) assert that there has been “vagueness in definition” of the term. They extrapolate from Jones (1980 p. 59-60) that “the notion that corporations

have an obligation to constituent groups in society other than stockholders and beyond that prescribed by law or union contract, indicating that a stake may go beyond mere ownership” thus leading to the issues of identifying the groups, understanding their levels of salience and balancing their interests. These issues are at the fore of stakeholder theory and research.

A popular and foundational definition of stakeholder in the field of business is the one provided by Freeman (1984, p. 46) as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation’s objectives.” This definition has been criticised by Clarkson (1994) as being too ambiguous, and he offers a more precise definition noting the difference between voluntary and involuntary stakeholders. According to Clarkson (1994, p. 5), “voluntary stakeholders bear some form of risk as a result of having invested some form of capital, human or financial, something of value, in a firm”. Involuntary stakeholders, on the other hand, “are placed at risk as a result of a firm’s activities... but without the element of risk, there is no stake” (Clarkson, 1994, p. 5). Clarkson’s definition essentially associates risk with stake, distinguishing between voluntary and involuntary stakeholders by the levels of their involvement and risk. This categorisation broadens stakeholder scope by including entities who may not necessarily be able to influence organisational operations

Similarly, Hemmati (2002, p. 2) used interest as a yardstick in his definition. To him, “those who have an interest in a particular decision, either as individuals or representatives of a group” are stakeholders. In his explanation, people who have the ability to influence a decision, and those affected by the decision, are typically interested and therefore eligible to be stakeholders in an organisation. Likewise, according to Weiss (2006, p. 52), “a stakeholder is any individual or group who can affect or is affected by the actions, decisions, policies, practices, or goals of the organisation”. Like Clarkson, Weiss goes further to identify two categories of stakeholders: primary and secondary. Primary stakeholders in a

firm include owners, employees and suppliers. Stockholders and members of a board of directors are also considered to be of primary influence. Secondary stakeholders comprise “all other interested groups such as the media, consumers, lobbyists, courts, governments, competitors, the public and society” (Weiss, 2006, p. 52). Weiss’ classification into primary and secondary stakeholders shows that the influence each group has on the organisation is usually not equal, indicating that some may be treated with a higher level of salience than others.

From the various attempts at defining the term “stakeholder”, the issue of influence is constant; either the individuals or groups influence the organisation/industry, or the reverse is the case. For the purpose of this study, I focus more on Weiss’ definition and categorisation of primary and secondary stakeholders because it helps to distinguish industry-based stakeholders, who are involved in news production and dissemination, from generic stakeholders whose stakes are tied to how the industry affects them and how they may externally influence the industry as well. This distinction is particularly important for the news media industry given that everyone with access to news may be regarded as stakeholders in the sense that they are influenced by news media and their actions may contribute to external influences on news organisations. Because the study objective is anchored on masthead stakeholders’ experience and informed perceptions, it is helpful to focus on stakeholders who are directly involved in masthead operations.

### **2.6.3.1 Stakeholder Classifications**

Brooks, Milne and Johansson (2002, p. 21) posit that there are six sets of people regarded as stakeholders: owners, clients, staff, internal customers, strategic partners and special interest groups. Extrapolating from Brooks, Milne and Johansson (2002), the different classes are

briefly explained:

- **Strategic partners:** This category refers to key collaborators and contributors whose cooperation is required for the continued existence and relevance of an industry. They usually include contractors, suppliers and trainers among others.
- **Owners:** They have and exercise control in an organisation. They usually include founders, shareholders, elected representatives or officials who are nominated as proxies of the proprietors.
- **Special interest groups:** This class of stakeholders represent the interests of members regarding professional practice, industry regulations or developmental issues.
- **Clients:** Clients are generally the consumers of products of an organisation; they are the end-users of goods or services. This category of stakeholders is often a subject of research and is usually further segmented into different sub-groups based on their demographics, usage patterns, loyalty, perception, interactions and several other variables.
- **Staff:** These are employees of an organisation. They are employed to carry out various roles as necessary to make products/services available to consumers.
- **Internal customers:** This group represents employees of an organisation who use its products or services in carrying out their duties: for instance, software developers in a technology or internet service provision firm who often need the internet and earlier software versions to develop upgrades and entirely new computer applications.

In a manner very similar to Brooks, Milne and Johansson (2002), Weiss (2006, p. 58) in illustrating his stakeholder moral responsibility matrix, identifies five groups of stakeholders: owners, customers, employees, community interest groups and the public (citizens at large). In the view of both Weiss (2006) and Brooks, Milne and Johansson (2002), owners are key stakeholders in businesses and industries. Clients/customers are also presented as a class of

stakeholders in both positions as with employees and staff. Brooks, Milne and Johansson (2002) present internal customers in a class of their own, but to be internal customers by the term's explanation, the group of people must first be employees of the organisation. Hence, internal customers may be broadly grouped as staff or employees. Community/special interest groups are also an integral stakeholder class.

The point of divergence in both studies is the identification of strategic partners as a stakeholder category by Brooks, Milne and Johansson (2002). They were excluded by Weiss (2006), who instead includes public (citizens at large). While one might argue that the public can be seen as strategic partners or vice-versa, both classes are differently relevant. It is important to keep them separate to understand the roles they play. Strategic partners have more to offer than their attention and opinion; they supply the industry with raw materials, human capital and other important factors required for business sustainability. The public may generally not contribute directly to the continued existence of an organisation, but is usually provided with necessary information, which underscores the importance of the media across industries besides their contribution to the image construction of any organisation.

#### **2.6.3.2 Classification of Media Stakeholders and Contemporary Issues**

To identify the stakeholder groups within the media industry, questions of who bears what risks need to be answered. This study extrapolates from the classification of Brooks, Milne and Johansson (2002) and Weiss (2006). From the comparison of both classifications, this study presents four stakeholder categories in the media:

- Strategic partners
- Owners,
- Special interest groups, and

- Staff/employees,

Consumers/clients are excluded as an independent stakeholder category because they are not actively involved in conventional media production and as a result, may not be able to provide responses relevant to this study's research. However, it is important to note that although other stakeholder groups are categorised based on their involvement in the production process, they typically are also consumers of newspapers, both the ones they are directly involved with and others in the domestic and international media landscape. Thus, while consumers are not presented in a separate category, they cut across other stakeholder groups. While this classification takes a broad look at the media industry, it is important to note that more specific details will apply to particular media branches such as print, broadcast and internet-based media. The four categories of media stakeholders adopted for this study are outlined and explained in the following sub-sections.

### **Media Strategic Partners**

This group is made up of collaborators, suppliers, trainers and so on. In the media, it typically consists of advertising partners, media educators, support service providers and the like. Their services are essential for the core duties of media organisations to continue. For instance, advertisers hold a huge stake in the media as they provide its paid content. Although sales and subscriptions also generate revenue for the media, advertising has contributed immensely to the economy of media organisations (Crampes, Haritchabalet & Jullien, 2009). In 2015, Mitchell reported that the media industry in America was generating over \$60 billion annually with two-thirds of this revenue (\$40 billion) coming from advertisements, mostly placed on traditional media platforms. In 2018, Williams and Gulati argued that this trend might be changing because of continued fragmentation in the media market, reducing the time spent consuming legacy media in favour of digital media content. Studying the

advertising budgets of the 2012 and 2016 American presidential campaigns, Williams and Gulati (2018) suggested that advertisers are focusing more on a multichannel approach, gradually reducing their spend on traditional platforms. Advertisers' decisions are instrumental to the performance of any media platform and this study includes them as stakeholders to aid in understanding the terrain in the Nigerian media context.

This study also identifies media educators as members of the strategic partners group even though they are barely visible in the industry (Stack & Kelly, 2006). Stack and Kelly suggest that the low visibility of media educators in the industry is attributable to the belief that they should remain neutral. Since this research explores changes in the media industry, it is useful to examine how these changes affect and are reflected in media education.

### **Media Owners**

Owners are considered the most important stakeholders in most corporate organisations (Weiss, 2006). The ownership stakes of such an influential industry as the news media have been the subject of extensive research as to whether it should be exclusively owned by the state or by private individuals or a mixture of both (Djankov et al., 2003). In Nigeria, media ownership was on the federal exclusive list, meaning that media ownership was restricted only to the federal government, until 1992, when it became constitutionally permitted for private organisations to own and operate media outfits (Duyile, 1987). Currently, both public and private media ownership exist. Whether private or public, owners have gone through the process of establishing the organisation or have acquired it, and bear a great level of risk; without them, the organisation would not be in existence. Common risks that media owners take are related to legalities, finances and ethics. In the media, owners may be media practitioners or entrepreneurs. Often, there is a board of directors that governs the

corporation's activities and there may be proxies for owners, especially when the owners are not originally media practitioners.

### **Special Interest Groups**

Industries often have interest groups that represent the specific interests of their constituents based on professional, industry or community issues (Brooks, Milne & Johansson, 2002).

These groups try to influence policies and decisions in favour of their members or to generally help to improve the industry. Special interest groups in other industries often use the media to push their agendas. Hence, special interest groups in the media wield much media power since their constituents operate these media platforms.

Special interest groups in the media include journalists' unions and associations as well as media-related advocacy groups locally and internationally. They often carry out regulatory duties through the provision of codes of ethics to guide the production and dissemination of media content. To remain members of special interest groups, media organisations and individual practitioners are usually required to stay compliant to the groups' guidelines for professional practice. Special interest groups are crucial actors in the media scene and occupy a position of influence within specific media landscapes.

### **Media Staff/Employees**

Employees of an organisation are also categorised as stakeholders in such organisations; their close integration with the firm gives them particular stakes and duties (Crane & Matten, 2004). They are employed to carry out various roles as necessary to make media content available to consumers; directly contributing to the success of an organisation. The core duty in a news media organisation is news reporting, thus the core employees are journalists; there are however more job positions in other units such as graphics, information technology,

administration and production. By the definition of term ‘stakeholder’, all staff members are stakeholders; the salience in the case of the media industry, however, depends on the delivery of core organisational duties; hence, the prominence ascribed to journalistic staff.

Researchers have extensively explored various issues in the media industry with journalists being the study samples of such studies (Bowd, 2014; Weaver & Willnat, 2016; Chuma et al., 2017; Hanusch & Bruns, 2017; Johnson, Paulussen & Aelst, 2019; Hänggli, 2020); this approach further indicates the salience attributed to reportorial staff and underscores the importance of their contributions to the industry.

Greenwood and Anderson (2009) argue that labelling employees as stakeholders conditions them to be treated as homogeneous, with an expectation of common values and interests, but that is usually not the case. Employees are individuals who bring varying types and levels of expertise to contribute to the success of an organisation. They are individuals working towards a common goal but with different values and interests. By identifying them broadly as stakeholders, the organisation suppresses their individuality and addresses them as an entity that exists in alignment with organisational interests (Greenwood & Anderson, 2009). This unitary treatment works in divergence from the pluralist framework of stakeholder theory. However, it is more helpful and relevant to identify employees based on the specific roles they play in the workplace. At this level, the differences in values and interests should be reduced, allowing the categorisation to be more representative. In section 3.3, I explain how I delineated media employees as editorial and reportorial staff alone, excluding staff whose job descriptions are outside of these roles. This specificity helps to elicit more relevant information around the subject of inquiry.

In sum, many stakeholder scholars attempt to narrow the range of who or what really counts

within an organisation or industry (Mitchell, Agle & Wood, 1997). This study demonstrates how stakeholder classifications apply to the news media industry. I focus particularly on how the classifications relate to the study objectives, hence recommending that holistic studies in media practice should be carried out considering the various stakeholder groups that exist and understanding their salience based on the prevalent terrain in the study scope.

Broadly, in this chapter, I discussed the background and context of the study in more detail, exploring the historical overview and theoretical contexts. The historical overview traces key points in Nigeria's press history, as well as emergence of digital news platforms in Nigeria, giving an insight into the cultural and operational environments of both print and digital news media since inception. I also discussed media convergence, remediation and stakeholder theories as a framework for the study. The examined literature on the remediation-replacement dialectic highlights the importance of considering local contexts and foregrounds the contribution of findings about experiences in Nigeria's media landscape. The next chapter discusses the approach with which these experiences on the Nigerian news landscape are explored.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methodology**

In this study, I explore how masthead stakeholders in Nigeria perceive the diffusion of digital news media, how it has affected and is affecting traditional media practice and what this portends for the Nigerian mainstream media, especially newspapers. The research probes within the contexts of remediation and revolution, emanating from the broad academic debate about the implications of new media on legacy media. I adopt a qualitative approach to assess perceptions of masthead stakeholders in Nigeria regarding digital news media diffusion in the country. The study contributes to understanding Nigerian newspaper stakeholders' perceptions of digital diffusion, how the print media industry is responding to the diffusion and if and how newspapers can remain viable with internet penetration figures on the rise.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 3) describe a qualitative approach to research as a process that “involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world”. They explain that qualitative research is conducted in an attempt to “make sense of, or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3). Qualitative research is usually intended to dig into issues and arrive at in-depth findings rather than statistical and quantified results (Strauss & Corbin 1998). Qualitative research is useful for examining relationships between variables. In the case of this study, a qualitative approach is valuable in exploring stakeholders' perceptions of how digital news media diffusion affects traditional news media in the Nigerian media context. This approach is appropriate for this research because it supports the collection of in-depth data and allows for deeper analysis that can aid understanding of the media landscape.

As noted in the introductory chapter, studies in the range of this debate have been carried out mostly in developed countries and economies, especially in Europe and the Americas, leaving African research audiences with very little information on prevalent situations in the local media terrain and at best making inferences based on foreign situations. This study helps to fill this gap by examining the local Nigerian context in order to explore the relationship between digital news media and traditional news media with a view to understanding the sustainability potentials of print newspapers amid increasing digital news platforms and diffusion in the country.

I assess leading masthead stakeholders' perceptions of digital diffusion to explore how newspapers respond to the increasing penetration of digital news media in Nigeria; if the relationship between hardcopy and online news media is that of remediation or revolution/replacement. This effort does not attempt to make generalisable findings on the relationship between digital and traditional news. Instead, I take an exploratory approach to gathering and analysing stakeholders' perceptions of new media diffusion and how traditional media industries, especially newspapers, are responding to the diffusion of new media platforms in Nigeria.

This approach locates the study within the interpretivist tradition, which focuses on localised or contextual findings. While postpositivism looks for universals, interpretivism is concerned with understanding particular contexts (Willis & Jost, 2007). The key feature of interpretivism in relation to ontology and epistemology is the relativity of reality.

Interpretivists believe that reality is multiple and relative rather than fixed. Knowledge is perceived as dependent on the experiences of the subjects involved. Interpretive research portrays knowledge as socially constructed; based on the experiences of the subjects involved

rather than being objectively discovered (Neuman & Wiegand, 2000). Hence, interpretivism suits this research project because it explores perceptions about the interrelationship between traditional and digital news media, which are contextually dependent on stakeholders' experiences and perspectives of news production and consumption.

Interpretivism creates room for flexible research structures to capture meaning and understand realities from human experiences, interactions and perceptions (Black, 2006). Assessing masthead stakeholders' perceptions of digital news media diffusion in Nigeria requires more than basic observation: interaction is needed to elicit what they think and understand of the phenomenon, based on their experiences and interactions with colleagues and clients. Their perspectives on how digital news media is affecting how journalism is locally practised and the sustainability of print newspapers are central to this study. In the next section, I discuss more specifically how I collected data from participants in the research.

### **3.1 Research Design and Instrumentation**

This study used a qualitative thematic analysis method, which involves unearthing meaning from research data (Merriam, 1998). Merriam (1998) developed this method and it has been extended by a number of scholars, including Braun and Clarke (2006), and Nowell et al. (2017). This study's interpretivist standpoint grounds it more within epistemological research traditions than ontological. It is rooted in the foundations of media convergence and the broad context of cultural studies as an enquiry into detailed perception of stakeholders. The use of a qualitative approach for this work was prompted by the works of Alasuutari (1995), and Denzin and Lincoln (2008, 2011) in that it allows for detailed responses to be elicited in specific contexts, not necessarily seeking universality. This approach sourced relevant data

on current trends in print media processes and how they are being affected by new media emergence in Nigeria. To achieve the aims of this research, semi-structured interviews were adopted as the central research instrument.

### **3.1.1 Semi-Structured Interviews**

Interviews are similar to regular conversations but with a focus of data generation, hence they are conducted with rigour to ensure reliability and validity (Patton & Cochran, 2002). Legan, Keegard and Ward in Ritchie et al. (2003) explain that interviews are useful in the development of data and meaning. Interviews allow for knowledge transmission, where an interviewer can construct knowledge based on an interviewee's experience or perspective. Kvale (2006) describes interviewing as a journey where conversations are used as a vehicle, leading to new insights where the interviewer asks questions, prompting the subject to tell their stories as they "wander together" in the interviewee's world.

This approach was selected over other qualitative alternatives such as structured interviews and focus groups because of its key feature of flexibility. This allows the interviewer to probe as deeply as possible into participants' experiences and perspectives. Having a rigid structure for the interview may not allow respondents the room to provide insights not directly in the question areas, but a level of flexibility gives room for the interviewer to ask further questions and the respondent can provide more relevant answers. Ward (in Ritchie et al. 2003) point out four vital features of an interview that guide the conduct of interviews for this research. The first feature is the combination of structure and flexibility. While some interviews may be formal, following a template, they may also be absolutely informal, like a friendly discussion. However, Ritchie et al. (2003) assert that researchers should combine structure with flexibility for responses to be fully probed and to give room for relevant issues

to be spontaneously raised by the interviewee. This enhances the depth of the research findings and also allows for a degree of comparability. This describes the conduct of semi-structured interviews, combining a pre-determined structure with conversational flexibility.

The second feature is interactivity. This is essential when conducting an interview despite the use of an interview schedule. The researcher should ask an initial question in a manner that encourages the participant to not only respond but also to talk freely around the subject area, and this response should form the basis of the interviewer's next intervention, guided by the prepared schedule (Ward in Ritchie et al., 2003).

The interview should also be probing, capturing the "reality on the situation" according to Willis and Jost (2008 p: 245). This is not to pose a risk to the participant but to provide room for additional depth in terms of explanation and exploration. The authors point out that initial responses are often given at surface level, but follow-up questions can be used to obtain deeper or hidden meanings in the responses. Interviews also permit the researcher to explore fully all the factors that underpin participants' answers: reasons, feelings, opinions and beliefs to further provide explanatory evidence, which is key in qualitative research, and especially in this study.

As a fourth feature, interviews should be generative – capable of creating new knowledge. While the extent of this depends on the research questions, it may be that respondents will think of certain issues or in certain ways they have not previously explored. These four characteristics guided the structuring of the interviews for this project. To achieve the objectives of the study, semi-structured interviews were deemed most suitable to elicit perceptions from research respondents using pre-designed interview schedules. The

schedules were planned to allow for flexibility during the interview sessions and to create room for other relevant issues of concern to the research to be raised. The emphasis was on open-ended questions to initiate further discussions about the subject area (Patton & Cochran, 2002).

Two interview schedules were used to guide the conduct of interviews with the four classes of masthead stakeholders identified earlier in the literature: one for media owners and employees or practitioners and the other for media strategic partners and special interest groups to provide room for questions to be asked in a manner that is more relevant based on the grouping (see appendices III and IV). Both schedules were divided into four sections; the introductory part and three other sections that probed into the three research questions. This allowed for fluidity in the interaction as well as to help the researcher maximise the interview duration and prevent the interview from extending beyond the a one-hour time frame. The design of the interview schedule was such that participants were encouraged to provide answers to other questions while tackling an initial one; that way the researcher would not need to repeat questions that had been satisfactorily answered. Interviews are useful to generate epistemological data, giving room for a researcher to ask appropriate questions of relevant individuals directly and record their answers (Flick, 2014).

### **3.1.2 Sampling and Recruitment**

The data sought for this project were not generally available; they reflect expert opinions of different groups of stakeholders in the Nigerian media industry. Hence, purposive sampling proved useful to elicit information from masthead stakeholders for the purpose of achieving the objectives of this research. Purposeful sampling is commonly used in such cases to identify and select information-rich cases or research participants (Palinkas et al. 2015). Since the study required information specifically from masthead stakeholders, purposeful

sampling helped broadly to ensure that participants recruited had the capacity to provide meaningful data towards addressing the aims of the research. In line with Patton (2002), who describes combination or mixed purposeful sampling as a method that combines more than one technique of purposeful sampling, I adopted combination or mixed purposeful sampling technique. Combining sampling strategies proved to be appropriate for this study because of the need to elicit responses across different stakeholder groups in order to explore varied perspectives while understanding the difficulty in reaching such experts that may be required for research participation, which underscores the need for expert referral. In this study, the first level of sampling was the selection of different strata or categories of stakeholders who would be able to provide responses/data that could contribute to addressing the questions raised in this research. Hence, stratified purposeful sampling was used to select groups that had been classified as stakeholders in the print media industry in section 2.6.3. Palinkas et al. (2015) explain that a stratified purposeful sampling technique is useful to capture major variations instead of identifying a common core.

At the second level, availability or convenience sampling was adopted. This strategy was used to select participants who were relatively easily accessible (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016; Patton, 2002) because of busy schedules and difficulty in reaching the initial intended participants. This level of sampling was necessary to reach at least one key stakeholder in each identified stratum. In compliance with the ethical requirements for this research, stakeholders whose contact details were publicly available and who were willing and available to participate in the research were selected as samples at this level. The key rationale for adopting availability sampling as an additional technique at this point was its alignment with the guiding ethical standards; allowing for voluntary self-selection without any need to coerce or cajole individuals into participation. Also, this technique in no way

affected the quality of the data, rather, it enhanced its credibility and dependability, being a second layer of sample selection from publicly available and trusted databases such as corporate or institutional websites. Having identified subgroups whose responses may be useful for the study, one individual who was willing within each subgroup was then recruited for the study.

It is worth noting that only these two levels of sampling were proposed for this research before the process of data collection began. However, it was discovered in the field that very few individuals who satisfied the selection criteria had their correct or direct details publically available; even fewer were willing to respond to messages from contacts they did not recognise. Thus, contact was made individually with prospective participants within the research location and the first person to respond in each group was selected at this point. The limitation in selecting the first person to respond is that it takes away the opportunity of other potential participants from being selected, particularly when it could be due to a number of uncontrollable factors such as disruptions in electricity supply, internet network issues or difficulties with accessing their emails. However, due to the constraint of time allocated to fieldwork, as well as strict ethical guidelines, I had to select the first person to voluntarily respond in the affirmative. This step led to the addition of a third level of sampling.

This third level involved passive snowball sampling techniques. Green and Aarons (2011) point out the usefulness of this technique in recruiting participants within similar industries. They adopted the technique to select program managers to identify clinicians, administrative support staff and consumers for research purposes (Green & Aarons, 2011). This technique was adopted for this research due to the difficulty in accessing key stakeholders in the newspaper industry. Participants selected at the second level were found to be helpful in

identifying and contacting potential participants who were also stakeholders in the newspaper industry. Upon reaching out to these potential participants who satisfy the selection criteria, those who were interested and available for research participation were contacted and interviewed. This snowballing technique has been criticised for singularity in research data because of the similarity in characteristics of participants (Palinkas et al. 2015). This study, however, makes a case that using passive snowball sampling techniques to gather data from experts may not always result in data singularity. As much as it connects the researcher to participants in a similar field, expert opinions or perceptions turned out to be independent because of their range of experiences. In some cases, responses were similar, indicating prevalence across the industry and in other cases responses specific to participants' experiences were discussed, differing from general perceptions, despite their closely related experiences and work environment. Also, there was a very limited sample to draw from, and as not all individuals had their correct or current details publicly available, this technique proved useful to achieve a suitable and effective sampling process. In the case of this study, stakeholders presented both similar and very different perspectives on different areas of the relationship between digital news media and newspapers. In addition, the singularity flaw was minimised by the first sampling level, which involved the recruitment according to different stakeholder groups in the newspaper industry in Nigeria. Specific requirements for participation in the research are explained in the next section.

### **3.1.3 Selection Criteria**

Participants for this study were recruited into each stakeholder category based on meeting the requirements. In the owner sub-category, owners of Nigerian newspapers with national coverage were eligible to participate in the research. Owners' proxies were also eligible to participate in their stead as it is common practice for newspapers in Nigeria to have resident

publishers or managing editors who are members of the board of directors and can stand proxy for their proprietors. The criterion of national coverage was established because such publications set the pace for regional and community newspapers and have audiences nationwide, making their owners able to comment more broadly on issues of circulation. Also, the coverage criterion helped to achieve uniformity, given that national newspapers operate at the same level and are bound to be equally or similarly affected by factors such as digital diffusion as opposed to regional or community newspapers that operate in small and mostly unilateral communities with much lower budgets and more direct connections with the grassroots.

Employees or internal customers were required to be newspaper journalists who were in active employment in newspaper organisations with national coverage in Nigeria.

Journalists working in regional or community newspapers were excluded based on the criterion of national coverage explained earlier. Non-reportorial staff of newspapers were also excluded from the study because of their non-involvement with news production, as this research is focused primarily on factors relating to news as well as news management and dissemination rather than other aspects such as facility or machinery management.

To be selected in the strategic partners' group, an individual had fall in one of two professional groups. The participant could be a full-time journalism or mass communication lecturer in a tertiary institution. Non-academic and part-time media staff were excluded from the academic participants because of their limited participation in curriculum drafting and learning management. Full-time lecturers, based on their involvement with various parts of academic assignments were better informed and experienced to provide holistic responses beyond classroom teaching experiences. An advertising agency/department official involved

in media buying for both print and digital media also qualified for selection into the strategic partners' group. Advertising staff who were not assigned to client accounts were excluded from this research also because of their limited interactions with clients and the media as well as their limited or no contributions to media selection decisions.

Selection criteria for the special-interest group included executive membership of the Nigerian Union of Journalists or any other top-level group that advocates for the welfare of journalists and works towards improving professionalism and responsibility of journalists in Nigeria.

Generally, the ability to communicate fluently in English was a major criterion for selection to participant in this study. This did not pose any form of barrier as all participants were professionals who already carried out their duties in English, which is the official national language in Nigeria. The selection criteria were useful during the data collection process. They allowed for clarity and specificity in the recruitment of research participants.

Individuals in the owner category were recruited using the availability and snowball sampling techniques. The initial participant was recruited with the availability sampling technique. A few suitable participants whose contact details were publicly available were contacted and the first (only) person who responded was selected for the study. Contact details were accessed on the open platform of the Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE) through its website – [www.ngeditors.org.ng](http://www.ngeditors.org.ng). The participant selected at this stage then contacted other potential participants who met the selection criteria, inviting them to participate in the research. Interested individuals signified their interest and were also contacted and interviewed. They also were able to recommend others until the quota for this sub-group

was complete. Five individuals were interviewed in this stakeholder category. State, regional and community newspapers were excluded from this study as the selection criteria were targeted at owners of newspapers with national coverage or their proxies.

Employees and Internal Customers are also identified as a group of stakeholders. While there can be different groups of employees working in newspaper corporations, only reportorial and editorial staff were considered to fit in this category for the purpose of this study because of their journalism and managerial experiences. Staff in other departments mostly carry out technical assignments and report to management, and make little or no direct contributions to the management of the newspaper. Newspaper journalists who are currently employed in newspaper organisations with national coverage in Nigeria were deemed eligible to participate in the research while journalists who work in community or regional newspapers were excluded. One of the selection criteria was that a journalist must be a registered member of the Nigerian Union of Journalists who works within the location of the research- Lagos and Ogun States, Nigeria; as this helps to ascertain that they work within the research location and to access their details from the union's website.

Membership of the union is listed as one of the criteria for participation in this research because it is regarded as the induction process into the traditional journalism profession, irrespective of the corporation a journalist works for. Hence, it would be highly unlikely to find a newspaper journalist who does not belong to the group. The initial recruitment process for this subgroup was similar to the owner category. Three eligible participants were contacted and two responded. They were both interviewed, and they contacted other potentially eligible participants, some of whom signified interest. Three of them were interviewed to complete the allotted number of five participants for this group.

The third group of stakeholders identified for this project comprises strategic partners. To be selected in this group, an individual had to be a full-time media lecturer in a tertiary institution or an advertising agency/department official who is involved in media buying. As noted in discussion of masthead stakeholder classification in the previous chapter, advertisers' experience in media buying is important to participate in this research to provide knowledge of contemporary media buying habits of organisations. Membership of the African Council for Communication Education (ACCE), the biggest professional institution for media academics and scholars, was important as participants will be recruited using the council's database. Three members of the council who work within the research location were contacted initially and one indicated interest. The participant was able to contact two others who then agreed to be part of the research and were interviewed. The membership database of the Advertising Practitioners' Council of Nigeria (APCON) was not available to the public. However, journalists were able to contact some eligible advertisers and two signified interest. These interested ones were recruited to take part in the study.

Lastly, special interest groups were also considered masthead stakeholders and five people in this category were recruited to be part of this study. Special interest groups represent the specific interests of their constituents or members based on professional, industry, regulatory or community issues. The Nigerian Union of Journalists is the key organisation that represents this group in Nigeria. A request for participation was sent to a state chapter chairman of the union in one of the locations of the research and two executive members of the union who indicated interest were selected as participants because of their interests and experiences in the print media industry in professional and regulatory capacities. The executive members were considered useful for this research given that they are journalists

who have been elected to direct the affairs and protect the interests of other journalists and regulate practices within the journalism profession. Later, another executive member agreed to participate and contacted executives of other special interest groups. Two other interested persons in this group were also selected to fill the quota of five participants.

### **3.1.4 Procedures of Data Collection and Management**

A semi-structured interview was scheduled with each participant and they were given detailed information about the research as contained in the participant information sheet. The participants were required to complete consent forms on participation conditions before each interview was conducted. In cases where participants were qualified to be in more than one group, I allowed them to choose the capacity in which they felt better positioned to address the research concerns and grouped them accordingly. The interviews were audio recorded with the permission of respondents and an interview schedule was used to guide the free-flowing discussion. Each interview took between fifty minutes and one hour. All locations were mutually agreed on by the respondent and the researcher; most interviews were carried out at the office of respondents, except in one case where a library reception area was used.

After each interview, the researcher wrote field notes to track progress, record highlights of interview sessions and keep details of reminders in cases where respondents volunteered to assist in recruiting people in their sub-categories. The notes were helpful in recalling interview activities and kinetic expressions. They were useful as an account of the research process and progress as well as a document of daily logistics of the data collection, changes in methodological decisions and resultant administrative requirements. Field notes are helpful for reflexivity and thematic developments (Lewis, 2015, Nowell, et al., 2017).

Audio recording of interviews were transcribed by the researcher for analysis, reference and

transferability purposes. As per University of Adelaide requirements, data were stored on password protected networked university drives and backed up on an encrypted hard drive.

Twenty stakeholders across four categories participated in this research. The recruitment procedure was guided by research and ethical principles and the combination of three types of purposive sampling turned out useful and appropriate in collecting in-depth information and eliminating bias in the data collected, something that has been the core criticism of qualitative research (Patton, 2002; Palinkas et al., 2015).

### 3.2 Participant Description

The following tables present brief descriptions of the stakeholders who participated in this research project.

Table 1: Brief description of participants in the stakeholder group A – Strategic Partners

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>
Participant A1	A professor of mass communication and member of the editorial board of one of the frontline newspapers in Nigeria. Also, a world bank consultant on rural reach and development. Focuses on development communication.
Participant A2	An associate professor of media and communications. Focuses on public relations and audience engagement.
Participant A3	A former print journalist, now a senior lecturer in mass communication. Focuses on bridging the digital divide between Africa and the western world.
Participant A4	Senior staff at an advertising firm. Involved with media buying and corporate accounts.
Participant A5	Managing Director at an advertising and Public Relations company. Experienced in working with government, large private organisations and prominent individuals.

Table 2: Brief description of participants in the stakeholder group B - Owners

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>
Participant B1	Editor of a national newspaper

	Head of the news company.
Participant B2	Editor of one of Nigeria's oldest newspapers. Former political media adviser.
Participant B3	A veteran journalist. Been in active newspaper management for over fifty years. A media lecturer.
Participant B4	A veteran journalist and media lecturer. Chairman of the editorial board of a leading national newspaper.
Participant B5	Chief Executive Officer at a frontline news corporation with national coverage.

Table 3: Brief description of participants in the Special Interest Group (Sub-Category C)

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>
Participant C1	An executive member at a special interest group. Former managing editor of a newspaper and public relations consultant.
Participant C2	Chapter chairman of a special interest group. Also a media lecturer with a focus on the contributions of print media.
Participant C3	A former newspaper editor. Currently an executive member of a strategic interest group.
Participant C4	Chairman of a special interest group and director at a broadcast corporation. Also an adjunct lecturer in media.
Participant C5	Management member of a special interest group and veteran journalist.

Table 4: Brief description of participants in the Newspaper Employees (Sub-Category D)

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>
Participant D1	Reporter for one of the leading newspapers
Participant D2	News Reporter for a leading newspaper
Participant D3	Newspaper Correspondent and online news reporter
Participant D4	Newspaper correspondent and news blogger
Participant D5	Former newspaper deputy editor, currently online editor

### 3.3 Data Analysis

Data collected from interviews with research participants described in the section above were thematically analysed. Braun and Clarke (2006 p. 79) explain that this method of analysis is used for “identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data”. Thematic analysis can be used to explore a data set in deep detail, interpreting emergent themes to answer research questions. Unlike some other qualitative data analysis methods such as thematic decomposition analysis (DA), interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) and grounded theory, that are theoretically bounded, thematic analysis is flexible with theory; it can be used within different theoretical frameworks (Smith & Osborn, 2003; Braun & Clarke, 2008). This research was theoretically triangulated, adopting media convergence, remediation and stakeholder theories to explain technological developments in print news media environment and stakeholders’ perceptions from their experiences of the precipitated changes. The interpretivist standpoint of this research aligns it with the constructivist movement with the position that “individuals gradually build their own understanding of the world through experience and maturation” (Gall et al. cited in Willis & Jost, 2007, p. 96). This constructionist or interpretivist approach aids in examining or exploring the manners with which “events realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society” (Braun & Clarke 2008, p. 81).

Boyatzis (1998) points out that there are different types of thematic analysis – latent, semantic and theoretical. Identifying latent themes requires drawing out underlying or implied meanings, ideas or assumptions through detailed interpretation. Semantic thematic analysis attempts to unearth surface and explicit meanings from the data, without going beyond information directly available from the data set. Theoretical thematic analysis looks out for a pattern to either buttress or propose a new theory. This research looked for latent

themes within the data set, to maximise the opportunities to explore the depths of the data collected. The experiences shared in the data were used to understand the prevalent situation that is playing out on the Nigerian media landscape as it concerns the relationship between traditional news media and online news media.

The analytic purpose of this project, its theoretical orientation and its exploratory objectives were reasons for the adoption of an exploratory approach to analyse the collected data rather than a confirmatory approach. A confirmatory approach is usually hypothesis-driven, seeking to confirm or deny predetermined hypotheses. In adopting a confirmatory approach to data analysis, codes are generated from the hypotheses and are used as a guide in analysing available data (Neuendorf, 2002; Krippendorf, 2004). An exploratory approach to data analysis is, however, data content-driven, with the intention of answering questions like “what do x people think about y?” and perhaps reasons for the respondents’ pattern(s) of thoughts (Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2011, p. 7). The exploratory approach was considered appropriate to analyse data collected for the purpose of this research considering the analytic purpose, use of research questions, theoretical framework, sampling technique and overarching aim of the research. An exploratory approach is suitable for research that is aimed at exploring scenarios or phenomena and for examining perceptions of different research informants, “highlighting similarities and differences and generating unanticipated insights” (Nowell et al. 2017, p. 3). In adopting this approach, specific codes and categories of analysis are not pre-determined; rather, codes are derived from the collected data. Exploratory analysis is usually used to analyse primary data collected for exploratory purposes.

Guest, MacQueen and Namey (2011, p. 8) argue that “research questions are better suited to

exploratory research while hypotheses better capture objectives of a confirmatory nature”. This study explores research questions based on responses from a research sample that was recruited using mixed purposeful sampling techniques. This process aligns further with King (2004); Braun and Clarke (2006) and Guest, MacQueen and Namey’s (2011) explanation that exploratory studies mostly use non-probabilistic samples of research respondents in generating primary or first-hand data. Guest, MacQueen and Namey, (2011) further explain that purposive sampling techniques are most often used in collecting data for exploratory purposes, underscoring the appropriateness of the sampling technique in the case of this study. As noted earlier in section 3.1.2, a combination or mixed purposeful sampling technique was adopted in selecting participants for the research, with both stratified purposeful and convenience sampling techniques utilised. Adopting these systems of sampling in the recruitment process lays a useful foundation for the use of an exploratory analysis approach. Moreover, in using an exploratory approach, the researcher is required to carefully read and reread the data in search of keywords, recurring trends, themes or ideas to serve as a guideline for analysis before the actual analysis takes place. This differs from a confirmatory approach, which is guided by specific ideas in the form of hypotheses, which the researcher set out to assess or evaluate.

Bernard, Wutich and Ryan (2016) illustrate that qualitative data can be in three forms – audio, text and video. The data gathered for this study was in audio format due to the mode of collection being interviews; but the interviews have been transcribed into textual form. Thus, this research concerns itself with analysis of written text. Bernard, Wutich and Ryan (2016) further show that text may be analysed in two ways – either as a proxy for experience or as an object of analysis in itself. Going by the overarching objective of this study as an exploration of stakeholder perceptions, text is used as a proxy for experience in different aspects of media

practice in Nigeria. This is the reason for sampling stakeholders in their professional capacities in the first place.

Furthermore, analysis of text as a proxy for experience can be carried out in two ways: systematic elicitation and free-flowing text. Data for systematic elicitation is more structured, while free flowing text usually requires unstructured or semi-structured interviews (Bernard & Ryan 1998). Data was collected for this research through semi-structured interviews and are thematically analysed as free flowing text, moving beyond counting particular words and phrases to digging out implicit and explicit perceptions within the data.

Braun and Clarke (2008) present a six-phase process for conducting thematic analysis irrespective of the type of themes under study. The process involves familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report. Similarly, O'Connor and Gibson (2003) put forward a six-step process of analysing qualitative interviews – organising the data, finding and organising ideas and concepts, building overarching themes in the data, ensuring reliability and validity in the data analysis and in the findings, finding possible and plausible explanations for findings and an overview of the final steps. Both processes are similar in approach and were used to guide the conduct of thematic analysis for this study.

The first step in thematically analysing data collected for this research was to become familiar with it. Braun and Clarke (2008) recommend that the researcher be immersed in the data through active and repeated reading in search of meanings and patterns. They further explain that the type of themes a researcher is searching for may inform the way the data is read. Regardless of the theme type, however, it is important for a researcher to be immersed

in all aspects of the data. The required familiarity with qualitative data at this phase is a key reason “to use far smaller samples than, for example, questionnaire research” (Braun and Clarke, 2008, p. 87). As the sole interviewer in this research, I already had a degree of familiarity with the data before I began the formal analysis process. I also read and re-read the data, which is a foundational step in successful data analysis. As proposed by Lapadat and Lindsay (1999) and Bird (2005), I produced an orthographic transcript of the recorded interview sessions and it helped me to gain deeper understanding of the data.

The second step involved generation of initial codes from the data. A code captures a basic idea or element from the raw data, and the coding process allows the data to be organised into meaningful groups (Tuckett, 2005). Bradley, Curry and Devers (2007, p. 1761) explain that “Coding provides the analyst with a formal system to organise the data, uncovering and documenting additional links within and between concept and experiences described in the data.” Coding can be done manually (by highlighting or extracting potential patterns) or using a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software programme (CAQDAS) such as Nvivo or Leximancer (Kelle, 2004; Bringer, Johnston & Brackenridge, 2006; Sotiriadou, Brouwers & Le, 2014). A hybrid of both practices is also possible (Fereday, J. & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Manual coding is used for this study since, as the interviewer, I already had a degree of familiarity with the data. The transcription process further enhanced my familiarity with and understanding of it. Codes are different from themes but can help identify themes, and this role of codes underscores the importance of this process. Codes are differentiated from themes at the level of analysis. During this analysis, codes were assigned during the line-by-line reading of the data to tag or label concepts, and were refined throughout the reading and rereading of the data. Recurrent unifying codes about the research subject were then grouped into themes that provide holistic insights into specific aspects of

the data set in line with Bradley, Curry and Devers (2007).

In the third phase of the analysis, potential themes were identified and the extracted codes sorted under them. At this point, I studied the connection between different codes to group them under overarching themes. After coming up with a set of themes, I reviewed and refined them as necessary. I merged some themes because their meanings were significantly similar. Some themes were split further because they were crowded with ideas with elements of divergence. Themes were grouped based on the way they addressed the research objectives. Two key actions in this phase are ascertaining how well the themes “work with the data set” and “to code any additional data within themes that has been missed in earlier coding stages” (Braun & Clarke, 2008, p. 91). A theme must be cohesive, with codes relating to each other, while themes must be clearly distinct from each other (Braun & Clarke, 2008).

I then proceeded to name and define the themes in the fifth phase. In this phase, each theme was clearly defined, explaining what it is about and the aspect of the data it captures. The data was then analysed within these themes; breaking down the themes to extract inherent answers to the research questions. Themes were developed to independently and adequately address research objectives to avoid overlapping.

### **3.4 Ethical Considerations**

The processes of recruitment for this research were ratified and approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Adelaide with approval number H-2017-226. The methodology and recruitment processes were adopted having carefully considered ethical issues such as local legislation, participants’ ages, selection criteria, sourcing of participants, participants’ consent, anonymity, data management, likely risks and mitigation

measures. The major reason for ethical compliance in any research is to ensure high moral standards and to eliminate or drastically minimise any form of imminent harm to any person during the research process (Forrester & Sullivan, 2018) and this knowledge guided the conduct of this project.

The locations for this research were Lagos and Ogun states, both in south-western Nigeria. At the time of data collection for this study, there were no local legislations in these locations that negated or limited the activities carried out in conducting this research in any way. Hence, the study was guided by the University of Adelaide Human Research Ethics Committee requirements and ethical guidelines contained in the Australian National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.

Ethical issues were also considered in establishing selection criteria for the research. Apart from the criteria explained earlier, participants also needed to be at least 18 years old. This did not in any way obstruct adequate data collection as persons who fitted within the various stakeholder classifications were most likely to be aged at least 18. Knowledge of the English language was also a requirement for participation, but this did not hamper the collection of adequate data, as the research explored use of newspapers with national coverage and all that fit into this category are published in the English language, being the official national language of Nigeria.

All participants were recruited essentially based on their interest in the research through stratified, availability and passive snowball sampling. The first level of participants recruited by availability were requested to circulate calls for participation and participant information sheets to their colleagues who were eligible to participate in this research. Interested

individuals signified their interest and were selected for participation. The process was repeated until the quota for each subgroup was complete. All participants signed off on consent forms as having been satisfactorily informed of every aspect of their participation and being aware that participation was voluntary.

An important aspect of the ethical considerations for this research was privacy and confidentiality. The default position of this research was to anonymise participants. Names and organisations of participants were excluded from the data set and replaced with alpha-numeric non-identifying information. Using non-identifying information helped to effectively de-identify participants, given the similarities in stakeholders' descriptions. As contained in the participant information sheet, interviewees could opt out of the project any time within one year from the date of their interviews (between June and August 2018) if they had concerns about being identified or for any other reasons, but none did so. To adequately manage and protect research data, all collected data were stored in password secured University of Adelaide cloud storage (Box) and an encrypted external drive. Production of hardcopy research data was minimised as much as possible and hardcopies were securely stored in the researcher's office. Likely risks for participants were also considered.

Participants determined the timing of the interviews subject to interest and availability. Regarding location-related risks, Lagos and Ogun states are two of the most organised, secure and peaceful states in South-West Nigeria, with Lagos the commercial centre and Ogun a border state, and are not areas prone to violence and attacks. Interviews were carried out within the organisations of the interviewees or participant-nominated venues or over the phone in a few cases. It is worth noting also that the two locations of this research have been peaceful and politically stable in recent years. I scrupulously adhered to the ethical standards guiding this project as contained in the approval (H-2017-226). Possible risks to participants

were carefully minimised and I ensured that all interviewees participated of their free will.

### **3.5 Credibility and Dependability**

Qualitative research has been criticised in comparison to quantitative research as less credible and dependable (Flinders & Eisner, 1994). Although it could be argued that the flexibility of thematic analysis and qualitative research in general may lead to inconsistency and lack of coherence in theme development, Holloway and Todres (2003) argue that consistency and cohesion can be enhanced by taking an epistemological position that provides a framework for the study's empirical claims. This study is robustly buttressed with epistemological underpinnings in the literature chapter and the epistemological framework guided consistency and cohesion throughout the project.

The sample of this study was also stratified to ensure wide stakeholder coverage, adding rigour to the process and reducing the chances of unilateral perspective bias. Upon stratification of stakeholders into subcategories, convenience sampling was used to reach interested participants who then participated in passive snowball sampling. The multiplicity in the recruitment pattern of this project further contributes to its credibility and dependability (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017).

In line with the University of Adelaide Human Research Ethics Committee requirements, the procedures involved in this research were made clear to participants. Audio recordings of interviews, word-processed transcripts and completed consent forms are stored securely and will be preserved for at least five years after the completion of this research. The research was also subjected to supervision of reputable scholars in the Media discipline. The supervisors provided scrutiny and guidance throughout the research process.

### **3.6 Relexivity Statement**

Being a Nigerian and a media scholar, who had been previously studied, researched and worked in the Nigerian media landscape, I have acquired deep knowledge as well as personal opinion of the media environment from direct and indirect experiences. While this background knowledge contributed immensely to my discussion of the historical and contemporary occurrences in the local news environment, I consciously endeavoured to put my personal opinions in check except in cases where they are confirmed in published views of experts. Having to go through the process of ethics approval with the Human Research Ethics Committee also helped to minimise possibilities for subjectivity in my interactions with Nigerian media stakeholders who participated in the research. All forms of interactions, including initial contacts and interview schedules were subjected to HREC's scrutiny prior to the commencement of data collection.

Overall, having a deep understanding of the Nigerian media landscape contributed to the depth of this thesis as it aided my ability to make sense of the data collected, as well as focus primarily on the country's local context without necessarily bringing in external and personal biases. This thesis thus presents an insider's exploration of the Nigerian media landscape.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Findings**

This chapter presents research findings based on data collected through semi-structured interviews with print media stakeholders grouped in four purposive stratifications: A- strategic partners, B – newspaper owners, C – special interest groups, and D – newspaper employees. Each group had five participants based on the criteria outlined in the methodology. In all, twenty interviews were conducted and all of them were thematically analysed.

The overarching objective of this research is to explore the notions of remediation and replacement in the context of the Nigerian mainstream print media. It has three main aims - to assess masthead stakeholders' perceptions of digitalisation in the news media landscape; to explore the level of relevance and sustainability potentials of traditional mastheads; and to examine traditional mastheads' responses to growing digital news diffusion. Each of these aims formed the framework for a broad theme.

Media ethics was a code that recurred across the initial three broad themes identified.

Participants made valuable inferences on how ethicality affects the relationships between traditional mastheads and digital news media; these inferences led me to include ethics as a fourth unified theme to allow for a holistic consideration of the participants' discussion of this important area.

The four central themes identified from the data set therefore were: (a) experiences and perceptions of news digitalisation; (b) sustainability potentials of traditional mastheads; (c) reaction strategies of traditional mastheads and stakeholders to continued digital news media

diffusion; and (d) ethical implications of digital news dissemination. These themes, as explored below, address the threefold aims of this research and contribute an additional finding that further aids overall understanding of the relationships between traditional mainstream mastheads and digital news platforms.

#### **4.1. Theme 1 – Experiences and Perceptions of News Digitalisation**

In discussing their understandings of the level and dimensions of news digitalisation in Nigeria, participants explored their perceptions about the digitalisation occurring in the Nigerian media landscape, with their differing experiences and understandings providing a range of perspectives on the issues. Three key sub-themes have been identified and structure the discussion of the data: technological fallibilities and inadequate digitalisation, digital replacement, and digital complementarity.

##### **4.1.1. Supporting Theme 1 - Technological Fallibilities and Inadequate Digitalisation**

About half the participants in this research discussed the state of digitalisation in the local media context, with one widespread view reflecting the fallibility of digital technologies and lapses in digitisation efforts. The technological situation in Nigeria was portrayed as inadequate and unreliable. Even though internet usage is increasing, supply does not seem to be growing at the same rate, meaning the rising user population has to share limited bandwidth.

Participants A1 and A2 explained that even though digitalisation is the right direction, hardcopy newspaper circulation will still be important because technology is sometimes unreliable. Participant A1 noted that “technology can fail at any time”. She compared the situation in Nigeria to the USA and some European countries, saying that while replacement

may be possible in those places, this would be partly because of good internet access, unlike in Nigeria where internet services are not reliable. She explained that the lack of reliable digital technologies and the resulting frustration may be contributing to some people's preference for traditional media forms. The state of internet services in the country is inadequate because the private telecommunication companies that are the major suppliers of internet services in Nigeria mostly supply 3G connections, with 4G sparsely available in about twelve states out of thirty-six and mostly limited to the state capitals (where the purchasing power is relatively high) (Nperf.com, 2019). Access also fluctuates or ceases intermittently without notice. As a result, users often complain about the poor connections, buttressing the perception that technology may fail.

Irregularities in power supplies and how these can hinder reliability of digital technologies were the particular concern for participant B2. This participant noted that with incessant power cuts, "it is probably easier and more reliable to get and document hardcopies." This participant believes that until the fundamental issue of electricity is fixed, reliability of digital technologies and full-on adoption of digital news will be near impossible to attain. Improved electricity supply has been a recurring electoral campaign promise in the history of elections in Nigeria, yet the supply remains inadequate despite being a major requirement for development (Batinge, Musango & Brent, 2019). Sometimes, telecommunication companies cite power outages as an excuse for the failure of internet connections, signifying the importance of electricity for improved connectivity. Considering these problems with supply of a basic utility, the relatively low priority of a fast and constant internet supply by government may be more understandable.

On a different note, participant A1 raised optical health concerns as a perceived disadvantage

of digitalisation and said some users were beginning to consider trying to minimise screen time. According to her, digital platforms “have implications for eye lenses.” Hence, she suggests that while users may not be able to stay away from device screens, some who are conscientious about their optical health seem to prefer print options where available.

Some participants also pointed out issues of inadequate or incomplete digitalisation – a situation where legacy media corporations have not optimally utilised available technologies and engagement channels, affecting traffic, quality and usability of some digital news platforms. Some participants feel that newspapers need to engage with social media users more to optimise digital engagement. Participants D3 and D4, for instance, spoke on leveraging social media followings:

With celebrities having as much as four million followers [on social networking sites] and newspapers are still struggling to make their presence known online, it is important to make use of all available avenues.

To participant D4, “newspapers need to get involved with those who can influence their target audience through social media news sharing.” This participant went further to illustrate how social media followings of entertainers and influencers surpass the print run and circulation of many newspapers even at their peak.

Equally, participant A4 talked about the need for newspapers to deliberately and decisively make use of social media platforms for news dissemination, noting the distinctiveness of each platform. He said that:

Newspapers need to develop content strategy. They share stories

on social media but it is not ideal to carry content from Facebook and slam it on Twitter, pick from Twitter and slam it on LinkedIn, pick from LinkedIn and slam it on Instagram. They need specific strategies that are optimal for the platforms they want to use.

He suggested that as social networking platforms are varied in outlook, style and audience usage, “copying and pasting” news stories across different platforms may not yield optimal results; rather, each platform should be utilised according to the common style of its users as this will improve audience engagement. Similarly, participant B3 noted that such placement happens across print and digital news platforms. He said: “What you have in hardcopy is also often available online, so what they have done is to transform hardcopy into softcopy for mass readership.” He said simply transforming hardcopy into softcopy is not adequate for online audiences. Participant C1 suggested that similarities in style may appear as competition because both platforms offer the same content: “what we have right now is just a newspaper taking raw news stories from its print edition and putting them online, both are basically the same.”

He noted that: “I think they are supposed to do things in different ways, but right now, that differentiation is yet to be pronounced.” This suggests the need for both hardcopies and online formats to have unique selling points that distinguish them from each other.

Participant B4 noted that news writers need to be more fluid in the way they write online, using their training as background knowledge but learning and adapting as the industry changes. He stated that “editors, reporters and correspondents still want to write for tomorrow’s paper rather than for this minute.” In essence, this participant believes that newspaper reportorial staff still sub-consciously operate in the traditional model of writing news as though readers are not already privy to the information contained in the stories,

which is typically no longer the case with the immediacy digital platforms offer. To participant B4, news should be treated with a higher sense of urgency and relevance. With timeliness being a core value of news, and digital media allowing for free and immediate information flow, this participant says newspapers should write for the moment and strategically provide follow-up in hardcopy later. He points out that although newspapers are trying to adapt, the adaptation rate is still very slow and the digitalisation process has remained inadequate, considering how fast technology advances.

Participants C4 and D1 attributed the inadequate differences in print and digital styles to a skill deficit in the country's media landscape. According to participant C4:

The challenge is lack of skill. How many online journalists have we produced in Nigeria that would rewrite the story? Because writing for the online [platforms] is different from writing from the traditional media. When you go online, you are usually not bothered to read the whole thing, you need to write subtitles, and everybody will go there to pick what he or she needs.

This response shows the inadequacy of relevant skills for online news writing. Participant D1 explained that many news platforms adopt a digital channel, but are still analogue in their approach. From his point of view, "online media are still being written like they do on paper." Consequently:

Replacement cannot happen in Nigeria just yet, because online practitioners are yet to get it right. They need to undergo some basic trainings, but they care less. All they care about is to attract traffic to their sites and get paid for adverts.

This re-occurring perception points out the fact that media practice is still fundamentally traditional in Nigeria and practitioners are simply migrating their analogue skills to a digital world. The common opinion of inadequacy of digital techniques in the Nigerian media landscape is that digital news channels are underperforming. The medium's features are yet to be optimised to aid ease of use and distinguish digital news from older forms, especially print. Based on these perceptions, stakeholders suggest that online news media in Nigeria operate with a level of dependence on traditional news platforms and may not be able to function adequately as replacements for newspapers. Hence, the stakeholders interviewed for this project hold the common view that although digital news platforms are increasing in popularity with the continued spread of internet connectivity, these platforms are yet to be maximised to improve user experience with optimised formatting and stylistic differences. The participants agreed that news mastheads seem to be tapping into the digital economy solely to obtain a share of advertising revenue.

#### **4.1.2. Supporting Theme 2: Digital Replacement in the Nigerian Media Landscape**

A broad overview of stakeholder perceptions indicates that both schools of thought on the dialectic being examined are present in the media environment under consideration. This theme looks more specifically into responses that tilt towards outright replacement of traditional newspapers by digital news platforms. It is worth noting that while most participants expressed uncertainties about the future of newspapers, few suggested that newspapers will ultimately be replaced. Only two participants – C5 and B4 – at some point during their interviews provided responses suggesting that newspapers are gradually moving towards extinction. Hence their views are discussed in this section.

Participant C5, in the special interest stakeholder category, compared the immediacy of both

platforms and observed:

Even in terms of news coverage and timing, before the newspaper comes out tomorrow, online platforms already have the story... The discourses have gone everywhere... And then you are coming out the following day? I really pity the mainstream, they cannot survive, and that is why they cannot pay salaries. It is no longer fashionable for many people to wait.

Considering the real-time advantage of digital platforms for news dissemination, participant C5 shared his belief that it is becoming increasingly hard for conventional newspapers to survive, including making regular salary payments to newspaper staff. During the collection of this research data, I became aware that some newspaper companies owe backlogs of salaries of up to six months. The trend is also evident in other industry sectors, among government and privately-owned companies, and may be more an indication of the national economic situation than an industry-specific one.

He also pointed out that consumers had access to online news from around the world, indicating that some readers may abandon Nigerian print newspapers in favour of higher quality online international news sources. Participant C5 also cited the interactivity features of digital platforms that allow users to engage in public discourse as an advantage over traditional newspapers. While this position provides valuable insight into perspectives of international news consumers in Nigeria, international news may not reflect the interests of the majority of consumers. Even within the study sample, only this participant explicitly mentioned this internationally comparative view of news contents in Nigeria and more developed contexts.

Similar to participant D5, participant C5 suggested that most conventional newspaper companies use their online platforms to indicate presence in the online space, rather than to make information fully available to audiences, while also noting that traditional newspapers often contain “excessive” advertisements, causing them to be less attractive to readers. Participant C5 continued by comparing the trends in some parts of Europe, North America, Asia and Africa. He noted that while newspapers are thinning out in some European countries and America, newspapers in some Asian countries are growing bigger, citing the examples of Japan’s *Asahi Shimbun* and *Yomiuri Shimbun* that still circulate in the millions. The points raised here indicate that local contexts may provide different experiences of digital media impacts on legacy news media forms. He claimed that literacy rate in Asia (with an average of about 81%) is higher than in Africa, averaging 60%, (UNESCO, 2017), which may be why newspaper sales are still high in some parts of Asia. Despite his initial leanings towards replacement, when asked if newspapers were approaching extinction, Participant C5 said it might ultimately happen, but that they currently serve some usefulness in the local news landscape.

On a similar note, participant B4 suggested that newspapers may fizzle out, but it will not happen immediately given that there are still some factors in the local environment that support their existence.

It might not happen now, maybe later. I said so because newspapers are not expanding, they are only making efforts to be in the digital area. [However] advertising revenue still comes to newspapers because decision makers in advertising still belong to that tradition...

This response describes some current experiences as reasons why newspapers may not disappear yet, but participant B4 explained that it is only a matter of time before digital platforms completely take over the news media landscape. He noted one reason why newspapers might still survive the coming years, which is advertising. His case for replacement is hinged on reduced numbers in copy sales and potential transition of decision-making powers to the younger generation who are generally more digitally inclined. He further noted that the likelihood of digital replacement has been a recurring issue at newspaper management meetings:

We always talk about the reduction in circulation and it is becoming too worrisome. The newspaper is like a patient waiting to die. The physicians [journalists] are doing practically nothing; it's as if they are clueless about what to do about it and the newspaper is seen as a fascinating living relic.

This highlights the uncertainties in traditional newsrooms and their influence on the actions and decisions of top-level stakeholders. The response portrays a situation of helplessness in expectation of what might come next. B4's description of managerial meetings indicates that some mastheads may have given up, waiting for the end to come, despite still having advertisers and audiences.

#### **4.1.3. Supporting Theme 3 - Digital complementarity in Nigerian Media Landscape**

Some responses from participants in this study indicated complementarity between traditional and digital news media. Interestingly, some participants who had earlier indicated that replacement is imminent also gave some of these responses, especially when considering local contexts that applied to their organisations or the peculiarities of the Nigerian

environment and news audiences. This kind of perception supports the need for considering continent or country-specific circumstances before drawing conclusions on such an area of study.

This subtheme provides an overview of stakeholders' perceptions of how newspapers in Nigeria maintain their relevance despite the increase in internet and digital technology penetration in the Nigerian media space, resulting in a situation of complementarity or, as Bolter and Grusin (2000) put it, remediation. It demonstrates a situation of media symbiosis with various media forms co-existing without one becoming extinct because of the advent of the other. Although complementarity issues will be explored further under the second theme, which delves deeper into perceptions of sustainability of newspapers in Nigeria, this section reports overarching perceptions about the inter-dependency of print and digital news forms and some of the factors responsible for this in the Nigerian context.

One of the aims of technology is to improve processes and maximise results. Participant C4 leveraged this idea to say that the emergence of digital news media will not put an end to “journalism as we know it,” but that it will rather improve the process and add value to the product.

It is value addition. Online media is a product of 21<sup>st</sup> century technology, which on its own is meant to drive the process of news production, news gathering and provide a new template for storytelling.

This response acknowledges that digital news channels can contribute to improving the process of news gathering and the quality of news being disseminated. Participant C4 holds that news digitalisation provides an added advantage to newspapers and not a threat to their

existence. This participant said newspapers should step up to the challenge and leverage on the advantages digital technologies bring, just as these technologies leverage on the existing systems to improve news dissemination. Participant C4 also pointed out that the capabilities of digital news technologies should not be undermined by limited deployment, rather newspapers should understand the trend and adapt to changing news media environments:

Today, hardly will you find any newspaper that does not have an online edition. It is about immediacy and feedback; that is what most online editions serve to do, not replace print. Adverts online are different and more expensive than what you will find in print.

Responses from some other participants also indicate how digital technologies can add value to existing systems. A major factor in Nigeria that was cited in favour of a complementary interrelationship between traditional and digital news platforms is the digital divide between different parts of the country. Participants A1 and B5 drew on this divide, which reflects the rural-urban dichotomy in Nigeria, to explain the continued relevance of newspapers. While participant A1 acknowledges that digital news platforms are becoming more ubiquitous, she suggests newspapers remain useful to take information to the hinterlands where they complement broadcast efforts in keeping residents informed:

The print media is still needed to reach out to those in rural areas without internet access. Until everyone becomes internet savvy and are able to access the internet easily, [digital] replacement is not feasible in Nigeria.

Participant B4 also explained that newspapers still enjoy some level of consumer loyalty in news markets:

Newspapers are still cherished by a demographic especially those who grew up with them... Interestingly, it is this group of people that mostly have the money to buy newspapers and they are the ones that enjoy the corporeal contact with the newspaper rather than going online or surfing the internet.

This response anchors the current situation of complementarity in the fact that the loyalty newspapers enjoy is largely based on readership traditions of older users. This shows that newspapers still have segments of the news market they cater to and reasons for their continued loyalty despite available digital alternatives. This participant added that the same might not be the case with younger users:

Culture is passed on from one generation to the other but it is discovered that the younger generation does not seem interested in holding the newspaper. So, the life span of the newspaper is probably going to be limited to the capacity of the older generation. So maybe when they go, the newspapers will go with them.

Although this focus on the segmentation of the news media market illustrates existing complementarity, it also demonstrates uncertainties about the future, given that younger audiences may not adopt similar readership preferences as they become older.

Participant D4 reflected a similar point of view, saying that in Nigeria's local context, it connotes an elitist behaviour to flip through newspaper pages, especially at a time when not much is being done to improve the credibility of online news platforms. According to him:

There are some elites who still believe in the conventional way of flipping through the pages to read their newspapers, despite

the fact that they can get the same information from online sources. They still trust the traditional media more than online platforms.

The idea of elite preference for conventional newspapers may be connected to the longstanding relationship between government and the press as well as referencing the value of newspapers, as noted by participant B3. This participant refers to the historical relationship between press and politics in Nigeria and how newspapers were used as the main medium for mass mobilisation towards political goals. He noted that it became part of the local elite culture to flip through the pages to stay abreast of relevant information. He suggested that there are still people holding on to this culture and that newspapers will continue to benefit from it, and as long as organisations are willing to run newspapers professionally, the democratic government should create an environment for media forms to thrive. He also made the point that many companies in Nigeria that have kept newspapers in their libraries continue to do so, as they believe the archiving systems of many online news sites are not efficient. Additionally, stories sometimes disappear when the news site experiences technical glitches.

Further comments on how the fallibility of and inadequate access to technology contributes to complementarity were made by participants A2 and C1. Participant A2 explained that some users find hard copy newspapers more reliable because they cannot just be impaired by intermittent power cuts, in line with participant B2's explanation in section 4.1.1. In his opinion, it is easier and more reliable to archive newsprint because "if all of a sudden your device refuses to come up or connect" as a result of power or internet service outage, readers may still have to fall back on the hardcopy option. Participant C1 also highlighted irregular power and internet provision as hindrances to full-scale digitalisation. In addition, the cost of

internet subscription is relatively high, given that Nigeria is a low-income country with almost half of the population living below the international poverty line of US \$2 per day (World Economic Forum, 2019). While people who prefer digital channels, who have access, and can afford them, may fully adopt and consistently use them, those who do not have adequate resources for and access to digital technologies may still need to rely on traditional media forms. These participants suggested that for digital news platforms to be capable of replacing print, everyone would have to have ready access to them. As Nigeria is far from being completely connected, traditional newspapers remain relevant to those who do not have access to digital infrastructure and services as well as those who have access but prefer traditional newspapers.

Some participants spoke about the need to operate digital platforms to improve the reach and relevance of newspaper companies. Despite her earlier position on the sustainability of hardcopy newspapers, participant A1 says it is equally important for newspapers to have a digital presence to cater for the digital news market. She cited the uncertainty in the media industry as a case for adoption of digital platforms so that in a situation where hardcopy readership fizzles out, the digital option will keep traditional mastheads in business. This participant still thinks, however, that outright replacement is unlikely to occur in Nigeria any time soon because of the unequal distribution of wealth and infrastructure access, and that “it will be a huge risk for any newspaper [in Nigeria] to go absolutely online now.”

Diversification helps newspapers to strengthen their brands and increase their readership. Participant D2 shares this opinion on leveraging digital news media to widen audience scope, noting that “newspapers can use digital media to reach audiences that do not buy hardcopies.” Although newspapers already make efforts to reach the digital audience, these participants argue that it is more productive to avoid treating both platforms as the same but instead

develop digital skills to maximise online engagement.

Participant A4 explained the importance of digital technology adoption by saying it provides room for remediation and improvement, which are prerequisites for organisational development. He said that: “Interaction is key. People want to be heard and digital media gives them the platform.” This highlights one of the shortcomings of hardcopy newspapers. He explained that having online editions broadens the market scope of newspapers and widens the horizon for traditional mastheads:

An online version is important to remain relevant in the newspaper business. It allows them to reach a different demographic and ultimately a wider audience. It is also an avenue to respond to feedback and build loyal followership. It gives room for all media forms [such as] videos, audios, text and so on.

His response highlights the convergence features of digital news platforms by noting how they can provide information in visual, audio and textual formats, improving on pre-existing traditional platforms. This also reflects participant B4’s explanation of his newspaper organisation’s strategy regarding the adoption of digital dissemination technology. He explained that their digital platforms are being structured to take advantage of the existing print infrastructure while restructuring print to maximise the nimbleness of online news platforms. This reflects a strategy being adopted by most traditional newspapers - adding an online unit or department to existing operations.

Despite acknowledging the growth of digital news diffusion, the research participants’

responses show some uncertainty and fear about potential newspaper irrelevance. This is illustrated in participant B4's views:

It has affected the capacity to project towards the future. Newspaper owners and managers meet to discuss when they should look into transition in a profitable way, from print to digital... Managements are still bound to print and they are not kinetic enough to understand that it is time to change and bring younger people to help drive the change.

This indicates resistance to change, as it appears that newspaper owners and managers still operate as they did before the advent of digital journalism. Participant B4 noted that this is a challenge and affects how newspaper companies respond to advancing digital technologies. This participant raised questions about the fate of newspapers in the age of digitalisation, and the uncertainty of the media environment:

How will newspapers make money? There are so many online advertisements so how will the newspapers compete in that atmosphere? How will they create their own niche? Google and other tech giants may also come out and say they are news organisations, because they have the digital platform. How can a newspaper beat that?

He added that based on contemporary experiences, technological advancements are inevitable and will continue to contribute to changes in news media landscapes.

Things will take a new shape eventually. It is still very nebulous to people all over the world... Answers to these questions will

still be determined by technology. The new technology that is developed will help and the social culture will change... The point is that managing news will be more complex than what it used to be in the past.

Being a newspaper proprietor, participant B4 was able to discuss the uncertainties his organisation has been facing in recent times. These responses are indicative of the gap this research effort is exploring, and confirm the uncertainties in the news media landscape. They also provide insight into the mood of traditional newspaper stakeholders and possible reasons for their responses to digital diffusion, which are further addressed under Theme 3.

Issues raised under this theme acknowledge the diffusion of digital news media and the uncertainty it causes in traditional newspaper corporations. On the one hand, the participants describe shortcomings of the digitalisation process based on infrastructure inadequacies as well as a lack of sufficiently skilled media workers to optimise the functionalities of digital news media. On the other hand, they refer to efforts they are making to improve their relevance across both platforms by leveraging digital channels to penetrate online audiences. Most stakeholders shared the position that online news media operate in dependence on conventional media platforms. They also believe that the unreliability of technological amenities limits the prospects for digital news platforms, thereby still making traditional newspapers relevant in the local news milieu.

#### **4.2 Theme 2 - Sustainability of Traditional Mastheads in Nigeria**

Another central theme that was identified from a thematic analysis of the data collected is the sustainability of traditional mastheads in Nigeria. Although some of the key ideas and understandings discussed under Theme 2 were also reflected in the previous section, section

4.2 focuses on prospects of conventional mastheads in more detail, exploring this from participant stakeholders' perspectives on the past and present to explore future possibilities.

#### **4.2.1 Supporting Theme 1- The Past: Historical Reflections on Newspaper Sustainability**

As noted earlier in chapter two, knowledge of the evolution and historical terrain of newspapering in Nigeria is crucial to understanding contemporary newspaper journalism practice, which in turn serves as a pointer to the future of the industry. Several participants - especially in the owner, special interest and strategic partner sub-categories - referred to Nigeria's press and political history, pointing out that Nigeria's press evolved in the colonial era and as such had colonial inheritances that affect its contemporary operations and may affect its future. This section highlights historical issues and considers historical influences on present-day news media in Nigeria.

Participant B1 explained that the press has always been seen as a part of governance in Nigeria and that it was instrumental in the nation's independence and the current system of democratic government. Involvement of the media in issues of governance has been the case since the first newspaper emerged. He noted that – like elsewhere in the world - traditional print media set the tone for journalistic activities in Nigeria, as newspapers were the first formal journalism platforms. He further suggested that newspapers remain the bedrock of journalism in Nigeria because other platforms (such as radio and television) often make reference to them for issues and stories they may later analyse, further develop or even report directly.

Another participant in the owner category, B3, also explained that the interrelationship between the press and politics in Nigeria has existed since the beginning of formal journalism

in the country when the first newspaper - *Iwe Irohin* - was established. He explained that while this newspaper was set up by an English missionary for religious and educational purposes (as described in section 2.2.1), it veered into local politics with an anti-colonial stance, which caused a backlash from the government:

The colonial governor in Lagos berated the publisher for using the newspaper to attack colonial policies. The governor reported the Reverend Townsend to England and the Anglican Communion in Nigeria warned him to refrain from attacking policies of government... It does not matter who owns the newspaper it is the content that matters and what the newspaper is set out to achieve.

This helps to explain the underlying structure and mission of news media in Nigeria. Henry Townsend's initial aim was to engender a culture of reading among locals, gradually enhancing literacy, so readers could access printed religious information. Later, news on political occurrences and situations began to appear in the newspaper. Although Townsend was English, his newspaper appeared to have aligned with local citizens rather than with colonial authorities and the paper was seen as a tool for political liberation. This participant pointed out that from this point in Nigeria's history, print newspapers have been perceived as showing solidarity and support in demanding people-oriented governance. This perception explains the role ownership plays in setting the agenda of some frontline Nigerian mastheads and how such agendas may be factors to consider in understanding current print media operations and their sustainability prospects. *Iwe Irohin* stopped publishing in 1867, not because there was another media form to challenge it but because the colonial government made the operational environment unconducive for survival, a strategy successive

governments have used, even decades after independence. This is why media unions have actively repelled every form of incremental governmental regulation for the media.

Participant A2 referred to another aspect of Nigeria's press history, explaining broad perceptions of technological developments in the media. In his view, the roles hardcopy newspapers and online news platforms play are perceived to be different and as such the historical terrain of complementarity will continue. He noted that "historically, people thought that when radio came, it would kill newspaper, and that television would kill radio but those have not happened. So, I think they have specific historical roles". This position indicates that there is a need to take a closer look at the Nigerian media environment to understand the different roles media platforms play. Participant B3 similarly said:

It happened then in the early 30s when radio was established in Nigeria, it was also argued that the end of newspaper had come, that radio will send them packing. Since 1932 when the first radio was established so many newspapers have sprung up. Although some have collapsed, many newspapers are still circulating.

Despite past predictions and expectations that newspapers would die off, participant B3 explained that the business of newspapering had stayed strong and continued to occupy a central place in Nigeria's democratic space. He noted further that the trend continued when the first television – Western Nigeria Television - was established in Nigeria:

When television came to Nigeria in 1959, the same statement was made by some of us, that it is the end of radio and newspaper, since television has the mix of visuals and audio. However again, television complemented radio, radio complemented the newspapers and the three of them still exist. So, it is highly likely

we will have a similar case again.

He suggested that on this basis, newspapers are likely to remain an important part of news media in the local terrain.

Despite suggesting that replacement may eventually be the case, participant C5 also agreed that historically, in Nigeria, the invention of a new technology in media has not driven existing ones away. Rather, each new technology continues to develop. This incremental innovation is why some online platforms have withered away, because newer online platforms improve on the shortcomings of older ones and are consequently more effective and efficient. In essence, replacement is more likely to happen between similarly structured media platforms, rather than between different media structures and generations. He further highlighted that digital replacement was internationally predicted to have taken place by 2015, but that has not yet happened in Nigeria.

*The Economist* predicted some time ago, in fact, it was predicted that in 2015, we will see the last of newspapers. That was the prediction of *The Economist*, but that has not taken place. In Nigeria, what is happening is the withdrawing of some smaller newspaper brands.

This assertion sheds more light on the sustainability potentials of newspapers. Indeed, no frontline national newspaper that has existed for more than ten years has closed down or merged because of digital disruption. Rather, newer ones and those serving smaller populations within regions and communities (especially rural) appear to be more affected by the prevalent conditions, perhaps because their markets have been further segmented or because of economic downturns, which increase the production costs for smaller newspapers. Some start-up news sites may see the niches left as gaps to fill, but limited internet

availability in regional areas could hinder their successful operation in affected areas. Hence, the withering of smaller newspapers appears to be an opportunity for bigger ones to reach the unattended audiences, thereby increasing their relevance. Even though stakeholders acknowledged that this position of market dominance is currently challenged by advances in digital news technologies, some of the stakeholders leveraged on this trend of survival and sustained relevance to express optimism about the future of newspapers.

#### **4.2.2 Supporting Theme 2 – The Present: Contemporary Realities in the Nigerian Newspaper Industry**

Looking at historical trends, newspapers, as the oldest form of formal journalism in Nigeria, have not only survived the emergence of every incremental or radical technological innovation in news dissemination, but have also remained an integral part of the news media landscape. This section thus explores contemporary occurrences in the local newspaper industry, given the continued diffusion of digital news media, and what these occurrences may portend for the future of newspapers in Nigeria. All participants shared relevant experiences and perceptions about current trends and their opinion on the overall state of newspapers, making reference to the local socio-political environment, technological disruption, operational environments, organisational management issues, audience demographics, and national economy to assess the current positioning of newspapers in the broad media landscape.

##### **4.2.2.1 Socio-Political Influences and Digital Disruption in the Local News Landscape**

Findings of this research highlight some factors that influence the dissemination of news in Nigeria's contemporary news media landscape. This section discusses these factors and how they are affected by the availability of online news. One factor that emerged from the data is

political attempts at suppressing stories that are critical of the government. Participant A5 explained that in the process of following journalistic principles of balance and fairness by verifying stories from concerned parties, news stories may be tampered with if not totally suppressed as driven by agents of government. Newspaper managements are more afraid to go against the wishes of government because government is a major source of press advertising and being blacklisted can threaten newspapers' continued existence. He explained that the press was more active in the junta days because newspapers thrived more on stories than advertisements. They mostly obtained stories from investigations and well-informed sources. However, in this democratic era, most newspapers are more inclined to wait for press releases, press conferences or invitations to events to source news so as not to unearth news stories that government wants suppressed. As a result, newspaper reports are generic and mostly approached from similar angles. Participant A5 pointed out that in cases where there are some leads to exclusive news content that affects a political administration, unlike some online-only channels that do not bother with verifying stories, newspapers are expected to do so, rather than risking exaggerating the story or reporting a completely false one. In the process of confirming the veracity of such stories, there would always be attempts by government media officers to "kill" them. He added that the globally popular trend of appointing journalists to government roles, causing them to transition into media officers for politicians, makes the situation worse in Nigeria, as they sometimes try to leverage personal relationships to suppress stories. With new media platforms, however, some stories make it out quicker but other trending events soon overtake them and may not allow stories to unfold in their full depth.

This participant's response shows one of the ways news is being commodified in Nigeria. Media officers typically send press releases to newspaper companies where they publish their

advertisements and expect the stories to be treated with a degree of prominence in reciprocity. In cases where their organisations are indicted in the process of news sourcing or investigation, media officers try to suppress the information by threatening to withdraw advertisements from newspapers where the story is to be published. This approach appears to affect the quality of journalism in newspapers, especially because operational costs are mostly covered by advertising revenue. Participant A5, however, suggested that if newspapers go back to carrying out investigations and breaking exclusive news, rather than just working as mouthpieces of private and public organisations, they should be able re-attain a high level of significance in the country.

Some participants spoke about the capability of digital news technologies to democratise information and enhance news transparency. Participant A1 shared her opinion that digital media platforms to a large extent are “bringing out the best” in traditional media “because media practice is becoming more competitive.” She explained that the media space is now democratised and “the good, the bad and the ugly can be found there”, but it is ultimately “deepening democracy because people are now able to freely talk about issues.” In her opinion, digital news media provide room for wider participation and enhanced freedom of expression, unlike when there were just a few channels of news dissemination and these were only accessible to prominent individuals and organisations. According to participant A1, prominence was a key factor in determining who was in the news; but with the growing popularity of stand-alone digital media platforms, news coverage is wider: “it erases the fact that only the ‘who-is-who’ makes the news.” Participant C5’s response corroborates this claim that “what online news media has done is to democratise the process of information dissemination. It has armed the ordinary people.”

Participants D4 and D5, both in the newspaper employee category, highlighted information democratisation and competition as advantages that digital news platforms have brought to the media scene. Participant D5 explained the disruption news digitalisation has caused:

Well, the truth is that the new media has eroded the space that we [mastheads] used to occupy. We used to be called gatekeepers but I think the gates are no longer kept. The truth now is - before the news gets to us, it is already out and we are even running after the information.

This comment corroborates the idea that news digitalisation reduces the chances of newspapers using their gatekeeping position to suppress or delay information:

It has now become difficult for traditional media to cover up certain things, unlike before, when you could easily count the newspapers in the country... because the news is on the go as it is happening. Before, they could keep stories for days before breaking it, because they had all the control over it...

Instead, this stakeholder is of the opinion that digitalisation challenges newspapers to explore the shortcomings of digital news platforms and use them as opportunities to develop their products. One such shortcoming is that online news media mostly focus on continually breaking news, without exploring different angles or incorporating journalistic balance. Hence, participant D4 suggested that newspapers can do more in such areas where online media have a deficit.

Furthermore, concerns about the foreign ownership and control of digital news platforms were raised in participant D5's comments. He suggested that because Nigeria is not a

technological force, indigenous mastheads appear to be losing control to international digital platforms, operated from outside Nigeria. To him, mastheads see themselves as a part of the established local culture that some digital technologies seem to be eroding, hence he is calling for caution in the adoption of digital platforms so as not to risk being subjected to another form of colonialism. He further said that the only control mainstream media can exercise now is on their platform; they can no longer control the flow of information or determine salience as they used to.

This stakeholder (D5) further proposed that traditional newspapers should constantly add value to what they offer, giving readers more reasons to want to engage with their brands. He is of the opinion that sales will drop but there will always be a demand for newspapers:

People would still buy newspapers but the numbers will go down.

My prediction is that some of our papers are going to go off, a few will survive for being good brands, and being there all along and being able to rise up to the various historical challenges.

Participant A3 believes that apart from the broad understandings of market segmentation according to age and location, mastheads have not performed adequately in terms of identifying their specific core audiences and strengthening their operations to serve them better while working to expand their readership. Participant A3 also noted that traditional mastheads make efforts to use their digital news platforms to direct readers to their hardcopies, rather than making full stories available online. However, some digital-only news sites and blogs simply upload stories from print newspapers without permission. Some individuals even use pictures from mastheads on their social media pages and type the stories in their captions or comment sections, taking as many posts as needed to complete the stories, depending on how much interest they believe the stories are likely to generate. Participant A3

notes that this action is an ethical breach and a major point of concern in the local news landscape (see section 4.4.1 for further discussion). The participant is of the opinion that even though complementarity will most likely continue, digital news media may become dominant. However, there is an increasing need to address issues of ethical breaches in digital-only news media so that the inter-relationship between traditional and digital news platforms can develop beyond one of parasitism. Stakeholders' views of ethical breaches and the implications are presented later in this chapter under section 4.4.

#### **4.2.2.2 Operation and Management Issues**

Current experiences in terms of how newspapers are operated and managed contribute to understanding of Nigeria's contemporary news media landscape. The experiences shared by stakeholders demonstrate how newspaper corporations are faring in the face of continued digitalisation.

Some stakeholders perceive online presence as necessary to maintain a vibrant and contemporary outlook. To participant B1, it helps them to remain relevant in the news media industry. He noted that:

Being online is very important because you have to be there as the news breaks. All our reporters and correspondents have a mandate – as soon as they are on the field, sourcing for news, they must send in the lead, a paragraph at least, to be posted online so our readers can get the gist.

This shows that digital news platforms have increased the pressure of timeliness on news organisations, with newspapers making efforts to reduce the time span between when news

breaks and when readers access the information on electronic platforms. It appears that the primary concern of the organisation, like most other news organisations, is to be the first to break the news, especially since non-traditional digital platforms tend to do so faster.

Sometimes, only the news leads appear online. Reporters mostly return to their desks to write stories to be published in print the following day. This indicates that the online platforms of traditional mastheads are not optimised to serve digital audiences.

Participants B1, C2, D1 and D2 explained that their newspapers' online departments are operated directly under the hardcopy management. Participant B1 said "we have an employee in charge of our online platform whom we call the online editor, under the supervision of the daily editor. We cannot employ different reporters". Essentially, the same staff run both the online platforms and hardcopy editions, except that there is an online editor in charge of what happens on the online platforms. The online editor in participant B1's newspaper had been promoted from deputy news editor for print to coordinate digital news dissemination.

Participant C2 noted that this approach is commonplace in traditional news organisations in Nigeria since there is little or no specific allocation to online departments in organisational budgets. Participants D1 and D2 indicated that their employer organisations operate a similar approach to manage their online engagements through both the web and social media platforms. While this may be a useful approach to adapting to the changing news environment, retaining rigid traditional structures and staffing policies seems to affect the optimal operation of digital news platforms, given how different they are from traditional ones. The concerns raised by participants in regard to the staffing of online news desks show how mainstream masthead operations are acknowledging and responding to digital disruption.

Most newspapers have developed web applications and started social media accounts, but the question is how efficiently and effectively they operate these. Broad responses indicate that some of these digital efforts reflect a response to trends rather than a deliberate strategy to optimise news dissemination to varying audiences. Furthermore, participant B5 explained the approach in his organisation as somewhat symbiotic:

We try to run our print and online versions as parallel products, not primary and secondary; there is a symbiosis. Stories from print are posted online but you need to wait for the print to get the full story. Both print and online platforms are under the same management.

This response suggests a difference in ideology behind online operations and organisational reality. It appears that the digital channels of this news organisation endeavour to operate as a full-fledged media arm but are required to work under a traditional management structure. This constraint limits the flexibility of the digital news team and indicates that they are being used as bait to attract readers to the newspaper's hardcopies, similar to the comments made by participants B1, C2, D1 and D2 reported earlier in this section.

Given the current operational trends in traditional newspaper companies, participant A4, an advertising executive in the strategic partners sub-category, and participant C5, an executive member of a special interest organisation, both suggest that there is a need for increased flexibility to stay relevant in the news business. According to A4:

A lot of newspapers in Nigeria are still of the opinion that they are the fourth estate, but I think they are not nimble enough. The online guys are taking their breakfast quickly. I understand that

they want to have editorial integrity, they want to have a point of view on issues, but it is also important to have digital skills.

This view corroborates some of the experiences described by stakeholders in the employee and owner sub-categories. While participants in both sub-groups mostly use the scenario to explain how they are catching up with digital trends, participant A4 points out the inadequacy in this approach:

Someone who has been an editor for the newspaper all his life cannot just suddenly be made the editor for an online news channel... The newspapers see their online platforms simply as their website fraction, instead of them to do it properly, they just pick a story from their print and slam it on their online platform.

His response suggests that masthead managements are not flexible and proactive enough to create the necessary shifts they need to stay at the forefront of the media business. Rather, they run a website like an organisational resource instead of a full-scale business. He further noted that local mainstream platforms, especially longstanding ones, enjoy immense goodwill and will be in an influential position to determine what happens in the news landscape if they can be bold enough to take leadership.

Similarly, participant C5 observed that “many newspapers just slam press releases as lead stories” and as a result, “most stories end up coming to readers as stale.” He also suggested an improved level of innovation, dynamism and value addition to help keep newspapers sustainable, and suggested that flexibility is necessary to rework the outlook and contents of newspapers. Some newspapers have adhered to their publishing format and standards for decades. This adherence to standards helps them to stay principled but, considering the

ongoing changes in media environments, it also portrays them as lacking in innovation.

Participant B4, in the owner sub-category, criticised the position of traditional mastheads, claiming it indicates resistance to change. He noted that media workers at most newspaper organisations are yet to fully undergo the needed professional transition “in terms of adjusting to the fact that news is now a twenty-four-hour cycle.” This suggests there is a need for newspapers to re-strategise and rejig their operation and management styles in acknowledgement of changing realities. He noted that this core traditional structure of mainstream mastheads affects their ability to adapt to their changing environment. According to him, “newspaper managements are not kinetic enough to understand that it is time to change and bring younger people to help drive the change.” Given that younger people are the major users of digital platforms, this participant believes that it will be an effective strategy to co-opt qualified middle-aged professionals into newspaper management so that they can bring in contemporary skills that can help print media in Nigeria.

To explain the strategies of their organisations in response to changes occurring in the Nigerian media landscape, participants B5 and C1 reported similar cases from two different organisations. Both organisations have developed other business brands, leveraging on the credibility and record of their newspaper. Participant B5 said “we have different business arms with the newspaper at the centre. We now have a television station, we do health financing, we run fashion shows and so on.” It is typical for businesses to diversify when faced with uncertainties, and this may be the case with this particular organisation. However, the newer businesses were built on the goodwill of the masthead’s record and are used to drive the masthead’s sustainability. This approach suggests how important it is for newspaper managements to keep traditional newspapers afloat despite the challenges they face. The

perspective may also be viewed in light of Participant D5's comment that newspaper companies are now becoming media organisations, expanding their operations beyond print. These responses indicate that profit for newspapers may not come only in the form of direct revenue, as their brands serve as a pedestal for them to launch into other business areas, but also through maximising niche marketing where they become useful resources to different audience clusters. Fashion trends, for example, typically have large followings, so it might be strategic to provide innovative information, capable of creating new insights and generating business leads. Catering to the needs of various identified audience niches may help newspapers to stay relevant and increase reader loyalty.

These issues raised by participants around the operation and management of traditional newspapers illustrate broad reactions to the changing news environment. Participants generally believe that although efforts are being made towards running with technology, the local media landscape still has much to do to optimise its service delivery, both online and in print. Despite being challenged by digital technologies, participants believe newspapers are not doing enough to maximise their relevance, perhaps because some local factors, such as inadequate technological infrastructure and low literacy levels, support their continued existence. There is, however, a need to be more flexible and open to change to increase relevance and sustainability prospects.

#### **4.2.2.3 Is Newspaper Advertising Affected?**

Advertising is an important source of revenue for newspapers and is a crucial factor in examining their sustainability potential. Some of the stakeholders in this study argued that newspapers will continue to thrive on advertisements, while others believe the increasing ubiquity of digital news platforms and their limitless reach will adversely affect newspaper

advertising and inevitably cause revenues to dwindle. According to participant A4 in the strategic partners' sub-category, print advertising enjoys a level of security in Nigeria that may continue to help it to thrive, given general perceptions and favourable legislation:

Press advertising positions you as a big brand. Publicly listed companies are also required to publish their financial statements in the newspapers. Religious organisations, political parties and families also show prominence or status by advertising events on the pages of newspapers. So, print will continue to thrive on advertisements.

It is a popularly held opinion that individuals or organisations that advertise in newspapers are wealthier, more serious and more professional than those who do not. As a result, many organisations like to see themselves in print, even if they complement that with digital advertising and marketing efforts. The adverse side of this, however, is that some organisations that used to place advertisements in in all available national newspapers now select two or three so they can also accommodate digital advertisement channels in their budgets. Although some stakeholders in the owner sub-group argued that cutting down on the number of newspapers for advertisement was more likely to result from economic downturns than digitalisation, two participants who are advertising professionals in the strategic partner sub-group estimated that press advertising has lost about half of its revenue to digital platforms.

Participant A5 noted that entities advertise for various reasons (such as brand awareness, increased sales, social mobilisation, call to action and so on) and to various audiences including rural, urban, profession-specific or broad-based. These factors help them to suggest relevant media outlets and plan media campaigns. He explained that digital news platforms

and social media are at an advantage over traditional print because they are being increasingly used for advertisements.

The audience of newspapers has dropped... Advertisers have also shifted their attention online. There is hardly any video you will watch online that does not contain an advert. These adverts should have come to the TV or papers, but because they know many people are now online and can be targeted, they have these adverts all over Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube etc.

In his response, he further noted that some organisations or individuals even struggled to place their advertisements in newspapers either because the spaces they preferred had been sold out for a long period or there was no available space in the preferred newspaper(s) for their target duration. He noted that some sponsors now prefer digital channels to reach their audiences because of access to engagement analytics and the possibility of wider reach that print newspapers do not offer. He also explained preferences for buying advertisement slots more specifically from an age segmentation angle, saying that organisations sometimes choose advertising media based on the target audiences' preferred platform.

Companies targeting young people go online, because millennials are there. Those targeting both millennials and older audiences still use the newspapers. This is why if you buy a newspaper, you would most likely see a telecoms or financial institution advert in there because they target both millennials and the older generation... It depends on what the client wants to achieve.

He noted that advertisers targeting people above thirty years old will most likely use

traditional platforms, including newspapers, especially when it is an elite audience. In the case of a mixed audience, an integrated marketing communications plan may be scheduled to include various media forms, including newspapers, based on the percentage of each segment they plan to reach. He took the position that newspapers are still very much channels for advertising not only for cultural or status reasons, but also for adequate reach of older audiences who still largely hold decision-making offices. However, some types of advertisements cannot be published in newspapers. For instance, advertisements deemed to contain sexual content will cause a newspaper to be fined if published. Promissory advertisements are also highly regulated. In such cases, sponsors find digital platforms preferable to circulate their message. He said one common case where advertisement sponsors use only digital channels, even when they are targeting older audiences, is when their adverts may not meet regulatory standards:

Online adverts are not regulated. There are some adverts that you cannot run in newspapers. It is a disadvantage to newspapers because many advertisers will prefer to get all the information spelt out to their audience but then the traditional media cannot get that freedom.

Participant A5 further pointed out that some forms of advertisements and announcements are required to be published in a daily newspaper with nationwide coverage:

There are some statutory adverts that you just have to put in the newspaper. For example, government is required to publish announcements as advertorials in newspapers. Annual General Meetings of publicly listed companies, financial reports, change of names, sales and allocation of landed property have to be

published in the newspapers.

This response shows that despite the challenges newspapers face, some revenue paths remain open to them, and are reserved for them. It also explains why the tenets of fairness and objectivity as well as investigative reporting may be dwindling as noted in section 4.2.2.1. It further explains participant A5's comment that newspapers feel the need to exercise caution and maintain a positive relationship with government and other statutory advertisers so that they can obtain their share of the guaranteed adverts. This position of caution about offending people in government may affect perceptions of masthead objectivity and quality of news.

Participant D1 made reference to the fact that many corporate organisations still have traditional print platforms as corporate social responsibility partners. To this participant, "the names of these traditional newspapers command respect", so it is a form of status conferral to partner with or advertise in them. Participant D1 added that newspaper organisations prioritise sales of print advertisements over online because print advertising is more expensive and often comes in form of sustained partnerships that help the masthead maintain its social status among high-ranking organisations. He also noted that online advertisements are sometimes sold as add-ons to print in the quest to boost the sales of print pages for advertisements.

Participant B4 agreed that although digital platforms now share in the advertising revenue, the extent of negative impact of digital news media diffusion on newspaper advertising has not been as extreme as popularly speculated by people outside newspaper operations. Apart from the statutory advertising advantage, he explained that "advertising revenue still comes to the newspapers because the decision makers still belong to that tradition." Top executives in organisations are mostly between ages thirty-five and sixty-five, and people in this age

range still have a connection with newsprint. It is popular organisational culture for business corporations to make newspaper copies available to executives, so most managerial position holders are assessed to be of the print tradition or hybrid readership of both print and digital copies. Participant B4 suggests that since decision-makers still engage with newspapers, they still see the need to show status and create awareness with them through advertising.

The notion of status may also benefit newspapers in other ways. Participant C5 noted that establishment of status and prominence still provide revenue paths for newspapers. In his view, Nigerians are largely a glamorous people, and the elites like to see themselves on newspaper pages. Hence, from time to time, sponsored personality profiles and advertisements for family and corporate events appear on newspaper pages. This revenue stream is not available only to newspapers, as there are also social media accounts dedicated to publicising glamorous events and helping individuals, families and organisations move up the social pyramid. For instance, [www.bellanaijaweddings.com](http://www.bellanaijaweddings.com) is described as “Africa’s top wedding website” and displays prominent wedding ceremonies. Their Instagram handle *@bellanaijaweddings* has four million followers, and their twitter account *@bellanaija* has over one and a half million. People pay to have their wedding ceremonies featured on these accounts and on newspaper pages. It appears that younger people prefer to have their events trending and to be able to tag their friends and followers, while the older members of the elite class stick with newspapers and often keep them handy as a way to entertain guests by having them go through features of their events, even if such newspapers are old. Another example is *@asoebibella* on Instagram, with 1.9 million followers, where pictures of event guests are featured. *Aso-ebi*, translating from Yoruba as family outfit means coordinated similar dressing to events. Event guests typically show up in dresses made from centrally selected fabric to show support to celebrants. Pictures of such guests are also typically sponsored to be

published on newspapers' events pages. Revenue from this channel is again being shared online. This use of digital platforms may appear to affect the advertising revenue that comes to newspapers, but it is arguable that they are both operating in somewhat different markets.

Contrary to owners and employees, participant A5 (an advertising professional) commented on the possibility of digital news platforms and social media accounts affecting newspaper advertising because of high followership and the probability of wider reach:

Imagine a Twitter influencer who has about one million followers, advertisers know that if they run adverts on their account, it is likely getting more views and interaction than from newspaper. So, they feel there is no point advertising in newspapers since it won't get to such a large audience. Some newspapers do not even print more than 50,000 copies anymore in a day.

This comment reflects an advertiser's perspective in terms of returns on advertising spend. The participant illustrates the impact huge social media following can have compared with what newspapers can achieve. However, he noted that even when they advise against newspapers, some organisations still insist they appear on newspaper pages.

Participants B3 and A4 similarly suggested that newspaper advertising may not be as affected as copy sales in terms of revenue generation. Participant B3 said:

The advertising prospects of traditional media has always been there and is increasing because business conglomerates, apart from putting billboards on the highway, they still want to see their company's product and service in hardcopy. I think they are

driven by the value of reference of newspapers, because you can pick a newspaper and refer to such adverts anytime.

He suggested that the transience of advertisements on digital channels may be one reason why large corporations choose to maintain newspapers for adverts even if it is to complement other channels. Participant A4 also commented that although copy sales have declined, the newspaper organisation where he works has dedicated pages for events and related advertorials and they are always filled with paid content, and that no newspaper can run solely on sales of daily copies.

#### **4.2.2.4 Economic Influences and Copy Sales**

Nigeria's economy has witnessed numerous downturns over the years, chiefly due to the colonial inheritance of endemic corruption and inefficient socio-political systems (Ogbonnaya, 2018; Williams, 2019). With a population of about two hundred million, Nigeria's GDP is US \$397.3 billion compared to Australia with a population of about twenty-five million with US \$1.432 trillion and the United States with a population of about three hundred and thirty million and GDP of US \$20.6 trillion (World Bank, 2019). This comparison helps to put Nigeria's economic situation in perspective and contextualise the inadequacy of economic opportunities for citizens.

Participant B1 explained that the dwindling economy affects every industry, including newspapers. He reported that the country had recorded over five million job losses in the last three years, bringing unemployment rates to about 24% (Tradingeconomics.com, 2019), and some of these job losses have been from newspapers. The newspaper owner further explained that the hardships experienced by newspapers are not unconnected to Nigeria's economic woes, as establishing and surviving in business has become increasingly difficult across all

sectors:

If you notice, in the last two to three years, no new newspaper has been set up because of the country's economic situation. Survival has been very tough. Even the big newspapers are feeling the pains of the economy. The survival of any enterprise, especially the media, depends on the cash flow of other sectors where they get their revenue.

This response shows that the news media as a local industry is affected by prevalent local economic conditions, further indicating the importance of examining local contexts. This participant noted that segmentation of media markets through the addition of digital news channels compounds the issue. Participant A5 explained that the press has always thrived as the channel between news sources and readers, but that that function appears to be threatened with the use of digital channels for news. According to participant A5, "with the social media, prominent personalities such as politicians and celebrities now break their news online, directly to users, eroding the need for press releases." Thus, while some stakeholders believe newspapers are more challenged by the economy, they still acknowledge that news digitalisation also affects them and they require strategic efforts to remain relevant.

Participant B1 also noted that the current economic situation has negatively affected the performance of journalists, as "even in the newspapers, the quality has reduced. A journalist who has not been paid for seven months, what would you expect of such?" He explained that the issue cuts across organisations, not only in the media, where staffers are being owed wages for months: both government agencies and private companies across the board commonly owe a backlog of one to ten months of salary payment. Some state governments arbitrarily pay certain percentages of different months, making it hard for workers to track

how much they are owed. This situation causes working citizens to be more frugal with their income, affecting purchasing behaviour.

Likewise, participant C4 mentioned that “the media business is shaky in Nigeria, largely for economic reasons. We have just come out of a recession and the purchasing power is low and further declining because of inflation.” However, he expressed optimism that despite increasing digital news diffusion, newspapers – like most other organisations – will see a boost in their revenue once the economy performs better. Participant C1 similarly noted the economic challenges facing media corporations: “There is a lot of debt in the industry right now; they are owing workers, so many people are leaving to start their own platforms online.” To this participant, online news media provides a better opportunity for income, provided the creators are able to consistently attract traffic. Since some digital media platforms pay content creators based on the number of clicks and visits on their sites; an increasing number of users, including workers sacked from news companies, are exploring avenues to create content and attract traffic. Sometimes, content creators in this category resort to obscenity, damaging content and even intellectual property theft as long as it aids their efforts to attract traffic and make some money online. These ethical violations characterise the realities of digital media produsage in Nigeria and are further discussed later in section 6.2.1.

#### **4.2.2.5 Copy Sales and Print Run**

Participant stakeholders believe that copy sales have reduced as a result of a combination of the spread of digital news and deteriorating economy. Participants A5 and B3 noted that there has been a significant reduction in sales of newspaper copies. They both point out that the same stories are usually available online, so readers can choose either option and obtain the

same content. Participant A5, considering the lingering economic hardship, he compared the cost of accessing the news online and in print, noting that with ten megabytes (costing an average of 10 Nigerian Naira – AUD \$0.039) of internet data, he can read news online. He then asked: “Why waste 200 Naira (AUD \$0.78) to buy hardcopies?” This response highlights how both factors can hinder copy sales. To this stakeholder, internet users find it cheaper and easier to access the news online. However, this assumes that everyone has devices that allow them to make use of this access, whereas it is difficult for some parts of the population to acquire internet-enabled devices to access the internet in the first place. Thus, a combination of both digital news encroachment and economic challenges appear to affect copy sales. But for participant B3, while this factor may reduce hardcopy sales, digital news media platforms create the opportunity for newspapers to increase their audience base by creating a digital version to be published online where there is a larger community of readers or users. Hence, reduction in copy sales does not necessarily mean reduction in readership. Participant B3 went on to mention that the business and operational models of print news media and digital news media are different. The online space, given the ubiquity of social media, thrives on followership and content sharing. This factor appears to provide an advantage that traditional platforms do not have – the possibility of content going viral. To him:

There are some celebrities with four million followers on one social networking site or app, for instance. No newspaper records that amount of circulation, not even before the emergence of new media.

He proposed that mastheads need to acknowledge the difference in the operational models of newspapers and digital news and news sharing platforms. Hence, there is a need to decipher a way of maximising the ubiquity of these social networking applications to drive readership.

Suggesting that the dwindling economy has affected copy sales more than news digitalisation, participant B5 pointed out that: “even before digital platforms emerged, many people were no longer buying newspapers, you see them at newspaper stands, reading for free. We call them the ‘free readers association’.” While it highlights one of the reasons for reduction in copy sales, this point shows that there is a loyal readership culture where some people have formed the habit of converging at a newspaper vending stand to read and interact based on the contents of the newspaper, even if they are unable to buy copies. Although this culture may not contribute directly to the revenue of newspaper companies, it builds the social relevance and positioning of mastheads. Consequently, mastheads make efforts to continue printing and remain relevant among such grassroots audiences.

Participants C4, C5 and D5 also reported that some people go to newsstands to read for free as a cultural practice. Participant D5 added that these free readers are part of the target audiences of newspapers because they help to maintain their agenda setting power, as such readers often act as opinion leaders in small grassroots groups. Even if these readers of newspapers read for free, it is strategic to continue making the newspapers available to them because they align with the agendas newspapers put forward and are major influencers within their local spheres. Participant D5 went on to note that political parties and organisations make use of this advantage to set grassroots agendas, which is why the election season has traditionally been the busiest for many newspaper corporations. Sometimes, the revenue garnered during election periods surpasses regular annual income due to increased copy sales and advertisements. As a result, even though copy sales reduce, newspapers still find it important to continue printing.

As a cost-cutting measure in most organisations, as pointed out by participant B5, companies

that used to order personal copies of all newspaper mastheads for all executive members, now simply select a few or buy a copy of all and put them in a central location. He explained that the readership culture in elite environments guarantees a level of sales and even though sales might be reducing, readership remains. Also, he noted that there is a high chance that newspapers are read by more than one person, but this is more difficult to track than the news sharing that happens online.

According to participant B3, “most newspapers now record less than 50% of their usual copy sales.” Beyond recent occurrences, reduction in copy sales can be traced back to the early 2000s following Nigeria’s return to democracy after years of military rule. At this point, mobile telecommunication was just making its way into the country and internet subscription was around 1% of the total population. Participant B3 added that “this is definitely not happening only because of digital media; television and radio among other factors are also key reasons.” He also pointed out that “if the new media had not come to existence, newspapers will still struggle with circulation. They always have, for different reasons.” This struggle or difficulty is often hinged on the availability of other media, but even before the emergence of digital news platforms, newspapers struggled with circulation numbers, so digital news and sharing platforms have only added to this.

Despite dwindling copy sales, participant B5 forecasts longevity for hardcopies, based on the loyalty they enjoy, which provides an assured level of patronage. He said “hardcopies are still preferred by some people, even though digital media platforms have a larger audience.” This indicates that news media platforms have different audiences and that the core audience of newspapers is loyal to them. He further explained that:

Some people do not want to buy newspapers again because they

believe they can access the same information online. Some others do not want to rely on what they see online because most online platforms tend to spread false news.

Thus, different segments of the media market have reasons for their preferred choices, and newspapers are still preferred by some people. He recommended that newspapers respect those who have chosen print newspapers and continue to serve them to the best of their abilities.

Participants B3 and B5, in the owner category, similarly highlighted that despite reduction in copy sales, there is still a level of guaranteed print run, no matter how minimal, since corporate organisations still buy hardcopies and keep them for referencing, regardless of whether they also have access to digital news platforms. Participant B3 added that moreover, “no newspaper owner in Nigeria wants to lose its original business of print ownership, for going absolutely online; one will rather own both.” This response suggests that there are other benefits of running a newspaper, even though it may now look unattractive from a sales perspective. However, Participant B5 noted that online platforms might not have the guaranteed level of sales of print, even if online news content were to be monetised. To this participant, given the unsuccessful attempts at introducing paywalls on news sites, sticking to hardcopy production appears to be the best strategy to remain relevant in the news industry.

One of the key reasons for the failures of paywalls in the Nigerian digital news space is the lack of adequate control that allows users to create ‘news’ sites and repost content.

Participant C4 explained that these online platforms are seen as revenue generating enterprises that are not heavily affected by the economic situation of the country as considered in section 4.2.2.4. Hence, many such sites simply register a blog and start to post

news from traditional newspapers on their platforms. As a result, his perspective is that monetising online news may not thrive in Nigeria because of the surge in the number of sites that copy content from other platforms and make it available for free to generate traffic, while making their money from online adverts. He noted that such sites also make it difficult for conventional mastheads to map out sustainable operational strategies.

To exemplify the constant failures of paywalls in the Nigerian news landscape, participant D5 cited different experiences in attempting to commercialise their online content. This participant explained that their organisation's latest attempt is to introduce portable document file (PDF) copies of the hardcopy to be sent to subscribers so that they can still get the newspaper as they normally would with the hardcopy, but for ₦50 (a quarter of the hardcopy price). The effort, like others before, still did not yield the desired outcome. Participant D5 further explained that the PDF newspaper proposition came as a result of pressures caused by the uncertainties about the future of hardcopies, given the decline in print run in recent times:

There is a lot of pressure on the online department to try to improve revenue to make up for the decline in print. The notion is that a lot of revenue is made online and that is why we are investing on the online platform.

His explanation demonstrates a lack of technical knowledge about the introduction of online news platforms. He pointed out that there is a broad notion that money can be made online, which is why newspapers are trying to position themselves in the digital arena. However, it appears that the stakeholders saddled with this responsibility are more traditionally oriented and trained. Hence, they try to operate in the digital space with pure traditional knowledge and experiences. This approach appears to dampen the potential of traditional mastheads in

the online space.

Despite his direct knowledge of the uncertainties being experienced in the newspaper industry, participant D5 emphasised that this is not enough to predict the extinction of newspapers in Nigeria, nor for newspapers to stop printing. This opinion is perhaps based on the survival of newspapers so far, especially with global predictions that the last of newspapers would be seen around 2015. There has been a further segmentation of the news market, but newspapers still maintain a market segment and that appears to aid their contemporary relevance. Also, as seen in the comment of participant B5 in section 4.2.2.2, the fact that some mastheads have become popular brands affords them the opportunity to create other products in other industries such as fashion and health financing, leveraging on their name.

Generally, participants acknowledge that copy sales are declining, but they mostly hold that this may not directly mean a reduction in relevance. Mastheads appear to be coming to terms with the idea that the news market has been further divided, but stakeholders express optimism that newspapers will remain relevant in the news landscape. For some stakeholders, this optimism comes from their experience of setting agendas for news and opinion and being a major source of political information to people at the grassroots. Others appear to see optimism as the only choice since they are resistant to change and are not willing to be flexible enough to adapt to the changing news scenario.

#### **4.2.2.6 Market Segmentation**

Apart from the rural-urban digital divide in Nigeria, findings of this research show that the key segmentation in the media market is based on age. Participant D3 specifically noted this

point, while most other participants made reference to it during their interviews. D3 suggested that as long as the older generation is around, newspapers will most likely stay on the news scene. However, he expressed pessimism about what could happen when millennials take over. He explained that there is a possibility that millennials will grow with digital cultures and influence their environment or grow into existing societal cultures. Consequently, newspapers may die with the current older generation, or remain a strong tradition that readers subconsciously start to prefer when they grow older.

Participant B3 also highlighted that young people have been the subject of many studies, being the predominant users of digital media platforms. Therefore, the results of such studies typically reflect millennial nuances. He suggested that sampling older people might show a different view. To him, the older generation that has cultivated the hardcopy culture still “cling dearly to it.” Participant B4 indicates that older news audiences typically have higher purchasing power than younger ones, which may also be a factor in the segmentation of news audiences.

Participant C1 attributed young people’s preference for digital media platforms to the kinds of content they are attracted to, particularly entertainment, social networking and gossip:

Our [older] generation takes news more seriously. This [younger] generation we have now are only interested in music, gossip, drama and other forms of entertainment; so, they are not bothered about newspapers.

In his opinion, audiences will gravitate towards the platforms that serve their chosen content, and that as those preferences change, media choices may also change. In describing how media market segmentation has occurred in Nigeria, participant C1 noted that new media

platforms typically carve out a market segment for themselves. He acknowledged that the diffusion of digital news media has affected the circulation of traditional media platforms, but noted that in the history of Nigerian media, no new media form has led to the extinction of an older media form; the market is typically further segmented and reach is often reduced but not to the extent of driving older platforms into extinction. He also argued that, so far, there is no country where conventional hardcopy newspapers have become extinct. Participant C4 made a similar point that despite the higher Gross Domestic Product and other wealth indices in developed and stable economies, they usually still have traditional platform audiences whose patronage keeps hardcopies in circulation.

The choice has become wider with multiple options available, and the addition of multiple digital news channels ultimately amounts to a reduction in the audiences of other news media platforms. Consequently, the market for conventional newspapers has reduced. Some stakeholders argue that this market reduction signals a replacement, but most believe that it depicts loyalty from core audiences irrespective of the alternatives. Participant B1 explained that when a new media technology arrives, some users may migrate in the adoption phase, while some maintain status quo. Ultimately, every media platform still has a group of people it caters to, and each media form will continue to remediate itself, aiming to provide better services to the audiences within its niche. He explained that online platforms in Nigeria have gained a foundational user base, like every other news media platform. The chances for growth then depend on how much relevant effort each platform can put in to serve their audiences better. According to him, some digital platforms are at bigger risk of dying out as a result of continued digital advancements. This participant further cited the examples of digital applications that seemed popular and competitive some years back, such as Yahoo! Messenger, Yahoo! News, MySpace, Hi5, MSN news and so on. He noted that they are no

longer as popular and some have even been relegated to the background in favour of newer applications that appear more relevant and user-friendly. Meanwhile, the older platforms they appeared to threaten are still in existence and serving their share of the market.

Generally, participants in this research discussed key issues in the contemporary environment and circumstances of newspapers in Nigeria to assess their potential for sustainability. Issues such as socio-political and digital disruption, operation and management structures, advertising, local economy, copy sales and market segmentation were considered to signal likely future experiences in Nigeria's newspaper industry. More insights into future possibilities in the Nigerian newspaper industry are explored in the next section.

#### **4.2.3 Supporting Theme 3: Future of Newspapering in Nigeria**

The final supporting theme that emerged in relation to the sustainability of traditional mastheads in Nigeria relates to stakeholders' perceptions about how the penetration of digital media may affect the future of traditional hardcopies in Nigeria. Some of the participant stakeholders in this research leaned towards an imminent revolution in the Nigerian media landscape that has the capability to cause the extinction of hardcopy newspapers. For instance, in the strategic partners' category, participant A5 suggested that "in less than ten years, newspapers might not be relevant anymore." He suggested that because digital news media present an easier and cheaper opportunity to access news they may render the traditional newspaper business model obsolete. Similarly, participant A3 shared the opinion that "newspapers will completely take digital form in the next ten years," given the rate at which digital media news platforms are multiplying. Participant B4, in the owner category suggested that the inclination of young people towards digital media platforms points at the possibility of a replacement after the passing of the older generation.

Participant C5, in the special interest category, also weighed in on this issue. His main point was the issue of staleness in traditional news production model. Since newspapers are usually printed overnight and distributed in the morning, most news audiences are often already privy to the issues being reported. This issue of staleness is worsened by the overly regimented approach of several mastheads, which means that the news stories being published reflect the same angles and perspectives as had been reported online. Also, competition is broader for local mastheads because of the internet's boundlessness; local audiences are able to read stories on international news platforms online. Some of these international platforms have optimised their sites and applications for the web, making it easier to follow stories as events unfold, and contributing to the stale appearance of local conventional newspapers. Participant C5 suggested that newspapers may survive if they become flexible and creative enough to evolve with the trend, fill the gaps in the contemporary news landscape and add values of novelty and human interest to their content. Otherwise, he suggested that it will be difficult to remain relevant in the news industry.

However, some other participating stakeholders shared the position that the Nigerian media landscape will experience complementarity. Some participants who initially suggested that a replacement will occur also considered other factors to indicate why that may not be the case. For instance, participant B1 took the position that:

Hardcopy newspapers will not die off, but they will be affected, no doubt. The news going absolutely online will be determined by many factors, including the level of literacy and broadband penetration and circulation in Nigeria. Besides, big men still want to read hardcopies, people still buy them for keepsake.

This position reflects the segmentation in the media market. The emergence and development

of digital news media has led to a reduction in the audience base of conventional newspapers. However, some audiences remain consistent hardcopy readers either because they only have traditional options to select from, or because it has become natural for them to hold the physical newsprint, or as a status symbol, which is interestingly the case in many social elite ('big men') circles.

In a different light, participant C4 explained that many Nigerian masthead stakeholders argue based on perceptions of foreign media and try to replicate their operational models in Nigeria. However, he argued that even in such developed countries, there are still audience groups that prefer conventional print newspapers. Participant C4 further explained that while some news companies may be working on absolute digital transformation, some others fare well in the complementarity space. To him, from a holistic point of view, hardcopies will not completely fade, in the same way that there will continue to be physical libraries despite the ubiquity of e-books and other digital resources.

As mentioned in section 4.2.1, participant C5, after an initial position that newspapers are headed towards extinction, went on to suggest that they may survive considering peculiarities of the local context. He recounted the prediction from *The Economist*, that the last newspaper copies would be published in 2015. He observed that although some newspaper corporations in the US and Europe had stopped hardcopy publication and gone totally online, such transition is yet to happen successfully in Nigeria. Some mastheads had attempted it but either had to shut down completely or revert to printing. He explained that newspapers have continued to publish and are actually growing stronger in some cases, citing the example of the Shimbun titles in Japan with close to twenty million copies in circulation on a daily basis. Participant D5 was of the opinion that indeed some newspapers will die off, but the strongly

rooted ones will survive, based on the quality of their brand and the value they offer. He explained that as much as digital media departments of newspaper companies try to move towards independence, they still end up leveraging the credibility of the parent brand. Furthermore, the fact that it is mandatory for private corporations and government organisations to make use of traditional newspapers for their advertising and publication was suggested by participant A5 as a factor that enhances the longevity of newspapers. Despite continued digital encroachment, this policy has remained and does not seem to be a subject for legislative revision. Consequently, newspapers jostle to get their share of these guaranteed advertorials as a source of revenue to remain in print.

Aside from the fact that hardcopy enjoys a guaranteed level of loyal readership and advertising patronage, the argument that some people do not have access to the digital option was also cited as a reason for traditional hardcopy and digital news media to co-exist. This digital divide is a fundamental factor that will keep traditional newspapers relevant in the news industry. Internet service providers in Nigeria concentrate on urban areas, perhaps because of the presence of mid and high-income earners who can afford their services. Internet coverage is typically only available in densely populated cities, leaving rural towns and villages unconnected. Consequently, newspapers and other legacy news media forms stay relevant in some of those areas, as the only source of news. It is worthy to note that the presence of the big newspaper brands in rural areas forced community newspapers to reduce their prices or work in collaboration with the bigger brands. Some community newspapers have reduced their frequency of publications, so they can cover more stories that are relevant to the community. This approach has proven useful for some community newspapers as national newspapers rarely report on issues within small communities. Others have either consolidated with national newspapers or shut down completely.

Broadly, there is a divide in the perception of the future of traditional newspapers in Nigeria. However, with deeper considerations of current situations in the nation, participating stakeholders came to the conclusion that newspapers still have key roles to play and are likely to remain in the news landscape. Therefore, the overall consensus among the participants in this project was that Nigeria's news landscape will have both traditional and digital news media forms existing side by side, but that newspapers need to be more flexible and allow for growth so as to have digital technologies as an advantage and not competition. Some of the digital strategies mastheads are adopting are further discussed under the third theme.

### **4.3 Theme 3 – Newspaper Responses to Digital Diffusion**

This theme presents perceptions of print media stakeholders on how Nigerian newspapers are responding to the diffusion of digital news media, based on their personal encounters and experiences within the industry. One of the recurring responses on this issue is the adoption of digital media platforms for news dissemination.

#### **4.3.1 Supporting Theme 1: Efforts at Adopting Digital Media Technologies**

Data collected for this research shows significant efforts at making news available on digital platforms and stakeholders' perceptions about the necessity and efficacy of this approach. Participant B3 proposed that the media continue to leverage emerging technologies to share information. He added that other sectors of the economy need the media to promote them, hence the need for the media to continue to stay popular and relevant. He said:

Newspapers should do anything within ethics to promote, popularise and add more quality to their product. That is what the new media is about, using technology to promote ideas and businesses.

This participant suggests newspapers should carefully adopt digital engagement strategies that improve upon their business model. Similarly, participant A1 observed that newspapers are increasingly making efforts to engage with digital media users and the efforts have enhanced news coverage. According to her, individuals are now able to read news on the go and send in “eye-witness accounts from places that would not ordinarily be covered.” This trend became popular when citizens started to use the platforms as channels to report situations that pose potential danger around them, such as potholes on major roads, accidents, flooding, banditry and so on. With this trend, conventional newspapers engaged more with citizen journalists than before; some of them even created citizen journalism pages to report such stories.

Participant A3 pointed out that newspapers need to adopt digital technologies for survival. In his opinion: “there is no newspaper that can survive solely on hardcopy, all of them now maintain a digital version as well.” He cited his organisation as an example, noting that their approach targets both traditional and digital audiences. The traditional newspaper is, however, their central product and other products are its offshoots. This participant further noted that digital adoption is very important in the twenty-first century given its advantage of instantaneous feedback.

Feedback is an increasingly important part of communication and that is a key reason a lot of people are going online. People prefer where they can get news, add comments and discuss about it.

Comparably, participant C4 also made reference to the issue of feedback. He noted that news audiences in Nigeria enjoy sharing their opinion on what they have read. Some readers do this among themselves, which is why they prefer to read the news at newsstands or common

areas. Others prefer to use the same newspaper as a medium to react to stories. Before the use of digital news platforms became widespread, reacting in this manner would have meant writing to the editor, which takes about two weeks or more in dispatch, without a guarantee of being featured in the opinion page. However, with digital media, feedback has become instant and interactional and newspapers see the need to leverage this advantage. Some newspapers are already doing this by creating comment sections on their news sites to engage with readers. Others are exploring this interactivity feature through their social media handles, while still maintaining the process of writing to the editor for those who may prefer it.

Participant B5 reflected on the wave of technological adoption in the Nigerian print media industry. He said:

Every newspaper is now forced to have an online version. I used the word “forced” because if you don’t, it’s like being strapped on a chair, limiting movement. So, it is important if you must compete online and in print.

This comment shows that adoption of digital technologies for some traditional news corporations is being done out of a sense of compulsion, rather than with the enthusiasm of value addition and wider readership horizon. Participant D3 similarly noted that digital adoption has become the order and newspapers key-in to stay competitive in the industry. He said that “the idea that ‘if you cannot beat them, join them’ is becoming the norm in the media all in the race to stay relevant and to be first with the news in this digital era”.

He explained that uncertainty and fear of irrelevance are two main reasons why most newspapers are adopting digital strategies and not necessarily a sense of direction or strategy

for growth. As a result, the strategies are often inadequate and inefficient. Participant C4 added that “today in Nigeria, hardly will you find a newspaper that doesn’t have an online version.” He further noted that the process of digitalisation precipitates media convergence as some newspapers are starting to incorporate audio and video in their online reports. To him, some newspapers still lack innovation in their digital dissemination style by operating a “garbage in; garbage out” system, without adequately exploring a variety of angles to stories they report.

This inability to innovate is reflected in Participant C2’s response where he noted that indeed newspapers are adopting digital strategies, but at a relatively slow pace and with inadequate skills, compared to developed countries. He added that the adoption pace is slow for different reasons, such as unreliable internet service, irregular power supply, ineffective legal systems and inadequate technical skills. These factors make it difficult to catch up with advancing digital technologies. However, as the situations improve, the number of digital subscribers is increasing, creating a bigger digital news market. Participants C4 and D2 highlighted that the intense market segmentation has necessitated the adoption of digital media technologies so as to enhance the reach of the newspaper as a brand. Participant D2 explained that newspapers now mostly maintain accounts across various digital platforms as well as setting up their own news sites and apps.

Some of the participants spoke about the instrumentality of social media platforms in attracting traffic to their digital platforms. The participants also spoke about their preferences in adopting social media for news based on the results they obtain from engagement with users. Participant A2, for instance, noted that:

It is important to leverage social media for news also. I find

Twitter particularly useful such that when something happens, you get alerted rather than waiting for it to be published.

He explained that apart from adopting digitalisation in the organisation's systems, existing social media platforms should also be leveraged to serve as amplifiers for their digital news dissemination platforms. Participant A2 emphasised his preference for Twitter for news publicity. In his response, he explained that Twitter works better in terms of news dissemination or propagation because it allows links to be shared and can redirect users to the main source of information. Participant A3 similarly talked of the importance of adopting social media platforms to engage with media market segments that prefer them. He agrees that Twitter is good but suggests that Facebook might be better, because it is more popular in Nigeria.

Similar to participant A2, participant A4 said: "Twitter is effective. It has a high engagement rate in Nigeria." It is important to note that Twitter is a significant space for social commentary among Nigerians. Activists have used it as a platform to lead movements challenging certain government laws or action. For instance, the law that reduced the minimum age requirement of political office holders to accommodate people from age twenty-five as against thirty-five started as a twitter hashtag - #nottooyoungtorun. Twitter has become a domain for social discourse and engagement. As a result, there is always a waiting audience to read the news and react to it on Twitter and mastheads are increasingly leveraging the advantage. Participant B1 mentioned that in addition to Twitter his organisation also uses Facebook and both platforms have helped them gain access to a wider audience range. To further increase this reach, he noted that employees are mandated to post news stories on their social media pages. This response raised the question of why some newspaper companies regulate the online personas of their editorial and reportorial staff and

how some personal ideas they share may negate the editorial stance of the corporations for whom they work. This participant proposed that journalists should have official accounts as part of their jobs to be relevant at this time. He further proposed that they may have personal pages where they share their views, but they owe their followers the responsibility of distinguishing personal opinion from factual reporting and editorial commentary.

Other participants hold that Facebook is better for news sharing. Participant B1 recounted that from his experience with young people that they rarely ever buy hardcopies; they read the news online and are mostly redirected from social networking sites. As observed by some other stakeholders, he explained that with youth dominating the Nigerian population, newspapers are trying hard to maintain a strong online presence because younger people are more digitally inclined than older Nigerians., As they dominate the national population, it is important to capture their attention and gain their loyal readership. Thus, he noted that Facebook was his organisation's preferred social media platform for news dissemination. He explained that Facebook is the most popular social networking platform in Nigeria and has been very helpful in helping to build an online audience base. Participants D2 and D5 similarly suggest that Facebook may be the most effective engagement platform in Nigeria because of its wide range of users locally. It also accommodates a large number of words compared to other platforms. Participant D2 also said that the business of news dissemination is now around the clock and not once in a day as it used to be with traditional newspapers. He explained that social media and their digital platforms allow newspapers to keep their loyal readers informed. Participant D5 said:

Social media, especially Facebook, has been very helpful. We have gained improved access to varying demographics. So, I will say that social media has been an active way of engaging with

audiences. The website is truly there, but for people to come to the website you need to do more to attract them.

Participants B4 and C2 have similar opinions regarding the use of social media for news purposes. The former noted that the goal is to maximise audience reach; thus, all available social media platforms should be used to “get the news to different audiences.” The latter also noted that Nigeria is diverse in many ways and this may affect social media preferences. Thus, he suggested that digital adoption should be “multi-faceted due to the intrinsic differences we have as a people. What may work for people in *Kaduna* may not work in *Ibadan*.” He proposed that it is important to know the strength and reach of each platform to know how to maximise their use.

Considering that digital media preferences and attitudes change over time, participant B3 explained that these preferences are likely to keep changing. He cited that in Nigeria for example, news blogs used to attract high traffic. However, with the popularity of social media platforms many individuals and organisations now optimise their timelines with links to news stories or simply paste the stories there. News organisations use the same strategy to attract traffic to their platforms and to popularise their brands with social media users, leveraging credibility, which users cannot be totally sure of in the case of other social media accounts, given the recurring situations of fake news and propaganda. He further explained that people no longer have to type web addresses to read news, they simply follow their favourite news accounts and can see the news at a glance on their timelines.

Participant A3 commented on his assessment of digital adoption by most Nigerian newspapers. He noted that although newspapers now have online editions and use social

media platforms, they are not operated optimally, but still try to run all their platforms with a traditional approach. He noted that the user experience element is missing from the outlook of most mastheads' digital platforms. All they seem to care about is putting the news out there, no matter how optimised it is for the channel being used. He suggested that while complementarity may be the broad scenario in the media industry, newspapers should maximise their clout to operate independent digital news platforms rather than forcing them to fit into traditional models and running them as secondary products to hard copies. This participant further noted that traditional newspaper organisations need to be more strategic in the adoption and operation of digital technologies. He broadly explained that in the case of staffing, there is a shortage of digital skills in the mainstream media space:

A large percentage of Nigerian journalists are analogue journalists. They are only trying to adapt. Up till now, they are still struggling to transit into the digital space.

This operational approach explains why some of the efforts of conventional mastheads at digital adoption may not yield desired results. In a similar light, participant B4 explained that while digital technologies are being adopted, they are being operated by analogue practitioners, who are attempting to operate in a digital environment with long acquired traditional skills. This approach seems to have limited the success recorded by mastheads in this regard.

To address this issue, participant D5 suggested that traditional journalists need to add digital skills to be able to function adequately in this digital age:

I think we need to retrain our journalists. They must be digital smart to be able to catch up, so if you have a reporter who is not

on Twitter and does not know what is trending, that reporter cannot do the organisation any good in this era.

He added that we are in an age where digital capabilities are as important as more traditional journalistic skills. Participant C2 pointed out that while masthead stakeholders understand the usefulness of digital news channels, they seem to be more focused on using them to attract attention to the hardcopies, rather than as valuable news distribution mechanisms in their own right. He explained that “most newspapers try to use the online versions to attract attention to the hardcopies being the main product, to keep them relevant.” One strategy he talked about has to do with using digital platforms as bait: “Hardcopies remain relevant by not releasing full details online. They can break the news online and have people find the full story in the next print edition.” This method shows that owners are interested in keeping conventional newspapers at the heart of their business, perhaps because it has been the tradition or because of their inadequate skills in the digital space. On this baiting strategy, participant D1 explained that as much as it is intended to point readers to hardcopies, this strategy is flawed because some bloggers pick up the stories from print and repost them, making the stories available to online readers of news. In his opinion, in any case, traditional newspapers remain essential to the availability of news in the online space. However, as mentioned by participants B3, B4 and D5, digital-only news websites can be unethical in the way they source and share their content. This issue of unethical conduct arose at various points during most of the interviews conducted in this study. Although the study was not designed to investigate this particular topic, it was one of the prominent issues raised by participants. Hence, the final theme in the findings of this research discusses stakeholders’ perceptions of the ethical implications of digitalisation in the Nigerian news media landscape.

#### **4.4 Theme 4 – Implications of Digital Diffusion**

This theme captures aspects of the research data that explain the implications of digital diffusion on various areas of the Nigerian media landscape. Although some of the implications have been captured earlier, under the second theme, there are two other key implications of digital diffusion of news content: media ethics and media education. The perceived implications of digital media diffusion on these areas are presented under this theme.

##### **4.4.1 Supporting Theme 1 – Ethical and Regulatory Concerns**

This research shows that there are concerns about the consequences of the continued diffusion of digital technologies in regards to journalistic ethics. Stakeholders raised concerns about increased ethical breaches, given the desperation to disseminate content. They discussed how these ethical breaches negatively affect the mainstream news media. For instance, participant A1 expressed concern about the low barriers to practise journalism online. This participant explained that it is becoming increasingly important to separate trained and qualified journalists from “information traffickers”, highlighting that there are “quacks” in almost every industry and that “professionals need to stand up for ethics; that is how we will be able to crush fake news and information traffickers.” Participant A1 explained that it is expensive to source and produce “good quality news stories” and allowing it to be plagiarised or mishandled so that it can be obtained for free online is a threat to the journalism profession and the nation at large. Participant A1 condemned the common practice of bloggers and content creators uploading news stories from conventional newspapers, noting that such an act does more damage to the journalism profession as a whole than digitalisation is believed to do. In her opinion, if digital news media platforms operate ethically, the media environment will be safer and it will be easier to understand the

differences between both media forms and the preferences of their different audiences.

Participants A4 and B4 explained that many digital news platforms not only operate unethically, they also work illegally, breaking existing copyright and defamation laws. To participant A4, unethical and illegal practices are common online because they are not being legally addressed. In a comment that corroborates this claim, participant B1 noted that intellectual property theft is so common that reporters and news organisations are hesitant to go all out to obtain exclusive stories.

When you work as an editor to get an exclusive story after you have really stressed and sometimes overworked your staff, you then find that the only exclusivity in your story is the hard work behind it, the benefits are usually stolen... Sadly, these guys will just go online, and copy your stories. Some of them would still even acknowledge you as the source, some would not.

This participant lamented the illegalities in the operation of some online platforms. He explained that these unchecked thefts of news content have contributed to the decreasing value of newspaper stories because news organisations are not guaranteed adequate returns from the resources they invest in gathering and producing news. He further described how some non-traditional online news platforms present copied stories: “Some of them create mailing lists and send ‘newspaper headlines.’” Without asking, I will see the cover of various newspapers. It’s so sad that they do not have anything original to offer.”

His response suggests that these illegalities and ethical breaches are fast becoming the norm. It is becoming common to find the exact same content across different platforms, leaving readers to wonder who the original publishers are. Participant B4 similarly pointed out that many digital-only news platforms engage in plagiarising news content. He said: “online news

platforms are taking advantage of the professionalism of the print media, stealing our news and appropriating it as theirs”.

Moreover, as noted earlier in section 4.2.2.4, online platforms are algorithmically structured to deliver targeted advertisements. Consequently, operating a news dissemination site provides a better opportunity for income, provided the creators are able to consistently attract traffic. Participant C1 explained that this is one of the possible reasons for the trend participant B2 observed above. He explained that since some digital media platforms pay content creators based on the number of clicks and visits to their sites, an increasing number of users, including news media workers disengaged by their companies, are exploring avenues to create content and attract traffic, by any means, including operating news websites and blogs. He further explained that content creators in this category sometimes publish reports containing obscenities and illegal content, all in a bid to attract traffic and plug into online advertising revenue.

In considering the possible causes of the state of online news media in Nigeria, participant B3 explained that the lack of adequate regulation and enforcement has been leveraged to perpetrate illegalities in the online news media space:

Leaving online media without adequate guidelines has caused a lot of problems both for the society and individuals. People go online, assassinating other peoples’ characters, defaming them...  
If the old media can be guided by press laws, then there should be laws to guide new ones from defaming people...

In his response, this participant explained that digital-only news platforms, like traditional ones, wield a great deal of power and must pay adequate attention to the regulations of the

profession. He added that given the level of literacy in Nigeria, it is important for every stakeholder in the operation of information dissemination channels, including digital ones, to gain some form of media education so that they can have an adequate understanding of what to do and what not to do. According to him;

Anybody who puts anything online for millions of people to read is exercising a lot of power to change the attitude of those reading or to make them fall in line with certain action causes. So, by not getting into schools of journalism or going for short certification courses in journalism, some of these bloggers are creating problems for the society now.

Participant B3 went on to note that because of the low level of digital literacy, many Nigerians take what they see online as the truth. He thus advocated that anyone operating a news site or blog should at least have some relevant training:

News bloggers and others involved in writing online must be given some education about how to go about what they are doing otherwise they will constitute danger to the society. Conventional newspapers are quite professional, but the new media is not close.

While some form of education may be useful in addressing these ethical challenges, participant A5 pointed out that it might be difficult to achieve because of the surge in online news platforms and because “almost anyone can call him or herself a journalist.”

Considering prosecution of illegal news activities online, participant D2 indicated that “many of these news sites are operated behind masks” and it may be difficult to apprehend the people running them, as previous cases have proven. Hence, this illegal activity often goes

unprosecuted. Participant B5 noted that some of the sites presented as news platforms are now used intentionally as tools for blackmail. He explained that they often copy stories from other newspapers to keep their appearance as a news site while they search for their victims.

Another factor that may be responsible for increasing numbers of ethical breaches is the absence of editors in the operation of many online platforms. Participant B5 noted that some people simply sit behind their computers, gathering and reposting all sorts of rumours without adequate editing or verification. Participant A1 explained that the responsibility of editing is now being shifted to news audiences. The participant suggested that it is the responsibility of media users as enlightened citizens to know that some things reported on some digital platforms are not always true or sometimes blown beyond proportion just to attract web traffic. Participant A5 put forward the opposing view, reflecting that given the current exposure and education levels, it cannot be left to the citizenry to decipher truths from untruths, especially when the medium appears similar to trustworthy ones. He noted that not all users will think of considering the credibility of the source. To address the media literacy challenge, participant A2 encouraged improved media literacy and suggested that it should precede regulation in terms of urgency. To this participant, media regulation is important, but it is more immediately important to educate news consumers on how to interact with news sources and to assess the information they receive.

Further concerns about ethical breaches in the media led to discussion about possible ways of handling the current situation. Stakeholders had various perceptions and explanations of ethical violations in the online media space, but all appear to align with the need for some form of regulation in the digital media landscape in Nigeria. The concern for participants A4 and A5 is that there is no clear distinction between professionals and non-professionals given

the low entry barriers and lack of regulation:

The online journalism space should be regulated to reduce the inflow of quacks who label themselves as journalists or influencers overnight just because of their posts or followings.

(A4)

One of the major problems with online platforms is that many of them are not professionally run. They do not have editors.

Anyone can just wake up and start a news channel tomorrow and there are no efforts to track them down or check them. (A5)

These responses show how easy it may be for online news providers to circumvent ethical news production processes and media laws, especially since they mostly lack the guidance of an editor and there are little or no efforts to track and prosecute them when they break the law.

The rate of intellectual property theft online was also decried by one of the stakeholders – participant B1 – noting the need for regulations in the online space. He explained that newspapers currently appear powerless and unable to arrest the situation:

Newspapers cannot do anything to fight such unprofessionalism in the digital media space because it is an uncontrolled space. Some of these guys do not have an address. For all you know, they may be in their bedroom or even outside the country.

On another note, participant B2 advocated that content of online platforms should be restricted for individual usage, suggesting that restricting digital news content for personal use would go a long way towards sanitising the system. Participant B2 explained that lack of restriction has been a demotivation for newspaper companies and that is why his own

organisation alongside several others do not publish exclusive stories online immediately. He emphasised his support for regulation with the clause that “it should not be prohibitive,” so that it does not hinder the press in any way.

Participant B3 proposed an equal playing ground for both traditional and digital media forms. He suggested that with adequate regulation and enforcement, digital news platforms will become more professional, and only then can they be compared with mainstream media. Otherwise, the comparison would be unfair and baseless.

There was another suggestion on how to address growing non-professional media, given the limited media literacy levels. Participant C2 explained that a country like Nigeria requires a firm framework for journalism practice to be enforced by a professional body. In his opinion, such a framework would guide news production so that audiences – irrespective of their literacy levels – became accustomed to a certain quality in news reporting and could tell if it was below the required standard. Participant C2, a member of the special interest category, suggested journalism could be professionalised, as occurs in the medical and legal professions; for instance, where members are licensed by their professional association and are not able to practise without being vetted and licensed. He expressed the idea that it would then become easier to track journalists and their activities. In his view, this approach would make it illegal to produce and disseminate news without being a licensed journalist or member of such licensing body.

A participant in the strategic interest group, A2, suggested that improved media literacy would go a long way towards addressing the issue of the lack of professionalism in digital news dissemination since regulations pose a challenge of their own. This participant

considered the potential challenge of regulation, noting that information environments should be free of government interference. He suggested that more efforts should be made towards improving media literacy, rather than increasing regulations, because of the way such regulations had been used in the country's history to suppress speech.

On the organisational front, participant B4 said that his newspaper company had attempted to deal with the situation legally, but the attempts had been so far unsuccessful. "We had to write letters to some of them through our lawyers, warning them to stop stealing our stories. But how many of them can we possibly go after?"

This response shows the surge in the numbers of such illegal news sites. He suggested that they would continue to increase until prosecutions started occurring, noting that some of them do not understand that they are contravening the law. However, he added that it is beyond individual organisations to handle the situation; instead newer and more clearly articulated laws and enforcement strategies would be useful to curb content theft and illegal news distribution.

Some organisations are hesitant to make any attempts towards addressing the situation. Participant B5 explained that the legal system does not encourage them to attempt prosecution. According to him:

They have not been sued to court because of the legal system we operate. The case can remain in court for years. Besides, most people behind these sites do not have offices so it is hard to pin them down. And ours is not a society where you can easily trace a person with basic identifiers.

This participant further commented on the lack of political will to protect intellectual rights

and curb illegal and unethical content dissemination online, stating that intellectual property theft in the form of piracy and plagiarism is the greatest threat to the creative and media industries in Nigeria. Globally, with Internet Protocol (IP), Global Positioning Systems (GPS) and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technologies, it is possible to locate the origin of internet content and monitor activities that have the potential to be illegal. Such monitoring activities, however, need to be conducted with adequate legal justifications. Making use of these technologies can contribute to resolving the helplessness of mainstream mastheads. Participant B5 hinted that being helpless or clueless seems commonplace among mastheads as they are stuck in the dilemma of allowing unethical and illegal news dissemination to continue or demanding regulatory frameworks from government, risking the extent of freedom of information available:

The illegal operation of some of these news sites is a big problem and we do not know how to address it. The special interest groups are being careful because of the history of undue censorship. The government is afraid of the media so if we ask them to regulate, they will jump at the opportunity without hesitation.

The fear of losing already inadequate freedom of expression was similarly expressed by other participants in this research. Participant B1 commented on the popular antagonistic position of the general public to digital media regulation. He reported that there had been a consideration of a “social media bill” in the Nigerian national assembly but “Nigerians protested it”, on the premise that “it will negate freedom of information and expression.” The protests were based on the historical challenges to freedom of information, with the notion that the press should operate with more freedom and not be further hindered.

This fear was also expressed by participant A5, a special interest stakeholder. He noted the

need for regulation but highlighted the challenge it may pose to freedom of expression. In his response, he noted that:

The challenge is freedom of expression, we suffered to get it to the point we currently have, and it is still inadequate because government wants to rule without being questioned or criticised. ... The desperation to get audience causes some misleading headlines and unethical content that we see.

This response illustrates the difficulty for journalists, especially those who have been practising since the military era, in calling for regulations, but it appears they believe the illicit conduct of some digital news media platforms has left them with no choice. He referred to the history of the relationship between the press and the government and hinted that regulations could be deployed as mechanisms to gag professional news channels. He also added that the volatile conditions of the country and propensity for unrest make it important to put some regulation in place so that news providers can be mindful of their environment and place public interest over profit.

In relation to this issue, participant A1 also raised a point of caution about how media regulations have been used by African leaders in times past, which may be why some people are resisting regulatory policies, but she noted there is need to reach a decision and enforce it:

Many of our leaders in developing countries, especially Africa, are so high handed. They use laws mostly to their advantage and not to protect the interest of the people. That is why some people are kicking against policy reforms. If there is a stakeholders' forum and people can share their perspectives so that a decision

can be democratically reached, so be it.

Unlike most other participants, participant A1 is of the opinion that the government has the ability to track culprits using technology and prosecute them as an example to other offenders but lack the will to do so. This participant proposed stakeholder engagement to tackle the issue and recommended that the policy outcomes must be binding on all parties. Similarly, participant C1 identified as an advocate of free press and free expression of one's opinions. But with the spate of blackmail, defamation, character assassination and undermining of national sovereignty this participant also suggested that "there should be rules", explaining that the Nigerian media as a whole has been regulated from the start of its existence in the colonial era. The press had always been in a fight for increased freedom and with the incremental freedom gained over the decades, it may be counter-productive to allow government to introduce new regulatory policies, essentially because "a good law can become a bad one in the hands of a dictator." However, he suggested that based on the illegal and unethical trends that have come with the diffusion of digital media platforms, regulation may be the way to go. He explained that terms and conditions for registration of websites were formulated by hosting companies outside the country and there are no indications that local contexts were considered in making them. Thus, the participant suggested that there is need to regulate the online news space within local contexts, despite identifying as an advocate for free press.

Against same backdrop, participant C2 and D2 made comments that support the need for regulation of digital news media. For participant C2, in the special interest category, the only way to enhance professionalism in the online news system is to regulate it, as without it the problems will continue. This participant explained that there are regulations in most developed parts of the world and that there is nothing wrong with Nigeria making necessary

laws and enforcing existing ones. Although this participant mentioned the possibility of inhibiting freedom of expression in the process of regulating digital news platforms, he vehemently supported the view that regulations and enforcement are required to call digital news providers to order and hold offenders accountable for their misconducts. He also proposed a registration process for news blogs, where they would have to apply with a registration council before they could practise. This approach, similar to participant C4's comment on licensing practitioners, seems to seek increased regulatory powers for special interest groups, which may not work with stakeholders in other categories, who are mostly sceptical about any form of regulation because of the inhibitive challenge it may pose. For example, participant D2 expressed scepticism about the possible negative consequences a regulatory approach could have on the nation's budding democracy.

Considering that traditional news media platforms are being negatively affected by the lack of professionalism in most digital-only news platforms, participant C5 also suggested some form of regulation. This participant noted that with uncontrolled entry into journalism, the values of objectivity and professionalism are being eroded:

The incursion of digital news technologies has affected traditional media platforms negatively in the sense that whether trained or not, many people now take to journalism as they understand it in their own sense not really journalism as it should be. They seem to feel they can practise journalism because they can access the internet and open blogs or websites.

This comment illustrates the participant's view of how digital news diffusion affects traditional news media. He expressed concern about the diminishing line between professional journalists and other individuals who upload news content on their online

accounts or sites. He went further to explain that some of these online news providers have described their approaches as journalism, but he believes that they are abusing the opportunities for actual citizen journalism. Similarly, participant A5 explained that some content platform owners feel pressure to create content to keep or grow their web traffic and followings and that is why they rush to post information without verification. He noted, however, that “the ability of news platforms to always be factual, not only seeking to go viral is what will separate the wheat from the chaff.”

In his call for more effective regulation of digital news channels, participant C5 added that journalists need to exercise caution when putting up information on their various digital platforms, whether social or professional. He explained that the online persona of journalists is capable of influencing public discourse and behaviour, implying the need for their social engagements to be guided by media laws and ethics.

If for instance as a political editor, I have a blog or my Facebook timeline, and I decide to go there and abuse everyone ... that is not proper. Journalists need to be ethical in their dealings, including on their personal social media accounts... The same personality they have on newspapers should be the same online.

Some readers are usually unable to distinguish between both.

For general social media users, he proposed that there may need to be regulations to prevent hate speech, to encourage people to be mindful of what they post. He noted that Nigeria, as a multi-ethnic country with a history of civil wars, inter-tribal and inter-religious tensions, needs to work assiduously to eliminate the triggers. Drawing from the example of Rwanda’s genocide in 1994, participant C5 recalled that hate speech was one of the triggers, including

racist and insensitive comments on *Radio Television Libre des Mille Collines (RTLMC)*.

Consequently, he proposed that digital media platforms should not be able to be used in Nigeria the ways they are used in less volatile places, especially outside Africa.

Participant A5 added that news platforms need to pay more attention to ethics, avoiding spreading false information and treating potentially inciteful positions that may lead to unrest professionally:

Let us subject to the values of journalism, verify your facts, do not be too much in a hurry to be the one to break the news. There should at least be some level of responsibility in the media industry. There should be some level of regulation, and any media platform that defies the laws should be sanctioned.

In essence, stakeholders voiced their concerns about the ethical implications of growing diffusion of digital news channels and called for enhanced regulations. Although, members of the special interest category (Group C) appeared to be more zealous in the call for regulations, all four stakeholder classifications ultimately agreed that ethical breaches and illegal conduct by many digital news platforms necessitate some form of monitoring and regulation, to restore the quality of news and reduce, if not totally eliminate, theft of intellectual property. Stakeholders across the different groups also cautioned that the regulations should not be prohibitive, to avoid a reoccurrence of the historical suppression of the press.

#### **4.4.2 Supporting Theme 2 - Implications for Media Education**

In light of the ethical and performance deficits that have characterised the Nigerian media

landscape with the increasing ubiquity of digital news media, stakeholders share a common view that there is a need for a strategic newsroom-classroom collaboration where relevant and contemporary media education is prioritised. Most participants agree that there is a need to update, optimise and administer continuous media education for practitioners at all levels, given the ongoing development of media technologies. For example, in the opinion of participants A1, C1 and D1, digital technologies are dynamic and require continuous learning; so, as long as these technologies cannot be divorced from media practice, practitioners need to be continuously trained. “Online journalism is a continuum and so is change. Many of our journalists were trained in the analogue era so I will recommend continuous training, for continuous relevance.” Participant C1 suggested that, at least, new entrants into the journalism profession should be trained so as to protect the dignity of the media. Participant D1 also proposed continuous retraining of reportorial staff to improve their digital skills so that Nigeria can catch up with digital trends.

In assessing the state of media education in tertiary institutions, participant A1 acknowledged the changes happening in the industry and mentioned that efforts are being made to reflect the changes in the education system. According to participant A1, “the media environment is changing and we are not oblivious of these changes”. This participant added that media lecturers in tertiary institutions are working to revise the teaching curriculum to accommodate happenings in the industry based on experiences and emerging trends.

Contrarily, participant B4 believed media education to be too traditional and inadequate. This participant explained that media educators still rely on old textbooks from foreign countries that do not reflect local realities and contemporary situations. According to him, “the journalism training that we have here tends to be too textbook bound... Journalism teachers

are too traditional and they are not catching up with development as things change”.

This comment implies the need to contextualise media education to reflect local realities.

Media students need to adequately understand the media environment around them for what it truly is, rather than understanding it predominantly through foreign theories and perspectives. It underscores the need to continuously update the media curriculum in schools given the constant development in digital technologies and methods of communication.

In line with participant A1, participant C3 noted that media education is improving. He, however, pointed out that it is yet to get to the point of providing adequate training for the contemporary practice of journalism with the changes caused by the rapid diffusion of digital news platforms. According to him, “media education curriculum is changing but there is further need to emphasise new trends in online journalism.” He added that “a journalist is made both in the classroom and in the newsroom. The academic/industry collaboration is extremely important to be able to handle the changes ahead of Nigeria’s media landscape”. He proposed deeper collaboration between media education providers and the media industry to enhance the contemporariness of skills acquired and gain insights into the future of the media landscape. He suggested that if this had been the case in the past, the media would have been better prepared for the changes that are now occurring.

Additionally, participant C2 noted that digital news dissemination in Nigeria is not functioning at optimal capacity because “there are no trained online journalists.” He noted that some universities have only recently started to introduce new media courses into their syllabi. Participant A2 similarly acknowledged the changes happening in the media industry and the efforts being made to cater for these changes in the media education system.

However, he pointed out that a dearth of adequately skilled digital teachers may pose a

significant challenge:

Well, the curriculum is changing. Some schools have adopted online news reporting, blogging and digital journalism as courses under journalism and mass communication. The only challenge I see is - who teaches them? and with what facilities? Teachers have to themselves be digital natives because the students already are most times digitally aware.

This comment raises the point that teachers need to actively learn and understand how digital news platforms work to be able to pass on useful skills to students, who are mostly already able to utilise some of these digital technologies. Otherwise, traditional media theories and operations will dominate media education, which will contribute little to tackling the attendant challenges of continued digital diffusion or maximally harnessing its potential. Broadly, stakeholders spoke of the need to improve on the educational curricula for media studies in Nigeria. Curriculum needs to reflect contemporary realities in the media landscape and offer insights into the future to be able to prepare future-ready students and build relevant capacities that are required to optimise the news process in Nigeria. Although some participants who are media educators in the strategic partners category assert that the curriculum is changing in response to developments in the media landscape, it generally appears that the changes are quite slow, compared to the pace of digital development being observed in the industry.

In sum, these findings reveal perceptions of masthead stakeholders about news digitalisation and how they are responding to the resultant changes to the Nigerian news media landscape. Participants' responses under the first theme demonstrate their perceptions that technology in Nigeria is fallible and as such cannot be the sole channel of news. Cases of poor internet

connection and intermittent cuts in electricity among other were cited as indicators of the fallibility of technology and reasons why complementarity is likely to remain the situation in the Nigerian's context. All participants in this research perceive that efforts at digitalisation in the Nigerian news media are currently inadequate and suggest that these should be intensified in order to help mastheads regain their influential place in the local media landscape.

The second theme, which explored the sustainability potentials of traditional mastheads in the current era, considered past and current experiences to signal possibilities for the future. Some of the participants referred to historical developments of the news media in Nigeria and pointed out that similar uncertainties precipitated by news digitalisation in the contemporary media industry existed in newspaper organisations when both the first radio and television stations were established in Nigeria. They suggested that introduction of newer media forms had not caused older forms to diminish and this is again unlikely to happen with the digitalisation of news.

The manner with which newspapers respond to digital diffusion was considered under the third theme. All participants discussed efforts that newspapers have been making to adopt digital technologies in their business of news dissemination. While participants indicated that these adoption efforts have so far been inadequate, they suggested some approaches to improve on the current situation to achieve optimal audience engagement through their digital platforms.

In the final theme in this findings chapter, responses of participants about the implications of news digitalisation on media ethics and the state of media education were presented. Most

participants expressed the view that the difficulty in regulating digital news platforms has created room for some digital-only news websites to violate legal and ethical standards. These participants cite issues of libel, plagiarism and copyright infringement as common experiences among digital-only news platforms and suggest that these violations pose more threats to the sustainability of newspapers than news digitalisation by itself. Overall, between replacement and remediation, key findings indicate participant stakeholders' perception of complementarity in the Nigerian news media landscape and they suggest that this will most likely continue to be the case, considering various circumstances in the country that make it different from other nations.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Stakeholders' Perceptions of News Digitalisation and Masthead Sustainability**

This chapter critically discusses the data presented in the findings, in a bid to provide answers to research questions one and two raised in Chapter 1:

Research Question One: What are stakeholders' perceptions of the continuous digitalisation occurring in the news landscape?

Research Question Two: How sustainable are traditional mastheads in Nigeria's media landscape?

Qualitative data for this study were collected through semi-structured interviews with twenty participants, evenly selected across four stakeholder categories: strategic partners (A1-5), owners (B1-5), special interest groups (C1-5) and employees (D1-5). This stakeholder categorisation was based on a comparison of classifications from Brooks, Milne and Johansson (2002) and Weiss (2006) as well as relevance to this research and the media industry.

The data collected were thematically analysed and presented in the findings chapter. Four key themes were presented in the findings and two of them are discussed in this chapter. The first theme relates to stakeholders' perspectives of news digitalisation in Nigeria, analysing views on replacement and remediation, while the second theme focuses on data indicating the level of relevance and sustainability potentials of traditional newspapers in Nigeria. This theme incorporates press history, current occurrences and future outlooks in the Nigerian media landscape. A perspectival synthesis of data presented across these themes is thus used to address the first two research questions.

### **5.1 Stakeholders' Perceptions of Digitalisation in Nigeria's News Landscape**

Here, I provide a response to the first research question – *What are stakeholders' perceptions of the digitalisation occurring in the news landscape?*

Stakeholders in institutions develop perceptions about digital technologies within the social and institutional environments where they interact with such technologies. As much as organisations increasingly look for ways to deploy technology for process optimisation, the perceptions of individuals who engage with the hands-on processes contribute to the extent to which such adoption is achievable and successful (Applegate, Austin and McFarlan, 2003). Stakeholders' experiences and environmental influences contribute to the perceptions they form about digitalisation in their professional space. Lewis, Agarwal and Sambamurthy (2003, p. 657) argue that individuals form beliefs about information technologies within a milieu of influences emanating from the institutional and social context in which they interact with IT.

The proposition of Lewis, Agarwal and Sambamurthy (2003) works in synchrony with the position of this research that the first-hand experiences of stakeholders and local operational contexts contribute to how news digitalisation is perceived. Newspaper organisations may talk about the need for digital strategies, but it is the activities of stakeholders, based on their perceptions, that determine the extent to which optimal digitalisation can occur in their companies.

Lewis, Agarwal and Sambamurthy (2003) further identify three dominant factors that influence perceptions about technologies: institutional influences, social influences and individual factors. These factors contribute to how stakeholders perceive digital technologies; while their perceptions drive their usage behaviour and ultimately influence organisational

outcomes. Perceptions of masthead stakeholders about digital news media are discussed below based on these three factors.

### **5.1.1 Institutional Influence**

Institutional influence plays a critical role in understanding perceptions about technology (Robey, 1979; Boynton, Zmud & Jacobs, 1994). This kind of influence can be seen in the level of managerial commitment and support (Yoon, Guimaraes & O’Neal, 1995; Amadi-Echendu & De Wit, 2015). Masthead stakeholders in Nigeria typically view digital news channels as secondary products, instead focusing more on conventional newspapers. This perception is mostly informed by the position of masthead management. For instance, most mastheads do not have a clear digital policy and support strategy to guide the adoption and use of digital news strategies, compared to the clear guidelines for print contained in editorial policies. Participant A4 in the strategic partners category suggested in his response that “newspapers need to develop content strategy” for online engagement rather than simply trying to put the news online, without a clearly mapped-out strategy for goals and processes. Similar responses from participants across all stakeholder categories suggest managerial inaction, giving reportorial and editorial staff the room to move at their individual paces or even stay stuck to their traditional styles and systems.

Newspaper owner participant B4 noted that most members of top management belong to the print tradition and are more drawn to conventional systems than opening up to the new possibilities and prospects that digital news media offer. Even though they talk about digitalisation, they appear to prefer to continue to operate in their area of traditional expertise rather than to try to navigate the digital arena. This in itself indicates the reluctance of newspaper managements to adapt to the changes occurring in the news landscape. As

participant B4 further noted, newspaper management undermines the effects of digital advances on the news process and emphasises traditional journalism standards. By taking this approach, mastheads reinforce a perception of superiority of conventional newspapers over digital news platforms. According to participant B2, even though masthead management express uncertainties about the future and discuss this at length in board meetings, they perceive and treat digital news channels as minor products and focus strongly on keeping conventional newspapers relevant.

Apart from the absence of digital policies for mastheads, the lack of a clear operational structure for digital news channels within most newspaper corporations as suggested by research participants B1, B5, C2 and D1 further signifies a laissez-faire approach to news digitalisation. These participants noted in their responses that in most newspaper organisations, the online channels are coordinated by a deputy editor, usually designated as online editor. The online editor reports to the daily editor, and typically both of them are traditionally trained. Reportorial staff work across both platforms without clear-cut operational distinctions and, as a result, end up prioritising the print editions, which receive more managerial commitment and support. Consequently, websites are usually not optimally managed; reports submitted for print are copied and posted partly or fully online, without optimising them for their various digital platforms. Considering Jenkins' (2006) media convergence theoretical framework, this inadequate optimisation of digital channels limits the chances for successful audience engagement. To adequately engage audiences in this digital era, Phillips (2012) recommends the concept of transmedia storytelling, which holds that audiences are maximally engaged when messages are optimised through various channels in the convergence spectrum. Davidson (2010) explains that this concept of transmedia describes the integration of experiences across multiple media and with the emergence and

development of the internet, cross-media interactivity has been incorporated into transmedia experiences. He noted further that cross-media is not necessarily a novel concept, but it has become highly relevant to enhance the experiences of users of internet-based media platforms. In essence, a newsreader who chooses to read across different outlets, for example, on a website or via a social media platform such as Twitter, should have an optimal experience on their chosen platform. This immersive user experience is also captured in McLuhan's (1964) concept of the medium being the message. Although the crux of the message stays the same, reader experiences differ given the difference in the platforms used. Hence, messages should be formatted to suit each platform. The fact that mastheads do not pay adequate attention to structuring their online channels to leverage these key convergence and cross-media concepts signifies that managerial commitment and support are not yet adequate. This implies counterproductive institutional influences, contributing to the formation of inferiority perceptions of digital news channels among most masthead stakeholders, even though participants seem to understand the prospects these channels offer.

Another indication of institutional influence that seems to have contributed to the subsidiarity perception of digital news channels is the inaction of masthead management in providing training for staff to enhance their digital capabilities. Although stakeholders identified the skill deficit and need for training, mastheads have not incorporated this training into the work schedules of their staff. With the round-the-clock requirements of journalism, it is difficult for news staff to add such skills individually. Lewis, Agarwal and Sambamurthy (2003) argue that active training usually points to the direction of growth an organisation envisages and helps to form a perception of salience. They further posit that "perceived top management support for the use of technology has a significant positive influence on individual beliefs about the usefulness of technology." In the traditional newspaper environment, stakeholders

acknowledge the need for staff training as a support mechanism to develop digital skills, but organisations do not do much to make such training available to their staff, thereby suggesting that they may not be as serious about digital development as they indicate.

Participants B4 and D5 noted that masthead management believe that although the practice of journalism is changing, journalists are refusing to change, preferring to hold on to traditional structures. However, Lewis, Agarwal and Sambamurthy (2003) explain that such systemic change requires an active training and adaptational structure, which is not readily available in newspaper companies in Nigeria, leaving most stakeholders to generally continue to operate within their traditional frameworks rather than learning to apply useful theoretical concepts of convergence and transmedia storytelling to practice.

Furthermore, masthead policies project hardcopy newspapers as the major channel for advertisements. Participant D1 pointed out that the fact that newspapers promote print advertisements to their advertising customers more than they promote online advertising is an indication of the way digital channels are perceived. Masthead advertisement plans contain rates for front page, centre spread, strips and various other sizes and placements of advertisements as the major products. Except for a few newspapers that have separated their rates in a drive for revenue, advertisers that want to be featured online, usually do this as an add-on to print advertising. Even news organisations that make efforts to grant their online arms some level of autonomy only do it for advertising revenue purposes and not necessarily as innovative additions. Hence, mainstream and online channels may be given revenue targets separately, but their management are yet to make such distinctions in reportorial operations. This approach shows mastheads are trying to leverage online platforms for revenue but are not enthusiastic about developing them as independent products for optimised audience engagement. This is an indication of the low level of importance ascribed

to digital news platforms, reinforcing perceptions that they are to be treated as additional products or “side hustles” and not mainstream outputs.

In addition, it is worth noting that masthead stakeholders interviewed in this study perceive that it takes a print edition to be mainstream. Their interpretation of mainstream newspaper is one that prints hardcopies and is available nationally. Even though the reach of such newspapers may be lesser than that of some digital news channels, there is a subconscious categorisation of digital news platforms as non-mainstream. While all four groups of stakeholders interviewed in this study agreed that it is becoming increasingly important to operate digital news platforms, participants in the owners (B) category believe that stopping the print edition of a newspaper in Nigeria would be very likely to initiate the demise of the news company or relegate it to the overpopulated and uncontrolled realm of non-mainstream online news platforms. Even if it appears to be a beneficial business decision to go solely online, masthead owners perceive this move as a bad sign to project to news audiences. Hence, participant B1 noted that newspaper companies’ adoption of digital operations is “forced” by the perceived necessity of being able to take part in the digital economy and out of the uncertainty of the future of traditional platforms, rather than as an innovative or developmental strategy. This perception perhaps contributes to mastheads’ tight grip on their print copies, considering the stakeholder concept of Weiss (2006) that explains how stakeholders’ perceptions can influence organisational position. Rather than optimising digital news channels as independent products with a large audience base, masthead managements mostly deploy them as ways to keep newsprint relevant. The operations of some newspapers indicate that they are even more focused on using digital channels to catch the attention of readers and redirect them to hard copies.

Some organisations depict the digital arena as a place of fads that come and go. Participant D5 noted that some masthead managements paint the picture of a transient trend that is not something for professional news organisations to engage with, and their organisational environments project this image through their staffing and operational policies. Participants B1, C2 and D1 explained that mastheads use the same staff they hired as conventional reporters to run their online arms, without adequate training. Participant C2 noted that this is probably so because there is little or no budgetary allocation for online departments, limiting their abilities to function optimally. Leonard-Barton (1987; 1988) and Lewis, Agarwal and Sambamurthy (2003) point out that funding and resource provisioning can signal organisational perspectives on certain courses of action. Thus, employees may interpret this signal as a reason to stay focused on progressing through the extant human resources paths to growth and promotion, especially since that is the route senior executives have passed through, including those who have now become online editors.

Another key institutional influence is recurring discussion about the unethical and illegal activities of some digital news outlets. Masthead stakeholders expressed concern about how unethically some digital news platforms source and disseminate their news stories.

Participants B1, B4, C4 and D5 bemoan the level of commercialisation that has evolved with the digitalisation of news, claiming that most non-conventional digital news platforms are set up not out of a sense of social responsibility but as platforms to obtain revenue in the digital economy. Participant B1 explained that these providers often source stories by copying intellectual property from conventional mastheads to repost on their news sites. Sometimes they edit the stories, and sometimes they simply upload them word for word without credit to the newspaper. Mastheads have made efforts to stop other news sites plagiarising their content: for example, participant B4 said his organisation had written many letters of warning

through their lawyers but the letters were not a deterrent. He added that his organisation had even tried to prosecute some cases in court, but there is yet to be a successful prosecution because of Nigeria's slow and inefficient legal system. Masthead stakeholders argue that regulations and enforcement systems are inadequate and provide room for digital news sites to act unprofessionally and illegally.

In terms of ethical practice, participants A5 and B5 noted that some digital-only news platforms do not demonstrate knowledge of Nigeria's journalism code of ethics, or perhaps ignore it in the way they disseminate information. Considering that codes of ethics are professional guidelines and not laws, they are not necessarily enforceable, meaning that only ethically-conscious organisations that care about professional standards seek to stay aligned with them. Participant A5 mentioned that sometimes, in a bid to break news and gain web traffic, some digital-only channels deliberately jettison the value of balance: "the desperation to get audience causes some misleading headlines and unethical content that we see." He further explained that some of them operate without a readily identifiable owner. They publish defamatory content about individuals and organisations to create controversy and increase numbers of clicks. These unprofessional operational patterns have contributed to making conventional newspapers not fully receptive of the broad idea of news digitalisation. As noted in Chapter 4, this position fuels the perception that digital news platforms are mostly unprofessional and exploit legal loopholes.

Another institutional position that fuels this perception is the open characteristic of digital-only news platforms. Traditional media systems present editors as people of high esteem; they portray that the gate-keeping process is to be respected (Ekeli, 2017). Editors determine the stories that make it into the newspapers and their positioning; to a significant extent, no

story can be published without the knowledge and approval of the editor. However, digital-only news channels typically erode the place of editors; operators and even citizens are able to disseminate information as they choose without filters or editing. This unfettered access to news production negates the traditional ideologies of journalism. Ncube (2015) explains that the proliferation of smartphones in Africa, occasioned by an influx of more affordable phones from Asian manufacturers, has led to increased citizen participation in news dissemination, causing professional lines of differences to fade. Print media institutions have responded with a posture that leans towards strengthening the professional boundaries of journalism, with the aim of excluding non-professionals from the field. Similar to the findings of Ornebring (2013) on journalists' opinions of citizen journalists in Europe, the results of this study show that traditional journalists attempt to distinguish themselves and redraw the fading lines of difference between conventional and citizen journalism based on their expertise, experience, sense of duty, commitment to ethical and moral standards and respect for news values and journalism tenets. This position strengthens the opinion that journalists should focus more on relevance within the traditional newspapering system so as to remain in the professional circle.

These institutional influences have contributed to the subsidiarity with which the diffusion of digital news has been handled in newspaper organisations. They also contribute to how masthead stakeholders perceive the diffusion of digital news channels. Based on these institutional influences, news digitalisation is largely perceived as secondary to traditional newspapering. Although they make incremental efforts to establish their presence online, masthead stakeholders believe that the local media market accords prominence to mainstream newspapers and their print edition signifies their mainstream status.

### 5.1.2 Social Influence

Lewis, Agarwal and Sambamurthy (2003) explain that social influence as a determinant of perception about digital technologies can be understood in a number of ways. They cite the position of Mathieson (1991), Taylor and Todd (1995) and Thompson, Higgins and Howell (1991), who proposed that social influence can be viewed in terms of social pressure to either perform a behaviour or refrain from it. Drawing from Fulk (1993), Lewis, Agarwal and Sambamurthy (2003) further explain that social influence may be understood from the perspective of information shared in the social spheres of an individual. Fulk holds that such information within an individual's social sphere is capable of influencing cognition and perspectives about technology.

For the purpose of this research, social influence is viewed from perspectives of both social pressure and information in social circles, based on social experiences in the local context of the study. In essence, social influence is explained based on how local experiences contribute to the pressures and information in social spheres of stakeholders and how such information shapes their perception of digital technologies. Key social discourses around the adoption of digital technologies in conventional newspapers revolve around issues such as the extent of availability of digital infrastructure, technological fallibility, media literacy and neo-colonialism.

On the extent of availability of digital infrastructure, coverage statistics (World Bank, 2019; Jumia, 2019) corroborated by most participants' responses show that about half of Nigeria's population is yet to be connected to the internet. Some cannot afford internet-enabled devices, while some areas still do not have coverage. Internet service providers concentrate coverage in urban areas, perhaps because of the dense population and higher income rates.

Participants A1 and B5 interpret this digital divide as a reason to prioritise traditional print newspapers over digital news platforms, noting that newspapers are still needed to reach out to those in rural areas without internet access. Hence, there is the perception that digital news platforms alone are not suitable for the Nigerian media market. Participant A1 noted that even where there is internet connectivity, it is not reliable. Perhaps because of increasing migration into the already densely populated urban centres, internet connection often fails because it is overloaded. Regular instances of servers being down and connection being interrupted do not affect newsprint. Stakeholders thus perceive that while digital connectivity in Nigeria is susceptible to interruptions, newspapers provide regular access to news, further distinguishing them from digital news platforms.

The rate of media literacy in Nigeria is another topic noted by masthead stakeholders. A recent UNESCO report (UNESCO, 2018) put the literacy rate among citizens aged fifteen and above in Nigeria at 62.02%. Thus, over seventy-five million Nigerians are illiterate. The rate of media literacy could be expected to be even lower, given that media literacy goes beyond the ability to read and write to include a critical understanding of media contents and techniques (Harry, 2017). The implication participants A2, A5, and C2 draw from these literacy levels is that there remains a crucial need to control information flows from the media, particularly because of the lingering divisions and propensity for aggression within the country. Drawing examples from civil wars, inter-tribal and inter-religious attacks in Africa's recent history, participants A5 and C5 say they consider the openness provided by the internet as dangerous and capable of triggering further insurgencies, clashes and even civil wars. Hence, these masthead stakeholders perceive digital news channels as a time bomb, a danger waiting to happen, because of the lack of adequate control mechanisms in the online space. Thus newspapers tend to position themselves as credible alternatives that

understand local demographics and ways to best to present information in order to avoid triggering unrest in the country.

Another indicator of social influence is the perception that foreign platform ownership and control of the digital scenery creates a kind of neo-colonialism. D'Arnault (2015) explains that digital platforms entrench digital cultures, and that digital technologies significantly shape the way human beings interact, behave, think and communicate. Like most countries in Africa, Nigeria is a post-colonial country. Its colonial history already paints a picture of subjugation. Although the press in African countries to some extent was a colonial construction, with increasing local participation it fought assiduously against appearances of colonialism. Hence, there is wariness in conventional media circles about any move that appears to be an attempt at recolonisation. Participant D5 noted that indigenous news corporations are losing control in the information and news landscape to foreign-based firms. Given that Africa is not a frontline technological force, the reliance on developed countries is increasing. This foreign reliance is suggested to be capable of causing local cultures to gradually fade away and be replaced by western values (Daramola, 2013). Stakeholders refer to the fact that most popular digital media technologies used by Africans were developed outside Africa, mostly in America. They infer that it is thereby almost impossible for American cultures not to be reflected through these platforms.

Furthermore, Jamerson (2019) argues that digital technologies are being actively deployed to proliferate the concept of a globalised economy “where racially marginalised groups are clearly and systematically disadvantaged.” Jamerson explains that these technologies have established new digital marketplaces that thrive on approval, typically “measured in terms of follows, likes, clicks, comments and retweets” (p. 40). The digital space and embedded

activities are perceived to be inclined towards subtly mirroring extant racial inequalities. Masthead stakeholders express some caution about this possibility but hold that digital news media portray elements of neo-colonialism, thereby emphasising the need to retain traditional structures that can present the news without any taint of foreign agenda. Newspapers have similarly criticised digital diaspora media outlets for foreign undertones, spreading the notion that they cannot be accorded the level of trust and relevance of locally operated traditional news media (Kperogi, 2011). Although traditional newspapers are themselves colonial constructs, the entry of indigenous owners into the industry and the anti-colonial roles they played leading to Nigeria's independence gave them a localised and nationalistic outlook, which boosted the trust readers had in them to play social leadership roles. Digital news platforms are viewed as one of the tools for cultural depletion, while traditional newspapers present themselves as tools for cultural renaissance.

These social influences have also contributed to the overarching perceptions of masthead stakeholders about digital news media. They believe the conventional press is more relevant to Nigeria's socio-cultural context than the foreign undertones in digital news channels. They also retain the nationalistic standpoint from the pre-independence era that stands against colonialism in its various forms. They perceive that digital news channels have the potential of becoming a major tool for recolonisation, thus they aim to use their traditional platform to sustain local cultures and keep them relevant.

### **5.1.3 Individual Influence**

Individual experiences with digital technologies also affect one's perception of them. Although masthead stakeholders work within institutional and social contexts, their individuality is brought into the work environment and contributes to overall perceptions

about news digitalisation. Rogers and Shoemaker (1971) explain that individual behaviour towards technology determines overall belief about it and the time frame for its adoption. Hence, as well as institutional and social influences, individual influence contributes to the overall perception of news digitalisation and how it is approached. According to Lewis, Agarwal and Sambamurthy (2003) “the most proximate influence on an individual’s cognitive interpretations of information technology is factors related to the individual.” Experiences of masthead stakeholders with digital news technologies influence the way they think about them.

Individual views of stakeholders about news digitalisation come from their engagement with these technologies. Stakeholders in this study explained their interactions with digital technologies based on the features they found to be advantageous and/or innovative for journalism practice. The innovative features of digital news media appear as a threat to some stakeholders, while others perceive them as an opportunity to improve on news processes. Although some stakeholders at some points showed how digital news media may threaten the continued existence of traditional newspapers, all participants ultimately tilted towards a perception of complementarity, indicating how both conventional newspapers and digital news channels can exist together to serve the needs and preferences of varying news audiences.

Participants broadly perceive news digitalisation as an opportunity for improvement in the news industry. Digital news media are seen to add value to the journalism profession, making practice and usage more seamless. Participant C4 took the position that:

It is value addition. Online media is a product of 21<sup>st</sup> century technology, which on its own is meant to drive the process of

news production, news gathering and provide a new template for storytelling.

Similar to the features explained in chapter one, digital news technologies enhance news processes and create new approaches to storytelling and information dissemination with their remedial features, one of which is interactivity. This is reflected in the findings of this study. Participants noted that journalism experiences are changing and one of the factors responsible for this is the improved interactivity of digital news platforms. Before digital news platforms emerged in Nigeria, interacting with newspapers was not easy or fast. Readers had to write letters to the editor without the certainty of gaining any attention, let alone being published in the opinion pages of the newspaper. However, some digital news platforms now have comment sections or links to their social media pages where readers can respond instantaneously and openly. This feature is particularly useful in Nigeria because it creates an avenue to replicate the newsstand discussion style in the digital space, engaging readers not only as passive recipients of news but also as contributors to the news discourse. Nigerians usually show a sense of community when deliberating on current issues, mostly around government underperformance. Every morning, readers of newspapers gather around newsstands to read the news and comment among themselves. Comment sections have not only made this possible online, but have also removed geographical barriers. At the newsstands, readers can only discuss among the people present. Comment sections allow readers to discuss among themselves irrespective of geographical distance, and also with the newspaper. News reporters sometimes participate in such discussions, creating a more robust sense of interaction with the news media. However, despite news digitalisation, physical newsstand readership is still common. Generally, the interactivity feature of digital news platforms has influenced the experience of stakeholders and created a perception of improvement upon existing press traditions.

The constraints of space, style and length, which mean that only a few letters to the editor can be published in print newspapers also apply to news pages. News stories, features, pictures and advertisements have to fit into certain restrictions, usually determined by advertising, placing a lid on reporters' creativity and flexibility. News content is also limited to the forms of content that can be accommodated on the channel type. For newspapers, content is limited to text and pictures. However, digital news platforms provide more flexibility, and are not limited by space or channel type. Participant B4 commented that with digital news technologies, it is now possible to post videos along with news stories, with the result that newspapers are now becoming broader-based media organisations. Stakeholders' individual experiences of this interactivity feature through digital news channels and social media platforms help them to form the perception that news digitalisation is an addition of value to the news media.

As noted earlier in section 1.1, another feature that contributes to stakeholders' perceptions of news digitalisation is timeliness. News is meant to be disseminated in a timely manner, but conventional news platforms are restricted to the traditional timing of their products - unlike digital news media that can share news as it happens Karlsson (2011). Participants A1, B1 and C5 referred to the fact that while most newspapers compile stories to be released every twenty-four hours, digital news outlets can be updated in real time. Considering this timeliness feature, in addition to other features discussed above, stakeholders perceive that digital news media can provide leverage for conventional platforms to engage in a more timely and interactive fashion with their audiences. At the same time, these innovative features inform the competitive edge that some stakeholders believe digital news platforms have over conventional newspapers.

Similar to Meyer (2004) and others in the replacement school of thought - see for example James, Wotring and Forest (1995); Kayany and Yelsma (2000); Dimmick, Chen and Li (2004); Gaskins and Jerit (2012); Silverman (2014) - who argue that new media technologies have disruptive features and are capable of replacing print newspapers, some stakeholders expressed concerns that the end may be near for newspapers. Participants B4 and C5, for example, initially suggested that digital news channels may render newspapers irrelevant. However, after considering the local situation in Nigeria, they suggested that newspapers may still remain, but have a great deal of work to do to remain relevant in the news landscape and adequately maximise the availability of digital platforms. Nonetheless, perceptions of replacement have contributed to uncertainty in the local news environment. Hence, most conventional newspapers seek to retain their relevance and maintain digital presence by leveraging the timeliness advantage to break news online and direct readers to the forthcoming hardcopy for details of the story. Online stories are also likely to be shared, further boosting the relevance and popularity of mastheads, as Hemsley, Jacobson, Gruzd and Mai (2018) have suggested that users of digital news channels make use of social media and other digital platforms to share news stories. So, while some readers may still opt to read conventional newspapers, others (especially younger readers) rarely engage with print. They typically look online for those details and other news stories that interest them.

This study has found that although digital news platforms have further precipitated segmentation in the media market, they are also creating their own markets, especially with younger people who had not previously engaged extensively with newspapers. This leads to the perception of digital news channels as an opportunity for mastheads to reach new audiences in a different niche. Thus, all participating stakeholders – even those who expressed doubt about the future of newspapers - ultimately saw digital news channels as

remediation for conventional mastheads to fill gaps in their operations and expand their reach and influence by engaging with online-only readers.

Like Lewis, Agarwal and Sambamurthy (2003) pointed out, personal understandings of the innovativeness of digital technologies have a significant influence on individual beliefs about such technologies. These individual beliefs influence broad perceptions about digital technologies in the work environment. For masthead stakeholders, their individual understandings of news digitalisation show that it can be both an added value to conventional newspapers and a threat to their relevance. Broadly, however, they believe news digitalisation provides leverage for conventional newspapers if strategically harnessed.

The interplay of these three factors – institutional, social and individual, assists in developing an understanding of stakeholders' perceptions about the continued digitalisation of news in Nigeria. Masthead stakeholders largely reflect the opinion that news digitalisation is useful to complement existing traditional newspaper systems, but will not replace them. Although there are concerns about its competitive advantages based on personal use and experiences of stakeholders, socio-cultural and organisational environments where stakeholders work are inclined towards the notion that conventional newspapers will remain key products, while digital news platforms are perceived as important, but reliant on traditional structures.

## **5.2 Sustainability of Traditional Mastheads**

This section discusses responses to the second research question: *How sustainable are traditional mastheads in Nigeria's media landscape?*

Continued digitalisation of news has precipitated doubts about the relevance and sustainability potentials of conventional mastheads, as discussed in the previous section. An

examination of the local context, however, provides a clearer picture of the media landscape in Nigeria. Stakeholders referred to historical trends and current occurrences to provide foresight into the sustainability of mastheads in the local news environment. Historically, since the beginning of formal journalism in Nigeria with *Iwe Irohin* newspaper in 1859, no new medium has displaced an existing one: they end up complementing one another and this trend is expected to continue (Talabi, 2011; Duyile, 2019). This perspective is broadly shared by the masthead stakeholders in this study. Participant B3 traced media history to note that there were replacement concerns in 1932 when radio was introduced, and in 1959 when the first television station was developed in Nigeria. This participant noted that although media markets were further segmented, the new media forms attained an optimal level and worked in complementarity with older ones. This demonstrates that the remediation concept of Bolter and Grusin (2000) has been playing out in the Nigerian news media landscape since the introduction of formal journalism in the country, and suggests the pattern is likely to continue.

Despite the challenges news digitalisation poses to traditional mastheads, stakeholders cited various local factors to suggest that newspapers are still relevant and will be sustained for years to come. One such factor is the transgenerational relationship between Nigeria's political system and the press. As noted previously, the first newspaper to be established in Nigeria was set up as a colonial-era religious publication, but with increasing literacy, political consciousness rose and readers engaged more with newspapers to be kept abreast of political happenings. The nationalistic position of most newspapers that sprang up in the colonial era contributed immensely to the attainment of political independence on October 1, 1960. Post-independence, newspapers led a resistance against military governments. Like Duyile (2019) noted, the military government continued in colonial patterns to make

draconian laws aimed at hindering press freedom, but the press remained undaunted, fiery and pungent in their editorial style. Press efforts again yielded results on May 29, 1999 when the military handed power to a democratically elected government (Falola and Heaton, 2008). Since 1999, newspapers have carried out a series of activism campaigns. A major example was the 2007 opposition to President Olusegun Obasanjo's attempt to stay in power beyond the constitutionally allowed period of two terms of four years each. The media labelled it a "third term agenda" and vehemently opposed it, suggesting that his approach was no different to the military style. Although he had senior newspaper officials in his government as spokesmen, the agenda was truncated and Obasanjo was unable to contest the elections. Newspapers have thus been a major platform for nationalism and social activism in Nigeria. Although there is widespread activism online, newspapers are seen as determiners of salience. They are still viewed as being on the front line of social activism, which is one of the reasons why successive governments have appointed both serving and former newspaper editors as media advisors, aiming to use their influence to tilt editorial positions in their favour.

Furthermore, newspapers continue to be dominant in the agenda setting space. As described in 4.2.2, there is a culture of community readership in Nigeria that has remained strong even during times of reduced purchasing of print copies. Millions of readers of news, young and old, from all walks of life, gather at newspaper vending stands to read, both in urban and rural areas: they are referred to as the Free Readers' Association of Nigeria (Oliha & Arthur, 2014; Agboola, 2014; Odiboh, et al., 2017). In the process of reading, they discuss issues in the newspapers and even argue among themselves. Most often, they go back to read news stories to resolve their arguments and form opinions that they take to their spheres of influence. In a 2015 CNN report titled "*The 'loud, furious' world of Nigeria's free readers*"

Stephanie Busari notes that the news vending stand is a unique place where friendships are forged, arguments break out and opinions are formed. She noted that arguments are even louder and longer during elections and major sporting leagues. Although their readership does not contribute to the mastheads' revenue, it boosts their agenda setting power by taking those agendas beyond the recorded circulation, thereby strengthening the social power and relevance of the newspaper. Political parties and successive governments leverage this agenda setting power during electoral campaigns, attempting to dominate the public sphere with discourses that favour their candidates and aspirations.



Figure 1: Picture of newspaper readers at a newspaper vending stand  
Source: [multimedia.nan.ng](http://multimedia.nan.ng)



Figure 2: Screenshot of CNN story on Nigeria's free readers  
Source: *edition.cnn.com*

Moreover, participant stakeholders, mostly in the owner category, pointed out that most stand-alone digital news platforms in Nigeria copy newspaper stories to repost. Again, this approach does not contribute directly to the revenue of newspaper corporations, but it furthers the extent of mastheads' influence in setting agendas for social discourse. Many news blogs and social media accounts regularly post stories copied from mainstream platforms on their digital channels. Sometimes, they simply upload pictures of the front pages and selected stories from newspapers. Stakeholders in this study complained that this has reduced their copy sales, but from the perspective of reach, the agendas of the mastheads, and sometimes their brands, are amplified beyond their possible reach without diffusion of digital news platforms. Hence, while newspapers find it difficult to put a stop to this trend, they may also benefit from it.

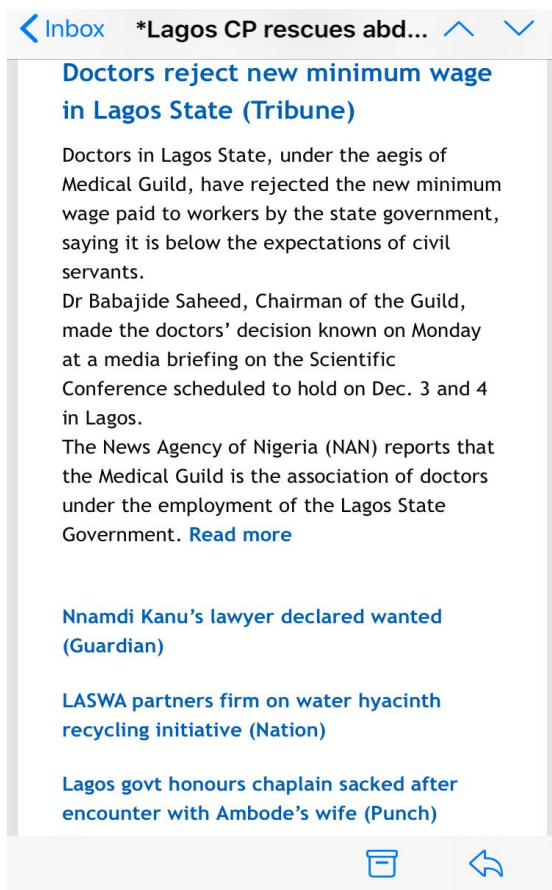


Figure 3: Screenshot of 1<sup>st</sup> news email, showing news from major national newspapers  
 Source: Author's Email Inbox

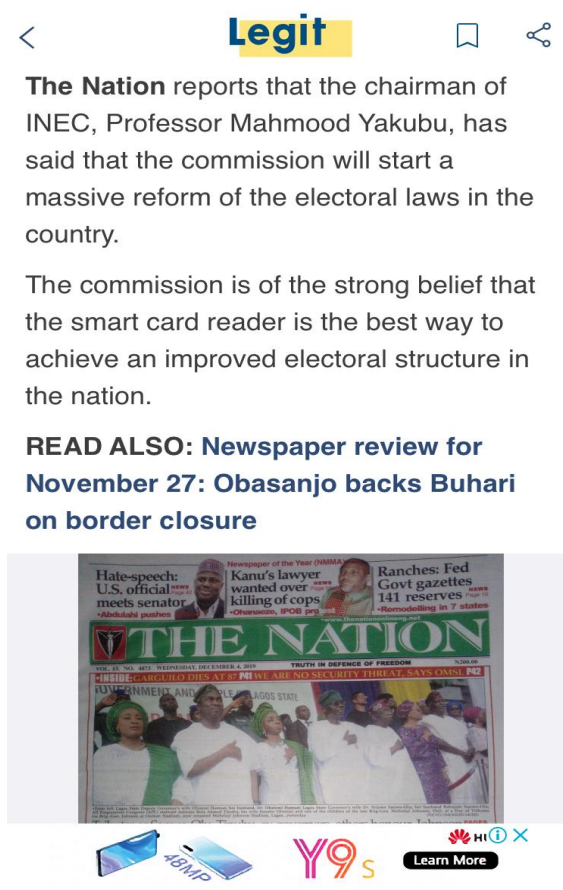


Figure 4: Screenshot of Legit News App reposting from The Nation  
 Source: legit.ng

Longstanding mainstream mastheads are also diversifying in their operations. Some of them have ventured into organising major events, fashion shows, masterclasses, consultancies and even broadcasting. Some newspapers have also entered into joint venture agreements with companies in other industries. They leverage the goodwill of their brands to operate other businesses that serve as additional streams of income. Participant B4 cited the example of his newspaper organisation that: “we have different business arms with the newspaper at the centre. We now have a television station, we do health financing, we run fashion shows and so on.” This way, even if revenue from newspapers is dwindling, the goodwill mastheads enjoy enables them to increase their revenue through other business platforms. Hence, stakeholders hold that it is important to remain in the mainstream news industry to sustain

professionalism while they venture into other business areas to tackle their revenue challenges.

Additionally, considering the digital divide, newspapers and other traditional media forms are still needed to take news to areas where there is no internet coverage. Provision of internet services in Nigeria is mostly limited to major cities that are densely populated by the middle class. The population and the relatively higher purchasing power are deemed to be the attraction to telecommunication companies that provide internet services. As there appears to be a neglect of rural areas, which form the majority of Nigeria's geographical area and are home to over half the country's population (World Bank, 2019), masthead stakeholders perceive the need to sustain their presence in the hinterlands so that these rural dwellers will not be further deprived of information about occurrences around them.

Another factor that works in favour of the sustainability of conventional mastheads is the availability of favourable advertising policies. For instance, participants A4 and A5 mentioned that Corporate Affairs Commission legislation requires publicly listed companies to advertise their profit and loss statements and Annual General Meeting announcements in national dailies. Other occurrences or issues such as sales and allocation of land, individual change of names, stock market reports, all job vacancies in government agencies, senior level vacancies in private organisations, election announcements and so on are also required by law to be published as an advertorial in at least one or two national daily newspapers. This study also found that corporate organisations like to see themselves in print. For many of them, it is a declaration of status. This kind of policy and preference guarantees a level of advertising patronage for mastheads, providing an ongoing source of revenue and enhancing the sustainability prospects of mainstream mastheads.

From the preceding discussion, it is evident that masthead stakeholders are of the position that conventional mastheads remain sustainable in the Nigerian news environment, despite global concerns that the end of newspapers is near. These factors show the importance of understanding local contexts to understand the environment in which news media operate and their future outlooks. The Asian experience, for instance, shows that conventional mastheads are still very relevant for some newspapers, such as *The Times of India* and *Hindustan Times* in India recording an average of ten million daily circulation and *Asahi Shimbun* and *Yomiuri Shimbun* in Japan recording an average daily circulation of around seven to eight million (Best Media Info, 2019; George, 2019). In Nigeria, although circulation figures are declining, mainstream mastheads are still relevant in leading social discourse and are in a position to leverage news digitalisation to further boost their relevance.

### **5.3 Summary of Findings**

This section summarises the findings presented in this chapter. The chapter explored findings of the study to address the first two research questions. In section 5.1, addressing the first question, I extrapolate from Lewis, Agarwal and Sambamurthy (2003) to argue that threefold factors - those arising from the institutional space of mastheads, those emanating from social contexts and circles and individual orientations and beliefs - contribute to the overarching perceptions of masthead stakeholders about the increasing digitalisation of news in Nigeria. Considering these threefold factors, stakeholders perceive news digitalisation mainly in the light of remediation. It is true that there are concerns about the possibilities of digital news channels replacing traditional newspapers, but the interplay of these three factors is perceived by stakeholders as favouring a situation of complementarity in the news landscape. Even though some personal usage experiences of stakeholders raise uncertainties about the future of conventional newspapers, institutional and social positions are more dominant and

ultimately show that both conventional newspapers and digital news channels coexist in the Nigerian news environment and are most likely to continue in such coexistence in the future.

In section 5.2, I discuss that contrary to popular suggestions and indications that newspapers will soon fade, stakeholders believe they are still viable in Nigeria and will remain so for many more years, given the wide digital divide, literacy levels, cultural inclinations, colonial and post-colonial histories, favourable legislation and other factors that are present in the local media environment. In presenting this notion of continued sustainability, masthead stakeholders point out that circulation is indeed declining but relevance is wider because of the leading roles mainstream mastheads play in directing social and political discourse locally, as well as the indirect opportunity digitalisation and news sharing presents as mainstream masthead contents are further disseminated via digital news platforms.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Masthead Responses to News Digitalisation in the Nigerian News Milieu**

This chapter explores the responses of conventional masthead stakeholders to continued news digitalisation to address this study's final two research questions:

Research Question Three: How effectively are traditional mastheads deploying digital strategies in reaction to continued digitalisation of news?

Research Question Four: What are the implications of the prevalent digital news diffusion on:

- a. The legal and ethical atmosphere of the Nigerian news media, and
- b. The current state of media education in Nigeria?

The third research question explores participants' perceptions of responses by conventional mastheads to the spread of digital news channels, focusing on efforts to retain industry relevance and enhance sustainability prospects. The fourth question aims to address the ethical and educational implications of digital news diffusion for traditional newspapers and how they are responding. Although the study did not initially set out to investigate ethical dimensions of digital news encroachment, the importance of this issue became clear after it was raised by most stakeholders during the interviews. Consequently, the data were also analysed in relation to this theme, as well as the implications of digital news dissemination for tertiary media education in Nigeria.

#### **6.1 Assessing Masthead Digital Strategies in Response to News Digitalisation**

This section addresses the third research question: How effectively are traditional mastheads deploying digital strategies in reaction to continued digitalisation of news? Although stakeholders perceive that conventional newspapers will remain relevant in the Nigerian news

landscape for years to come, they also believe that it is important to operate digital channels to keep pace with technological advancements. The findings of this study show that a range of strategies have been adopted by newspaper companies to establish their presence in the digital news sphere, to engage with online news audiences and to further improve opportunities for sustained relevance and existence. Participants across the four stakeholder categories noted that newspaper organisations are increasingly adopting strategies to initiate and maintain digital presence. Participants A1 and A4 noted that it is important to engage with the digital news market and to give news audiences room for interaction, while participant D5 explained that newspapers are experiencing a transition to broader-based news organisations because of their adoption of a multimedia approach occasioned by the realities of media convergence.

One of the earliest digital strategies deployed by mastheads in Nigeria was the development of websites and news portals (Bolat, 2019). With increasing availability of news online, occasioned by diaspora-based news media and, later, indigenous news bloggers, newspaper companies realised there was a need to also occupy the digital space (Kperogi, 2012). Most newspapers started to develop websites, followed by mobile news applications. However, some of those early websites were static and not regularly updated. Participant D5 observed that newspaper stakeholders mostly initially saw news digitalisation as a trend that would be short-lived and consequently only wanted to tick the box of being online. However, as digital news technologies have increased in popularity, most newspaper organisations have developed their websites to be more functional and dynamic. Participant D1 suggested that for mastheads to stay relevant, they need to have strong online presence. Currently, every conventional masthead in Nigeria with national coverage has a functioning news website and application. However, the findings of this research indicate there are two fundamental issues

with how mastheads operate these digital news platforms.

First, as shown in the previous chapter, mastheads operate their websites and news applications within the purview of traditional newspapering. They operate the sites as subsidiary products and attempt to use them to draw attention to their hard copies. One strategy they adopt is to break news stories online as briefly as possible and encourage readers to look out for the full stories in the next hard copy edition. The adequacy of this strategy is questionable, especially when the story is not exclusive to a particular newspaper; and, as participant B1 lamented, even when the stories are exclusive, once published, they cease to be because the stories are copied and reposted by others. This limits the success of mastheads in directing readers to their hard copies.

In addition, as an offshoot of operating within traditional systems, mastheads make use of reporters who are trained and experienced in conventional structures of newspapering to write for both the hard copy newspaper and the websites/apps. They also typically appoint long-standing sub-editors as online editors or coordinators. It is worth noting that the job descriptions and human resources policies for recruitment and promotion are largely centred on traditional print platforms. This kind of operation causes a stylistic dominance, where traditional news writing and delivery style are used on digital platforms. Stories prepared for print are often posted on digital news channels as well in their traditional formats.

Participants A4, C1, C5 note that “slamming” content across print and digital platforms in this manner without optimising them for cross-media consumption is common among masthead-operated news websites and portals, but is counter-productive to their efforts at digital engagement. Mastheads typically prioritise print over digital, meaning that print formats and styles dominate, leaving little room for news stories to be optimally utilised online.

While operating an online channel under the auspices of a traditional masthead may be a cost-cutting approach, if mastheads are to optimise their various news channels it is necessary for practitioners involved to understand the differences in the market segments they are writing for. As mentioned in section 5.1.1, Jenkins' (2006) media convergence theoretical framework shows that inadequate optimisation of digital channels limits the chances for successful audience engagement. The cross-media concept also holds that audiences are maximally engaged when messages are optimised through various channels in the convergence spectrum (Davidson, 2010; Phillips, 2012). Hence, while it might suffice for a news organisation to have some staff working in the online department, it may not be sufficient from the user's perspective to read stories that were originally prepared for a different platform. News gathering and writing techniques for conventional newspapers may not be adequate for online stories because of differences in the design and features of both platforms and the limitations traditional reporting techniques place on digital channels. For instance, it is becoming a common feature in the digital space to provide opportunities for news audiences to engage with journalists as well as people who are the subjects of online news stories by tagging or providing a link to their social media accounts, but this is not the case in conventional newspapers. So, a story prepared for conventional newspapers that does not provide links to the social media handles of journalists and individuals to whom the story refers will not achieve optimal engagement if posted online, detracting from the overall user experience.

One of the advantages media convergence brings to news dissemination is that online stories can carry audio and video recordings, and can use hyperlinks to redirect readers to URLs that further explain concepts in news articles. Hypertext can also be used to redirect users to previously published stories that may contribute to their understanding of the topic. The

limited use of these strategies by Nigerian mastheads, largely due to their focus on established staff to run their online spaces rather than those with specific digital skills, contributes to the overall inadequate digitalisation in the news landscape. For example, Participant C1 mentioned that “many of our journalists were trained in the analogue era”, suggesting a gap between their skills and the digital strategies needed for effective engagement of news consumers. Another element of the online space that is not the same as in print is timeliness. Stories can be updated online as events unfold, and participant B4 suggests (in line with Karlsson, 2011) that this characteristic sets digital news media above conventional newspapers. Users can also engage with the news providers and other users by leaving comments in the comment section under each article. These features are not available in conventional print newspapers; to utilise them optimally, operators should possess adequate digital abilities in addition to journalistic skills. This further points to shortcomings in the deployment of existing staff to online departments without adequate upskilling.

Participant responses, mostly in the strategic interest and special interest groups, show that directly lifting content from hardcopy print to online news platforms is an inefficient strategy. Although there are readers who flick between both options in the Nigerian news landscape, there is still a segmentation in the media market that distinguishes core traditional newspaper readers (mostly older audiences) from core online news readers (mostly younger audiences). Traditional newspaper readers typically flip through the pages, either fully or selectively reading news articles therein, while digital news readers click on articles of interest to them either directly from news sites or through social media engagement, news emails or notifications. They may also search for particular news stories that they wish to read or follow up on. Because of the multiple uses of digital devices and the variety of content competing for attention, it is important to align with the theoretical contributions of cross-

media engagement and media convergence (Jenkins, 2006; Davidson, 2010; Phillips, 2012) that underscore the importance of medium optimisation in message production, so as to not only catch readers' attention but also to sustain it with concise and creative styles, as discussed in section 2.6.1. Considering the agreement of these theoretical concepts with participant responses, it can be concluded that having online news in same form as the print version amounts to an underutilisation of the dynamism and capabilities of web design. It also makes the medium of access the only difference between print and digital news forms; the content and style stay exactly the same, offering no room for stylistic and usage preferences that some users may find more attractive, and rendering the medium design redundant.

Furthermore, the subsidiary placement of digital news platforms appears to have become a more popular position among mastheads after experimentation with paywall strategies failed. Participant B5 noted that since the emergence of online news, newspaper organisations in Nigeria have at different times attempted to provide the news at a subscription cost to online audiences but these attempts have repeatedly failed. He cited a recent example from the experience of his company:

I doubt if digital news subscription will ever work in Nigeria ...  
We experimented with it and even made it cheaper at 50 Naira  
(0.20 AUD), yet it did not work fine. The percentage of people  
who know why they should pay for news is still very limited.

Even recent attempts by some newspaper organisations to produce an electronic copy of the newspaper as it appears in print and sell at cheaper prices have not yet yielded expected sales results. Stakeholders, particularly owners, say that any digital news dissemination model that requires readers to pay for news is not likely to succeed in Nigeria, as noted in participant

B5's response that:

Printing is still sustainable because that is where most of our revenue comes from. We have not gotten to the stage where we can monetise our online content. As soon as we do, people may stop their patronage.

Consequently, newspaper companies hold on strongly to their print editions while they continue to seek ways boost their presence online.

As an alternative to engaging audiences through a system of online news subscription, newspapers have adopted the use of social media for news promotion. Although posting news on social media platforms does not contribute directly to the income of newspaper companies, it can help to build their digital reach and improve their chances of increasing their advertising revenue. As noted in section 1.5, the three leading platforms used by mainstream mastheads in Nigeria are Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. The preference for Facebook is based on its popularity and reach. Facebook is ranked the most visited social media site in Nigeria. Twitter is popular with elites and creates a robust platform for engagement and deliberation. Instagram, being a photo sharing social networking application, is useful for mastheads to share photos of events they are reporting. The comment sections also provide room for robust interaction among followers. In using these social networking platforms, however, participant A4 suggested that mastheads need to pay more attention to the differences in the platforms' outlooks, styles and audience usage patterns:

Newspapers need to develop content strategy. They share stories on social media but it is not ideal to carry content from Facebook and slam it on Twitter, pick from Twitter and slam it on LinkedIn,

pick from LinkedIn and slam it on Instagram. They need specific strategies that are optimal for the platforms they want to use.

This position is supported by other participant responses (for example, B3, B4 C1, C4) that focus on the fact that mastheads commonly copy and paste content across different platforms without considering the core features of each platform. In their comments, similar to A4 above, they referred more specifically to social media, noting that reposting the same content across different social media platforms typically does not yield optimal results in audience engagement. They suggest that in adopting social media for news dissemination, each platform should be utilised according to its typical information presentation standards as well as popularly accepted style of its users, in order to improve audience engagement.

For instance, Facebook is relatively flexible with posts. It accommodates long posts and multiple pictures. Hence, newspapers may find it easy to simply repost their stories on their Facebook walls to engage with their “followers”. The comment section works as a discussion forum where other users can share their opinions about the post. Other sites have different affordances and constraints. Twitter initially only had room for 140 characters in a post, but that has now been doubled to 280. Ironically, however, Perez (2018) in a techcrunch.com article noted that “the common length of a tweet back when Twitter only allowed 140 characters was 34 characters. Now that the limit is 280 characters, the most common length of a tweet is 33 characters.” This provides an indication of the importance of brevity to the social networking platform. Although a newspaper may publish full stories as threads, posting a descriptive picture or comic that tells the story while providing the uniform resource locator (URL) to the full story is perhaps more helpful. Instagram on the other hand does not recognise URLs in its captions and comments. It allows users to post URLs only in the bio section or as a story. Unlike Twitter, pictures are the primary content of Instagram.

Captions can be used to describe or support picture posts and can be as long as 2200 characters, but shorter ones are believed to be more effective. So, attempting to simply “copy and paste” across platforms will not allow an optimal use of any of them. In essence, the affordances of each platform are able to aid digital news dissemination and audience engagement only if effectively harnessed by news organisations. This underscores the need for an optimal cross-media approach, utilising each platform for news dissemination based on its distinct design. For example, Instagram can provide room for news to be disseminated primarily through pictures, with captions to explain further, but to adequately leverage Instagram’s affordances, mastheads may have to pay more attention to training photojournalists.

In sum, as suggested by research participants A4, B3, B4 C1, C4, and supported by media convergence theory (Jenkins, 2006), while conventional mastheads are making efforts to stay online, they need to be more strategic in their activities. To further penetrate the digital market, conventional mastheads require a clearer understanding of these digital audience fragments and how to actively engage them, maximising the interactivity feature of digital platforms. This study concludes that effective user engagement requires optimal production and delivery of messages through selected digital channels, thus suggesting a change in the news writing and presentation style of mastheads from their traditional print products to their digital platforms. However, the findings of this research show that the operational systems of mastheads have been so traditionally structured that it is difficult to effect developmental change. As an example, attempts to duplicate traditional newspaper sales online through paywalls were unsuccessful. However, rather than coming up with more innovative ways to leverage the growth of digital technologies, newspapers retreated to their core traditional practice and prioritised print because they were guaranteed the minimum level of revenue it

generates, but in the process they relegated their digital news outlets to the background.

## **6.2 Stakeholders' Responses on Implications of News Digitalisation for Media Regulation and Education**

This section addresses the fourth research question raised in chapter one: What are the implications of digital news diffusion in the Nigerian media landscape?

Two key issues emerged in stakeholders' responses to questions about the implications of news digitalisation for the Nigerian news media landscape. First, stakeholders raised concerns that existing regulations are inadequate for the contemporary landscape, causing an erosion of journalistic values and a breach of media laws and ethics. Secondly, concerns were expressed about the inadequacy of media education in Nigeria, given the changes occurring in media practice.

### **6.2.1 Regulatory and Ethical Implications of Digital News Diffusion**

As mentioned in section 2.2, while tracing the evolution of Nigeria's press and colonial efforts at press suppression, the news media in Nigeria has always been under various forms of regulation. Although news media stakeholders have worked to attain incremental regulatory freedom for the press over the years (Akinwale, 2010), this research shows that there are concerns that existing regulatory frameworks may be inadequate for the contemporary realities of the news media industry, especially considering the pace of technological advances. Given that these technologies are not isolated to Nigeria, this regulatory challenge is similarly not limited to Nigeria. However, there are specific elements of and influences on the local context that need to be considered. The four categories of masthead stakeholders who participated in this research agreed that news digitalisation has affected the traditional systems of newspapering in many ways. However, they suggest that loopholes in the structure and regulatory framework of digital news platforms allow for

violations and ethical breaches, which are possibly the greatest threats to the journalism profession.

Furthermore, findings revealed that since the emergence and development of digital news platforms in Nigeria, the local news landscape has witnessed ongoing intellectual property theft. Participants shared the opinion that the laws guiding digital information dissemination in Nigeria are inadequate and ambiguous, lacking clear enforcement structures. Participant B3 explained that leaving online media to operate without a clear set of regulations has led to problems such as copyright breaches, plagiarism and defamation. Nigeria still operates a Copyright Act that was promulgated in 1988. Although it has been amended four times, in 1990, 1992, 1999 and 2004, this Act focuses mostly on traditional methods of mass communication – print and broadcast - covering activities that take place on the internet to only a limited extent. Consequently, mastheads whose contents are plagiarised online find it difficult to prosecute those responsible. Participants across the four stakeholder groups raised this issue despite the fact that it was not initially presented as a focus of this research. They noted that the legal shortcoming has left them helpless. Participant B4 and B5's comments illustrate this:

We had to write letters to some of them through our lawyers, warning them to stop stealing our stories. But how many of them can we possibly go after? (B4)

They have not been sued to court because of the legal system we operate. The case can remain in court for years. Besides, most people behind these sites do not have offices so it is hard to pin them down. And ours is not a society where you can easily trace

a person with basic identifiers. (B5)

These stakeholders further explained that piracy and plagiarism are more responsible for the decline in the revenue of news corporations in Nigeria than news digitalisation. While digitalisation has benefits, the unclear and inadequate regulatory framework has caused its disadvantages to overshadow those benefits. Some participants in the owner category explained the futility of efforts at arresting the situation because of the legal loophole but expressed willingness to prosecute offenders if the laws provide for it.

Furthermore, Ezeibe and Nwagwu (2009) suggest that news digitalisation has brought society to a stage where almost everyone is a journalist of some sort, given the participatory culture it promotes. The media convergence theoretical framework explains the blurring of demarcation between producers and users, providing room for a new category referred to as “producers” (Bird, 2011, p. 504). Anyone with a computing device and internet connection may choose to create a blog or website and news content. Castells (2007) explained that this openness has caused a shift from the journalist-centric era to an audience-based or people-driven reportorial era with citizens emerging on the news scene, taking control of how occurrences around them are viewed and interpreted. While this is partly true in the case of Nigeria, participating stakeholders suggested that many digital-only news platforms were created simply to gain online advertising revenue or as propaganda tools. Even though they are labelled news sites, most of them do not report their own news; they copy from newspapers and repost on their sites. They may be seen more as aggregators than citizen journalism platforms or independent news sites. Some others gather already published stories, rewrite them and present them as their own to create an appearance of originality. Original content is often limited to paid promotions or unfounded accusations.

Given the low rate of media literacy in Nigeria, the openness of the internet makes it difficult

to separate professional journalism from citizen journalism. For many readers of news, as long as it is in the news or online, they consider it true. Thus, participant stakeholders expressed the fear that criminal or rebel organisations may take advantage of this openness, coupled with Nigeria's volatility, to incite interethnic or interreligious clashes. Some stakeholders are of the opinion that gatekeeping is essential in any news organisation in Nigeria because of the historical instability in Africa. Hence, all groups of stakeholders that participated in this research ultimately called for regulation of the digital news space in one form or another. Participant A5 suggested that adequate regulation would help to ensure professionalism and sensitivity and avoid explosive triggers that may affect national stability and security, given Nigeria's history of inter-ethnic and inter-religious unrest and growing ethno-religious politicisation and mobilisation, which have been deepening since the re-introduction of democracy in 1999 (Ikelegbe, 2013).

The erosion of gatekeeping has also occasioned the frequent use of contents that is obscene and could be considered unfit for professional journalism. Nudity and gruesome images are becoming common among start-up digital news platforms, unlike conventional mastheads. Some sites perhaps make use of such content to gain traffic, ignoring or unaware of ethical principles of journalism. For instance, while conventional mastheads will typically find relevant but acceptable pictures to depict the scene of an insurgency attack, some start-up digital news platforms may show the images of bodies and blood uncensored, contributing to the impact of the attack and lending strength to the message of the insurgents. Such action violates the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) code of ethics but since many digital news channels are operated by people who are not publicly identified and are not bound by regulations to abide by the code of ethics, such content continues to appear on digital news sites.

Some digital platform developers are making efforts to control the type of content that is posted on their platforms, but their approach remains insufficient for some contexts (Gillespie, 2017; Obar & Wildman, 2015). Consequently, participants in this research advocated some form of locally-oriented regulation for digital news dissemination. Even though regulatory policies have been difficult to enforce online given the global nature of the online space (Gillespie, 2017), stakeholders believe there should be ways to curb illegal and unethical practices domestically, through changes to existing legislation on information dissemination. Most participant stakeholders initially hesitated in calling for such changes because of the history of press gagging in Nigeria by the colonial, military and even democratic governments. As discussed in section 2.2, successive Nigerian governments have taken advantage of every opportunity to reduce the extent of press freedom, which news media stakeholders have struggled to increase since the emergence of formal journalism in the country. This trend explains the scepticism expressed by some participating stakeholders, especially in the strategic partners category, to advocate for regulations in the digital news space. However, given the prevalence of legal and ethical breaches, the broad position of participants is that digital news diffusion should be regulated to reduce these kinds of breaches. Participants mostly suggested that regulations should be introduced to create a level-playing ground for both digital and traditional news platforms, suggesting that the existing media laws be extended to regulate digital news platforms. Some participants further suggested that if it is necessary to make more specific laws, all relevant stakeholders should be consulted and allowed to ratify them to ensure there are no exploitative loopholes that might hinder press freedom.

### **6.2.2 Assessing the Adequacy of Contemporary Media Education**

In considering how news digitalisation is affecting the news landscape, some stakeholders

referred to its impact on media education and how the current state of media education may limit the digital capabilities of Nigeria's news industry in the future. Findings of this research show that media education in Nigeria is not effective enough in responding to the changes occurring in the news industry. Participants, mostly in the owner and strategic partner categories, suggest there is a need for collaborative efforts between the classroom and the newsroom to facilitate improved responsiveness to the changes being brought about by digitalisation. Although media educators interviewed as part of the strategic partner category highlighted that they are in the process of reviewing the curriculum to accommodate the changes and prepare students for professional realities, the broad position of stakeholders is that the reactions are not happening fast enough, nor are they adequate.

Some stakeholders are of the opinion that media and journalism education in Nigeria is inadequate because it has remained traditional and many of the skills being taught are becoming obsolete. Odunlami (2014) observes that the rate of adoption and diffusion of innovations in the contemporary media industry is slow and, as such, poses a challenge to media educators as the requirements of the newsroom appear to be constantly ahead of what is being taught in the classroom, especially in the developing world. Given these concerns, there is a need to observe happenings in the news industry and not only prepare students for the field but also help them to be future-ready by foreseeing and preparing for potential changes that may occur.

Fundamentally, media education in Nigeria is perceived as too traditional and inadequate for the fast-paced news industry, contributing to the underutilisation of available technologies in the news media workplace. Participants A1, C1 and D1 suggested that while journalism and media education are being reviewed and developed to meet with contemporary industry demands, this should be supplemented with ongoing trainings for practicing professionals,

constantly seeking to update skills and technical proficiency, towards providing the increasingly divergent segments of the news audience with improved experiences with their preferred news media platforms.

### **6.3 Summary of Findings**

This chapter explored findings to address the remaining two research questions on how mastheads are deploying digital strategies in response to continued news digitalisation and how this digitalisation affects the Nigerian media landscape. Participants acknowledge the importance of digital development and are making efforts to be more visible in the online space. However, participants in this research indicate that the pace at which these strategies are being deployed is slow and the strategies appear inadequate. Mastheads appear to be stuck to their age-long tradition of news production and are yet to be innovative enough to leverage the opportunities digital technologies present.

Furthermore, this chapter discussed participants' concerns about how media laws and ethics are being eroded due to the inadequate regulatory framework for online news platforms. Participants called for clear regulation and enforcement for digital news dissemination platforms, noting that such regulation should not be used as instruments to reduce the extent of existing press freedom, but to enhance the practice of journalism locally.

Lastly, participants noted that with the technological advancements and resultant changes that are occurring on the news scene, existing media education systems are becoming obsolete and need to be updated to meet the realities of the industry. The prevalence of traditional media educational systems perhaps contributes to the limited technical capacities in the local news industry and consequent underutilisation of available digital channels of news.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Nigerian Mastheads in the Digital Age: The Way Forward**

This chapter concludes the thesis by providing a broad overview of key findings and charting the way forward for the Nigerian news media industry. Previous chapters have shown how stakeholders perceive news digitalisation and the way it affects the production and dissemination of news in Nigeria. This contextual consideration of the Nigerian news media landscape shows key occurrences in the development of news digitalisation and highlights contextual differences, which help in developing an understanding of how the local news industry is affected by news digitalisation and how it is responding. Consequently, with this research, I emphasise the need for contextualisation as the study contributes perspectives and experiences from Nigeria's (and to an extent, Africa's) underexplored local news media landscape to the traditional versus digital news media dialectic.

To explore Nigeria's news media context and how it is being affected by news digitalisation, four key questions were raised for this research, as outlined in chapter one. These questions are as follows:

Research Question One: What are stakeholders' perceptions of the continuous digitalisation occurring in the news landscape?

Research Question Two: How sustainable are traditional mastheads in Nigeria's media landscape?

Research Question Three: How effectively are traditional mastheads deploying digital strategies in reaction to continued digitalisation of news?

Research Question Four: What are the implications of the prevalent digital news diffusion on:

- a. the legal and ethical atmosphere of the Nigerian news media, and
- b. the current state of media education in Nigeria?

In addressing the first research question in Chapter 5, I draw from the research findings to show that stakeholders perceive the media landscape as essentially complementary, depicting a situation of remediation, rather than replacement. This is in line with Lewis, Agarwal and Sambamurthy's (2003) position that perceptions about technologies are formed based on individual experiences within institutional environments and social contexts where such technologies are being utilised. The findings also showed that because mastheads treat their digital channels as subsidiary or minor products, their operations are dependent on the traditional structures within which conventional newspapers are published. While news is disseminated through digital channels, conventional newspapers remain relevant news distribution channels as well, creating a situation of complementarity in Nigeria's news landscape.

Participant responses indicate that although digital news media platforms are further segmenting the media market, they are creating their own readership base as well. They attract younger people who mostly had not previously engaged with traditional newspapers. Hence, some older news consumers and rural dwellers still stay loyal to traditional newspaper readership while younger and technology-savvy individuals, mostly in urban areas, opt for digital options, portraying complementarity across the news media landscape. These kinds of inclinations indicate that the news environment will continue to be symbiotic, essentially because of the interdependent operations of news media organisations in response to the complementary demands of news readers.

In addressing the second research question on the sustainability of traditional mastheads, results show that participant stakeholders, in addition to their complementarity position, further drew from factors such as the history of print media in relation to the socio-political

history of Nigeria, the popular culture of community readership, extant digital divides, dominance of news media in the setting of social agendas, and favourable advertising policies to explain how newspapers remain relevant, playing critical roles in the news environment. Nigeria's print media history is one of resistance to domination over various periods. As detailed in Chapter 2, newspapers played major roles in the anti-colonial and anti-military movements, giving them a position of dominance and leadership in the country's socio-political historical terrain. However, the digitalisation of news and increasing digital news media usage has appeared to cause a decline in the level of newspaper influence, creating uncertainties in the newspaper industry. Conversely, findings show that while news digitalisation may be the sole or major cause of newspapers' shrinking dominance in other countries, especially developed nations with adequate digital coverage, Nigeria's experience is quite different. Newspapers have indeed shrunk over the years but as well as news digitalisation, this shrinkage has been caused by factors such as declining purchasing power due to prevalent economic woes, a dearth of investigative reporting and the unethical operations of some online news platforms.

Furthermore, even though circulation figures have fallen and some newspapers have shut down, the longstanding national publications have remained relevant in the news environment. They still dominate the Nigerian news arena and the usage of their content on digital news and social media platforms further boosts their influence in the news media environment. The culture of community readership that has existed in Nigeria for many years also contributes to the influence newspapers have in the news media landscape.

Newspapers play a major role in mass mobilisation and opinion leadership in Nigeria. They are useful to enhance grassroots participation in social movements, especially politics (Moemeka, 1994, Nwabueze, 2005). As discussed in section 4.2, members of the Free

Readers Association gather at newsstands every morning to debate issues contained in newspapers and defend the editorial stance of their preferred masthead. They also typically go further, bearing those messages to their spheres of influence. These kinds of actions demonstrate the influence newspapers still have in Nigeria's news media space. In areas where there is no internet coverage, newspapers play an important role in taking the news to the public. Traditional newspaper sustainability prospects are further strengthened by the extant policies of government regarding advertising in national dailies, which guarantee a constant revenue stream for mastheads. Consequently, despite the increasing popularity of digital news media in Nigeria, mastheads are still seen as sustainable in the news environment.

Although participant stakeholders argue that conventional newspapers are sustainable, they explain that news corporations find digital technologies useful to help them keep abreast of the trends and as an additional stream of revenue, hence, as part of their responses to news digitalisation, they are continuously strategising to be accessible in the digital space. The third research question of this study centred on exploring how these digital strategies are being deployed. Some of the digital strategies that mastheads have adopted include the creation of websites where they post news stories; mobile applications, which notify users whenever a story is reported or updated; email notifications; and social media accounts, with Facebook and Twitter being the most popular among them. Participant responses suggest that the main aim for mastheads in the digital space seems to be to portray the appearance of trendiness and vibrancy and gain a share of the digital audience, rather than being driven by a desire for innovation and enhanced news dissemination. Stakeholder responses showed that the second-class treatment of digital news platforms is reflected in their operation. For instance, breaking news online as a bait to attract readers to hardcopies shows that newspaper

organisations are more focused on sticking to their traditions than fully exploring digital opportunities and innovativeness. Similarly, relying on conventional reporters to write for both hardcopies and online editions indicates the secondary positioning of their digital news channels and contributes to their underutilisation.

Participants' responses showed that it is common among Nigerian news corporations to use the same content across multiple digital channels of news dissemination, including social media platforms. Posting the same content across different platforms does not provide opportunities for optimised delivery of messages. Because of the different designs and intended user experience of these platforms, it is best to optimise content to suit each platform being used (Phillips, 2012). Considering the multiplicity of digital news options, news corporations should focus more on sustaining audience interest and making engagement as easy as possible with their online channels.

This project also considered the implications of news digitalisation for journalistic practice and education. Similar to the position of Duru (2016), results show that diffusion of digital news is implicated in ethical and legal breaches that affect the operations and circulation of conventional newspapers. Many online channels of news in Nigeria that are not affiliated with established news organisations are involved in intellectual property theft through copying stories from conventional newspapers on to their sites. Although masthead stakeholders decry this plagiarism, they express their inability to adequately address the situation because of legislative loopholes, inadequacy of the judiciary and lack of political will by government agencies and officials.

Additionally, because some operators of digital news channels are not trained in journalism,

nor affiliated to professional journalism bodies, they perhaps are not aware of the code of ethics guiding the profession or choose to ignore it to give them an edge over traditional platforms in attracting audiences or advertisers. There have been situations where faces of minors have been displayed unethically and graphic images such as scenes of accidents or terror attacks with human remains have been published. The Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) code of ethics cautions against these types of content, but the Union is unable to stop such content from appearing on “news” sites, given the limitation of their influence as a professional group and the difficulty in regulating online content because of its borderless nature.

Regarding media education, participant stakeholders, especially in the strategic partners’ category, are of the opinion that the curriculum is too traditional. Participants suggest the need to update curricula to address ongoing changes, rather than relying on old experiences and foreign-designed instruction materials, given the dynamism and uniqueness of Nigeria’s media landscape. The media has been greatly affected by digital innovations and these effects should be explored in the classroom to enhance adequate media and journalism training with a focus on contemporary relevance and future readiness.

The findings of this study place the Nigerian media landscape within the media convergence and remediation theoretical frameworks. Advances in digital technologies for news dissemination are evident in the news landscape and are being adopted incrementally in response to contemporary trends and readers’ demands. However, the response of research participants indicate that the adoption rate has been inadequate, and that these digital news channels are yet to be optimally deployed chiefly owing to a digital skill deficit in local news organisations. The increasing demand for optimised digital news media platforms is now

leading news corporations to develop skills and deploy strategies to help them stay relevant in the digital space.

Key findings also indicate that the Nigerian news media landscape is essentially Afro-complementary, and not staunchly Afrocentric. Despite being unwavering in their decolonisation standpoint, stakeholders recognise globally relevant innovations, conventions and standards and see the need to deploy them to aid their practice of journalism locally. Considering that most other countries in the sub-Saharan African region share similar socio-political histories and demographic outlooks with Nigeria, the Nigerian experience is useful to contribute to understanding the sub-continental media landscape.

### **7.1 Recommendations**

In this section, I discuss the recommendations of this study based on its findings. Given perceptions of complementarity in the Nigerian news industry, it is important for mastheads to operate a deliberate complementary strategy, maximising the potential of both print and digital news channels, rather than operating their online channels in subsidiarity to traditional platforms. To maximise the potential for their print editions, mastheads need to become more innovative with their content. As suggested by some of the participant stakeholders, mostly in the special interest group, newspapers cannot beat digital news channels to the timeliness feature because of their restricted printing and distribution models. Consequently, they are unable to continue to be as efficient with breaking news. However, what they can do is to dig deeper than digital-only news providers, providing more in-depth analysis to news reports. While some digital news providers give updates on some stories, they mostly focus on freshly breaking news. This gives newspapers the opportunity to create further unique selling points. The findings indicate that newspapers may no longer be as critical as they once were in

leading movements towards social change. Historically, newspapering in Nigeria occupied a position that could be seen as holding up one end of a social contract, serving people on the other end, who gave their trust in exchange for credible and unbiased information to help them make their decisions. Currently, however, the trust level has declined, given the lack of clear challenges to government and the dearth of investigative journalism (Ozohu-Suleiman and Dahiru, 2018; Wasserman & Madrid-Morales, 2019). Participants thus suggested that a shift away from regular newspapering conventions and re-introduction of fiery editorials to address issues in governance and concerted efforts at investigative journalism may contribute to strengthening print editions in the news landscape and improving their relevance, readership and sustainability.

The findings also suggested that mastheads should not continue to operate their online news channels as afterthoughts but should consider them to be parallel products. As discussed in Chapter 5, most local news companies have policies that revolve predominantly around their traditional platforms, and pay inadequate attention to their online channels. Conventional mastheads need to rework their management and operational systems to become more flexible and nimble in their responses to emerging media technologies. Masthead managements need to be more deliberate in the operations of their online channels as independent news products. Participants suggested that with the constraints on resources, it is difficult to have separate reporters for traditional and online channels. However, it is possible for masthead management to train reporters to develop their news gathering abilities with the aim of presenting the information in multiple formats. An example of this occurred on a wider scale in Syria, where citizen journalists were trained and supported through the network journalism model, which led to the production of news stories for the Damascus bureau website (Yousuf & Taylor, 2017). It is equally important for media educators to

consider the multiplicity of news dissemination channels in the curriculum so that learners can acquire skills that focus on the specificities of each channel and develop skills to allow them to prepare suitable news stories for each of them effectively.

Furthermore, newspaper companies need to understand that editorial power is shifting away from news providers. There are a growing number of digital news platforms and users can exercise more choice than with the limited number of available print newspapers. Readers can exercise their power to select topics of interest to them in their personal order of preference, unlike in newspapers where stories are prioritised according to editorial decisions and presented in published format. Newspaper companies need to understand that editorial power is now being shared with audiences and should strategically infuse ways for the audience to exercise their power on their platforms. One way to achieve this is to take a more specialised approach to key subject areas. Many blogs thrive on writing about specific subject areas, and podcasts often succeed better when known to represent expert opinions in specific fields. This kind of specialisation is important to catch the attention of readers, because they have so much information available to them. Thus, rather than simply dumping news stories on their websites, news corporations need to pay attention to strategic fragmentation, departing from the traditional approach of publishing various sections of news in one edition. Instead, news sites can differentiate between sections by presenting each section in its own portal and making the design theme of each portal speak the language of the subject. All portals could be hosted on the masthead's domain, but presented differently. For instance, a business portal could focus expressly on issues around money, investments, economic policies and so on, with a streamlined design to match the content. Similarly, a politics portal, sports portal, nature portal and so on could take a similar approach. Mastheads would not have to present news across all possible niches, but could choose key areas where they could

stand out. It is even possible that readers would be more inclined to pay for content that interests them.

Participant responses suggest the major challenge precipitated by news digitalisation in the Nigerian media landscape is the erosion of media law and ethics. A key issue is the growing rate of plagiarism. Many online-only news sites lift their stories from conventional newspapers or their websites, either in part or in full. The reposting of masthead news content online negatively affects newspaper sales. Worse still, the mode of dissemination mostly allows readers to access the news for free, relying on visitor traffic and advertisements for revenue. This has contributed to journalists' demotivation. Responses in this study suggest that traditional masthead journalists do not feel a sense of reward for excellent service since their work is not protected from being presented as someone else's. It has also contributed to the dearth of investigative reporting in conventional newspapers because the stakeholders believe that the resources and efforts put into achieving exclusivity would be wasted without a way of guaranteeing that news stories are not re-published without permission.

Consequently, as the stakeholders who participated in this research suggest, there is an urgent need to introduce a clear regulatory framework that protects the intellectual property rights of journalists and news media organisations in Nigeria. Although, as Gillespie (2017) noted, given the global nature of the online space, regulatory policies have proven difficult to apply. It is helpful to explore the extent to which they might be successful in Nigeria's local context, especially to curb intellectual property theft. Such a framework could promote swift prosecution of offenders to ensure that ethical violations are drastically reduced in the news landscape. Adequate protection of intellectual property rights for journalists and news organisations would further distinguish between traditional and digital journalism, as each

news channel would have to disseminate original reports and operate within the approved limits of information reproduction.

However, there is a quandary about the potential of digital media regulation being counter-productive, given the ongoing history of government censorship. As participant C1 noted, “a good law can become a bad one in the hands of a dictator”. Successive Nigerian governments have shown dictatorial tendencies, especially in their dealings with the press, seeking to control the flow of news (Forrest, 2019). This attribute is indeed a cause for caution in advocating incremental regulation in the news media space. Currently, Nigeria ranks 120<sup>th</sup> out of 180 places in the Reporters Without Borders press freedom ranking (RSF, 2019) indicting continued press inhibition.

Thus, I recommend that a legal framework be developed as a collaborative effort by all concerned stakeholders so as to subject possible regulatory guidelines to debates and block as much as possible potential avenues for government interference. This framework could also include some technical elements to facilitate digital news platforms’ adherence to ethical and legal standards. Since some digital-only news media appear unprofessional and generally hard to regulate in the Nigerian context, it might be useful to facilitate a transition of those willing to practise professional journalism to domain names with an extension that is branded and publicised as promoting top-notch and professional journalism. For instance, the domain extension might be .news.ng, indicating that every website hosted there is expected to be professional. With adequate awareness, digital news readers could increasingly perceive the extension -.news.ng as the way to identify professionally-compliant news sites, and view them similarly to regulated mainstream news platforms. However, to be hosted on this extension, operators would need to be willing to agree to terms and conditions that subject them to the same regulations that govern traditional media platforms and that would be

monitored by concerned special interest groups and regulatory bodies. Operators would also be required to provide basic publication details, similar to a newspaper imprint, on their site at all times. This approach may make it easier for regulators to monitor or for users to report erring news sites. Operators of such erring sites could then be sanctioned or the site taken off the internet, depending on how the platform was governed. Importantly, in line with participants suggestions, regulations should not be presented as impediments for press freedom, rather, they should be tools to aid the ethical and legal dissemination of news, protect intellectual property of mastheads, level the playing field for both traditional and online media forms and essentially improve the experiences of news consumers.

In summary, this project explores the Nigerian news media context to assess how news digitalisation affects traditional media systems. Key outcomes show that: first, the Nigerian news media landscape is currently experiencing a situation of media complementarity, positioning it within the context of remediation, rather than replacement. Second, although copy sales have declined, mastheads still enjoy a high level of relevance in Nigeria's domestic media market. Third, conventional mastheads have already penetrated the online space and are seeking to not only maintain but also to improve their relevance, but their strategies are considered inadequate by participants in this study who have first-hand newspaper experience. Viewing the strategies against the theoretical framework of media convergence corroborated participant views that conventional mastheads need to allow room for flexibility and increase the autonomy of their online presence. They also need to prioritise upskilling of their journalists in cross-media operations and to create a strategic engagement plan that allows them to maximise digital engagement. And last, news digitalisation has implications for both media ethics and media education in Nigeria. It has created room for ethical breaches, considering the regulation difficulty caused by its global nature. These

ethical breaches should be mitigated with innovative measures such as facilitating a transition from the perception of unregulated and unprofessional news sites to professional ones that operate within the principles and ethical standards of journalism. With the ongoing fast-paced advances of news media technology, media education in Nigeria is perceived to be inadequate to prepare prospective journalists for changes that are already occurring and those to come in the media landscape, thereby necessitating a revamp to be able to address the changes in the news industry and prepare (potential) journalists for the future of the profession.

To conclude, this study has laid the groundwork for further studies in its subject area. As noted in section 1.3, it focuses on masthead stakeholders who are involved in and influential on newspaper operations and management. Thus, further studies would be useful to investigate perceptions of users across market segments as demarcated by age and rural/urban location on how digitalisation is affecting the news media landscape. It would also be useful to explore the idea of regulating news sites that are not affiliated with established news organisations from both cultural studies and digital humanities perspective to appraise its feasibility from both dimensions.

One key limitation encountered in the course of this study is the non-availability of specific details of newspaper circulation figures and advertising revenue. Newspaper managements appear to have placed an embargo on the release of such specific details as they have not been published by any known platforms including the National Bureau of Statistics. Even masthead stakeholders, when asked, did not give specific details of their circulation, rather they gave generalised reflections of occurrences signalling a decline in circulation figures. This remains a gap in fully understanding the implications of digitalisation in the Nigerian media landscape. It would be of significant help to the news digitalisation discourse if further

studies could rectify the absence of this highly relevant data.

Although this study focuses on the largest and a highly influential country in Africa, its findings are not intended to make generalisable conclusions. However, given that it addresses a significant gap in the literature by providing an examination of a developing and non-western context, it has the potential relevance of serving as foundational literature for consideration of other African countries, or even other developing countries, to further incorporate diverse contexts into the broad discourse on the future of traditional news media platforms.

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# Appendices

## Appendix I: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET (Media Stakeholders)

PROJECT TITLE: Masthead Stakeholders' Perception of New/Online Media Diffusion in Nigeria

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL NUMBER: H-2017-226

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dr Kathryn Bowd

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Ayodeji Aiyesimoju

STUDENT'S DEGREE: PhD

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in the research project described below.

### What is the project about?

This project looks to examine newspapers' stakeholders' views and opinions based on their experiences in practice about online news media expansion in Nigeria in order to create an understanding of how newspapers are responding to the emergence and spread of online platforms and how they may affect hardcopy newspapers in the country in the future. Hence, the researcher seeks to explore what newspaper stakeholders think about the penetration and spread of online news media towards creating an understanding of their relationship with newspapers.

### Who is undertaking the project?

This project is being conducted by Ayodeji Aiyesimoju

This research will form the basis for the degree of PhD at the University of Adelaide, Australia under the supervision of Dr Kathryn Bowd and Dr Kim Barbour

### Why am I being invited to participate?

You are being invited to participate because you are currently in service as a newspaper publisher/owner, editor, journalist, media lecturer in a tertiary institution, an executive of the Nigerian Union of Journalists or advertising official involved in media buying. This qualifies you as a masthead stakeholder whose perception this study intends to inquire.

### What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to participate in an interview that will last for around 45 minutes preferably at your office to reduce your inconvenience of travelling for the purpose of this research.

Please note that I require your consent to take a digital audio recording of the interview session.

### How much time will the project take?

The interview is expected to take about 45 minutes or more.

### Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?

You will be setting out time as indicated above to participate in this project. There could be potentially business-related risks, which may arise from questions concerning readership popularity or any other issue that may be confidential to the organisation. These risks will be mitigated by providing a copy of the interview transcript for you to review within two weeks in case you choose to withdraw any statements.

Security and travel risks are also mitigated as the interview will be conducted within your organisation's complex or a nearby secured restaurant or café.

### What are the benefits of the research project?

The project may result in improved service delivery of print media and aid strategies for business relevance and sustainability. Usage of the print media may be enhanced and users may derive more gratification from the medium. The project will add some African dimension to the existing body of

knowledge on media evolution globally, to create an understanding of how media platforms evolve differently in different places.

### **Can I withdraw from the project?**

Yes. Participation in this project is completely voluntary. If you agree to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time up until the final draft is submitted tentatively on 6<sup>th</sup> August, 2019. You will be advised about the submission in an email before this date.

### **What will happen to my information?**

Your information is safe and will be treated in a highly confidential manner. The information shall be used as data for a PhD thesis and other scholarly publications. Your identity will be kept anonymous in the resultant thesis and publications except if you otherwise state. This data will be used only for the purpose of this project and will not be used in the future.

### **Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?**

Primary Contact:	Dr Kathryn Bowd	Dr Kim Barbour
Email:	kathryn.bowd@adelaide.edu.au	kim.barbour@adelaide.edu.au
Phone Number:	+6183135617	+6183133405

Ayodeji Aiyesimoju  
ayodeji.aiyesimoju@adelaide.edu.au  
+2348066348082

### **What if I have a complaint or any concerns?**

The study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Adelaide (approval number H-2017-226). If you have questions or problems associated with the practical aspects of your participation in the project, or wish to raise a concern or complaint about the project, then you should consult the Principal Investigator. If you wish to speak with an independent person regarding a concern or complaint, the University's policy on research involving human participants, or your rights as a participant, please contact the Human Research Ethics Committee's Secretariat on:

Phone: +61 8 8313 6028

Email: [hrec@adelaide.edu.au](mailto:hrec@adelaide.edu.au)

Post: Level 4, Rundle Mall Plaza, 50 Rundle Mall, ADELAIDE SA 5000

You can also contact Dr Sam Awoniyi on

Phone: 08037181218

Email: [sawoniyi@jabu.edu.ng](mailto:sawoniyi@jabu.edu.ng)

Post: Joseph Ayo Babalola University, Nigeria

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

### **If I want to participate, what do I do?**

Kindly indicate interest to Ayodeji Aiyesimoju through the email address: [ayodeji.aiyesimoju@adelaide.edu.au](mailto:ayodeji.aiyesimoju@adelaide.edu.au)

Yours sincerely,

Dr Kathryn Bowd	Lead Researcher
Dr Kim Barbour	Researcher
Ayodeji Aiyesimoju	Researcher

## Appendix II: CONSENT FORM (Professionals)

1. I have read the attached Information Sheet and agree to take part in the following research project:

Title:	Remediation or Revolution?: Masthead Stakeholders' Perception of New Media Diffusion in Nigeria
Ethics Approval Number:	H-2017-226

2. I have had the project, so far as it affects me, fully explained to my satisfaction by the research worker. My consent is given freely.
3. Although I understand the purpose of the research project it has also been explained that involvement may not be of any benefit to me.
4. I have checked and complied with organisational requirements for approval to participate in this research Yes  No
5. I have been informed that information gained during the study may be published, and participants will be anonymised. I agree to stay anonymous  I want to be named
6. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time.
7. I agree to the interview being audio recorded. Yes  No
8. I am aware that I should keep a copy of this Consent Form, when completed, and the attached Information Sheet.

### Participant to complete:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Researcher/Witness to complete:

I have described the nature of the research to

\_\_\_\_\_  
*(print name of participant)*

and in my opinion she/he understood the explanation.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix III: Interview Schedule (Media Owners & Practitioners)

Project Title:	Remediation or Revolution?: Masthead Stakeholders' Perception of New Media Diffusion in Nigeria
Maximum Time Limit for	45 Minutes

Preamble: Review of Participant Information Sheet

Review and signature of Consent Form

Permission to record

All questions are regarding the Nigerian media landscape and are semi-structured;

serving only as a guide

#### Section 1: Introduction

- What is your position within the organisation?
- What are your key duties/responsibilities?
- When did you assume your position?

#### Section 2: New Media Perception

- How has the increasing popularity of the internet affected your newspaper?
- Many news corporations in different countries have replaced print editions with online ones. From your experiences so far, is this likely to be the case with your organisation?
- If yes, what factors make you suggest so?
- If no, what factors make you suggest so?
- Do you have an online edition?
- If yes, is it your major product or it serves to support your print edition?
- If no, do you intend to start one soon?
- From your experience and trends in the Nigerian media industry and with online news media growth, what are your perceptions on the future of newspapers in the country?

#### Section 3: Digital Strategies

- Do you see the need for your newspaper to adopt any digital strategies to retain relevance and audience loyalty?
- What digital strategies are currently in place to achieve audience engagement and retention in response to continuous new media growth?
- How effective will you rate each of the strategies?
- Do you think the online news platforms will take over from the mainstream ones or they will exist in complementarity to each other?
- Considering the growing use of news blogs and social media accounts, will newspapers be able to keep up with the pace of news dissemination?

#### Section 4: Influence on Journalism Practice

- How has the growth of new media affected professional journalism practice in Nigeria?
- What are the positive influences of new media diffusion on newspaper journalism?
- What demerits does new media diffusion portend for print journalism?
- Are new media platforms a welcome development in the Nigerian media industry?

Finally, are there any further comments on this subject?

## Appendix IV: Interview Schedule (Strategic Partners & Special Interest Groups)

Project Title:	Remediation or Revolution?: Masthead Stakeholders' Perception of New Media Diffusion in Nigeria
Maximum Time Limit for	45 Minutes

Preamble: Review of Participant Information Sheet

Review and signature of Consent Form

Permission to record

All questions are regarding the Nigerian media landscape and are semi-structured;

serving only as a guide

### Section 1: Introduction

- What is your position within the organisation?
- What are your key duties/responsibilities?
- When did you assume your position?

### Section 2: New Media Perception

- How has the increasing popularity of the internet affected newspaper journalism?
- Many news corporations in different countries have replaced print editions with online ones. From your experiences/observations so far, is this likely to happen in Nigeria? Why?
- Is it important for newspapers to have an online edition? If no, why?
- If yes, should it be the major product or should it serve to support print editions?
- From your experience and trends in the Nigerian media industry and with online news media growth, what are your perceptions on the future of newspapers in the country?

### Section 3: Digital Strategies

- Do you see the need for newspapers to adopt any digital strategies to retain relevance and audience loyalty?
- What digital strategies do newspapers currently use to achieve audience engagement and retention in response to continuous new media growth?
- How effective will you rate each of the strategies?
- Do you think the online news platforms will take over from the mainstream ones or they will exist in complementarity to each other?
- Considering the growing use of news blogs and social media accounts, will newspapers be able to keep up with the pace of news dissemination?
- Is there need for policy statements to guide news dissemination using online platforms? Why?

### Section 4: Influence on Journalism Practice

- How has the growth of new media affected professional journalism practice in Nigeria?
- What are the positive influences of new media diffusion on newspaper journalism?
- What demerits does new media diffusion portend for print journalism?
- Are new media platforms a welcome development in the Nigerian media industry?

Finally, are there any further comments on this subject?