

A Survey on Mortality of Selected Newspapers During Covid-19 Era in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: *This study was carried out to investigate the mortality of Newspapers during COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. The study adopted survey research design. Findings revealed that COVID-19 lockdown measures, poor readership, low patronage, low advertising patronage, dwindling economic factor, limited circulation and high production cost were the major factors that threatened the survival of Newspaper in Nigeria. The study concluded that during pandemics like the COVID-19, Newspaper industry faces a number of challenges that threaten its survival but strategies that can prevent it from total collapse if properly adopted also exist. It recommended therefore that Newspaper operators and managers should recognize the fact that during pandemic outbreaks such as COVID-19, lockdown measures, poor readership, low patronage, low advertising patronage, dwindling economic factor, limited circulation and high production cost may pose challenges to the survival of Newspapers. Consequently, the recognition of this fact is a first step towards overcoming the challenges when need arises*

KEYWORDS: mortality, selected, newspapers, COVID-19, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The need to provide people with timely information on variety of issues as they affect them in the society has given birth to the arrival of a print medium of communication known as the Newspaper. It is the earliest channel of mass communication and has been existing as an agenda setting medium on matters of public interest in the society. Daramola, (2003) sums up the importance of the Newspaper in the following words:

At the beginning, the Newspaper was society's primary instrument of mass communication and till today the logbook of human affairs than any other means of communication. It was, for a long

time, the chief instrument by which the people learnt of each other, debated the problems, which troubled them and spoke their minds on public issues (p.120).

The above expression indicates that the Newspaper is a medium of mass communication which sets agenda on important issues for public discourse. It is the earliest information medium of mass communication before the arrival of Magazine and the Broadcast media. Discloses that today, Newspaper shares the communication spectrum with radio, television and magazines (Daramola, 2003). Newspaper is a channel of mass communication published at periodical intervals. Bittner has developed what he regarded as a set of five standards that modern scholars generally hold as acceptable criteria for determining a true newspaper:

First, a Newspaper must be published periodically at intervals not less than once a week. Second, mechanical production must be employed. Third, anyone who can pay the price of admission must have access to the publication. In other words, it must be available to everyone, not just a chosen few. No organization can have an exclusive right to read or obtain the publication. Fourth, it must vary in content and include everything of public interest to everyone, not merely to small, select groups. Finally, publication must be timely with some continuity of organization (Bittner, 1989, p. 22).

The existence of Newspaper in Nigeria is not without challenges. (Samuel & Ihejirika, 2019) note that as cases of proliferation of Newspapers abound all over the world, so also are cases of their extinction. For instance, having observed the steady regression of daily Newspaper reading habit in America from 1970 at about 0.94 percentage annually. Meyer decries that the trend “shows us running out of daily readers ...” (Meyer, 2009, p.19). The steady regression of daily Newspaper reading habit should not be misconstrued to mean that Newspapers must have outlived their usefulness. Newspapers still play crucial role in sensitizing and mobilizing the people on activities of governments and reporting events happening in the polity. For the fact that issues bordering on education, politics, crime, entertainment, religion, health, sports and innovations in science will continue to evolve, reporting must never cease and so Newspapers must continue to be relevant in information dissemination. (Meyer, 2009). notes that the Nigerian Newspaper is a concept that predates colonial state and has been characterized by diverse twists and conquered evolution that find expression in proscription of media outfits; incarceration, imprisonment and killing of pressmen; draconian media laws and act; politico-ideological oriented news reporting; and stringent legal requirement for establishing media outfits. Also, a look at the history of Newspaper in Nigeria indicates that not all the Newspapers established from 1859 are still in existence today. The implication of this is that Newspaper survival and management is quite challenging. Adebaniwi attests that:

Newspaper business in Nigeria is seen as challenging and risky. The risk involved is attested to by the fact that all publications established between 1859 and 1972 are no longer on the newsstand, except the Nigerian Tribune and the New Nigerian which were established in 1949 and 1966 respectively. While the 80s and 90s produced a profusion of Newspapers-some 43 major

Newspapers were established during this period-29 have since ceased publication (Adebanwi, 2001, p. 95).

Ekhareafu et al (2013), Asemah & Edegoh corroborate that the various challenges confronting the Newspaper industry have led to the death of most Newspapers. According to them, the challenges are so pervasive that only a few are in production continuously for 10 years and above (p.2). Aliagan, (2015, p.20), attest that across the world, Newspaper business is facing many challenges. These are brought about by the challenges of the changing times, changes in socio-cultural traits in different societies, demographic changes which inform new audience taste for news, economic challenges, as well as the impact of new technologies (Aliagan, 2015). These challenges are robbing many Newspapers of readership and revenues.

Since there are evidences of the mortality of Newspaper business/production in the past, it has become more imperative to investigate how Newspaper business is faring in the era of COVID-19 pandemic which evidence (Alabi, 2012) has shown has affected (and is still affecting) so many sectors of the economy across the globe. Aifuwa, Musa & Aifuwa in their study affirmed that COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected both the financial and non-financial performance of ... businesses in Lagos state in particular and Nigeria at large (Aifuwa, Aifuwa, 2020, pp. 15-25). Anthony & Damiete opine that the Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) is currently the biggest crisis affecting the world. COVID-19 has claimed the lives of millions and is impacting the economic lives, ways of life and at least psychological health of most people (Lawrence & Damiete, 2021). While the report by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on businesses revealed that:

The COVID-19 outbreak has led to revised growth forecasts for the global economy. Every aspect of our lives has been affected by the outbreak. Its impact on economic activity is extremely broad: from dramatically diminished consumer discretionary spending to a freeze on business activities including capital budgets, hiring, and a reduction in everything but essential operational expenses (International Telecommunications Union, 2020).

Aliagan contends that Nigeria's Newspapers are part of the world's press ecology; hence they are not insulated from these global trends which are incapacitating Newspaper economy and constituting a threat to their survival (International Telecommunications Union, 2020).

Statement of the Problem

A review of the history of Newspapers across the globe in general and Nigeria in particular reveals that as cases of proliferation of Newspapers abound, so also are cases of their extinction with so many factors contributing to its success and failure. While the challenges of Newspapers have engaged substantial literature in Nigeria, not much attention has been paid in media studies on the causes of Newspaper collapse from the eyes of stakeholders-owners, managers, distributors, labour unions, media critics and advertisers. In other words, an important aspect of the Newspaper business that has not been given adequate consideration is the views or experiences of major

stakeholders in the business (Wimmer & Dominick, 1987, p.20). Deriving from the fact that the history of Newspaper is characterized by proliferation and death on one hand and dearth of empirical evidence on the mortality or otherwise of the Newspaper in Nigeria during the COVID-19 period on the other hand, it becomes imperative to investigate this gap. This is what this study seeks to address.

Research Questions

The following research questions are to guide the conduct of this study:

1. What are the major factors that affected the survival of selected Newspapers during the COVID-19 era in Nigeria?
2. To what extent did such factors affect the survival of the selected Newspapers during the COVID-19 era in Nigeria?
3. What are the major survival strategies employed by the selected Newspapers during COVID-19 era in Nigeria?
4. How does COVID-19 pandemic affect potential Newspaper managers in Nigeria?

Research Design

In this study, survey research design was used to collect data. Survey research method was used to collect data in this study based on its numerous advantages on behavioural research which Wimmer & Dominick, (1987) described them to be: firstly, survey research methods studies large and small population by selecting and studying samples chosen from the population to discover the relative incidence, distribution and interrelation of sociological and psychological variation. Secondly, survey does not make decision for administration on which sound decision is based. Thirdly, it focuses on people, the vital facts, opinions, attitude, motivations and behaviors. Fourthly, survey method identifies present conditions and points present needs. Under this design, questionnaire was used as the research instrument.

Population of the Study

The population of the study comprise owners and staff of the *Leadership* and *Nigerian Pilot* Newspapers in Abuja, and *Thisday* and *Vanguard* Newspapers in Lagos, Nigeria. Abuja and Lagos were chosen due to the fact that they were major cities in the country with high concentration of Newspapers. The breakdown of the population is as follows:

Leadership Newspaper	– 213
Thisday Newspaper	– 257
Vanguard Newspaper	– 231
Nigerian Pilot	– 173
Total	- 874

The population of the study, therefore, was 874 managers and staff of the selected Newspapers in Nigeria.

Sample Size Determination

The sample size was determined using online *Survey Monkey* sample size calculator under the Confidence Level of 95%, Error margin of 5% and the Population Size of 874 (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/sample-size-calculator/>). The sample size was therefore, 268. This sample size was justifiable owing to the higher confidence level of (95%) attained, while incurring very minimal margin of error of 5%.

Sampling Techniques and Procedure

To sample respondents, the researcher first clustered Nigeria into two, including the North and South, after which, purposive sampling technique was used to select one major city from each of the groups which represented the group sampled. The cities selected were Abuja from the North and Lagos from the South respectively. The two cities were sampled rather than others due to high concentration of Newspapers and also high infection rate of COVID-19 pandemic in the areas.

In Lagos, *Thisday* and *Vanguard* Newspapers were selected using purposive sampling technique, while in Abuja, *Leadership* and *Nigerian Pilot* Newspapers were also purposively sampled. These Newspapers were sampled in their respective areas due to their national circulation rate during COVID-19 lockdown in Nigeria.

Furthermore, proportionate sampling technique was used to sample respondents from each of the Newspapers sampled using the formula thus:

$$\frac{S \times n}{N}$$

Where;

S = Size of Newspaper

n = Sample Size

N = Total Population

The proportionate sampling was done using the above formula thus:

<i>Leadership</i> Newspaper	$\frac{213}{874} \times$	$\frac{268}{1} = 65$
<i>Nigerian Pilot</i> Newspaper	$\frac{173}{874} \times$	$\frac{268}{1} = 53$
<i>Thisday</i> Newspaper	$\frac{257}{874} \times$	$\frac{268}{1} = 79$
<i>Vanguard</i> Newspaper	$\frac{231}{874} \times$	$\frac{268}{1} = 71$

Therefore, 65 respondents were sampled from *Leadership* Newspaper; 53 from *Nigerian Pilot* Newspaper, 79 from *Thisday* Newspaper; and 71 from *Vanguard* Newspaper respectively. In all, 268 were sampled in the study.

Data Analysis, Results and Discussion of Findings.

This section of the study deals with the presentation, analysis and interpretation of data from the questionnaire administered.

Table 1: Return and Non-Return Questionnaire Rate

Variables	No. of Respondents				Total Total
	<i>Leadership Newspaper</i>	<i>Nigerian Newspaper</i>	<i>Pilot Thisday Newspaper</i>	<i>Vanguard Newspaper</i>	
Return and usable	62 (95.38)	50 (94.34)	77 (97.47)	68 (95.77)	257 (95.90)
Return and not usable	3 (4.62)	3 (5.66)	2 (2.53)	3 (4.23)	11 (4.10)
Total	65 (100)	53 (100)	79 (100)	71 (100)	268 (100)

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

Table 1 is concerned with the returned and non-returned of questionnaire which was administered on the respondents. Data revealed that 95.90% out of 268 copies of the questionnaire that were administered on the respondents were returned in good shape while 4.10% out of the 268 respondents sampled in the study did not fill the questionnaire administered on them. The breakdown of the returned and non-returned questionnaire rate indicated that 95.38% out of the 65 copies of the questionnaire administered on the respondents from *Leadership* Newspaper were completed and returned in good shape while only 4.62% out of the 65 copies of the questionnaire were not filled by the respondents; 94.34% out of the 53 respondents sampled from the *Nigerian Pilot* completed the questionnaire and returned it in good shape while 5.66% out of the questionnaire was not filled and returned; 97.47% out of the 79 copies of the questionnaire administered on the respondents from the *Thisday* Newspaper were completed and returned in good shape while 2.53% were not returned; 95.77% out of the 71 copies of the questionnaire administered on the respondents from the *Vanguard* Newspaper were returned and found usable because they were completed correctly while 4.23% out of the questionnaire administered were not returned.

It implies therefore that the overwhelming majority proportion (257 or 95.90%) of the questionnaire administered on the respondents was returned and found usable for analysis while an insignificant proportion (11 or 4.10%) which were not returned constituted the mortality rate and was not included in the analysis.

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Sex		
Male	173	67.32
Female	84	32.68
Total	257	100.00
Marital Status		
Single	73	28.40
Married	167	64.98

Divorced	17	6.61
Total	257	100.00
Age Range		
18-30 years	91	35.41
31-40 years	105	40.86
51-50 ears	39	15.18
51 years and above	22	8.56
Total	257	100.00
Educational attainment		
Primary	3	1.17
Secondary	37	14.40
Tertiary	217	84.44
Total	257	100.00
Organisation		
Leadership Newspaper	62	24.12
Nigerian Pilot	50	19.46
Thisday Newspaper	77	29.96
Vanguard Newspaper	68	26.46
Total	257	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

Table 2 is concerned with demographic characteristics of respondents sampled for the study. Data revealed that majority (67.32%) out of the 257 respondents sampled for the study were male while female were sampled less (32.68%) compared to the male; majority (64.98%) out of the 257 respondents in the study were married while those that were single (28.40%) and divorced (6.61%) were less compared to the married population; majority of the respondents in the study range between the ages of 18-13 (35.41%) years and 31-40 years (40.86%) compared to those that were between 41-50 years (15.18%) and 51 years and above (8.56%); majority (84.44%) of the respondents in the study attained tertiary level of education compared to those that attained secondary (14.40%) and primary (1.17%) levels of education; majority (29.96%) of the respondents in the study were from *Thisday* Newspaper followed by *Vanguard* Newspaper (26.46%) and then *Leadership* Newspaper (24.12%) while *Nigerian Pilot* Newspaper (19.46%) has the least respondents in the study.

It implies therefore that the primary data in this study was collected from different category of people with sound educational and professional background enough to provide accurate data sufficient enough to make sound judgement.

Table 3: Major Factors that Affected the Survival of Selected Newspapers During the COVID-19 Era in Nigeria

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage
The Extent of awareness of the COVID-19 Outbreak among Selected Newspapers in Nigeria		
To a great extent	239	93.00
To a little extent	13	5.06
Difficult to say	5	1.95
Total	257	100.00
Factors that Affected Operations of Selected Newspapers During COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria		
Lockdown measures	39	15.18
Dwindling economic factor	26	10.12
Insufficient finance	17	6.61
Advent of ICTs	4	1.56
Poor readership	37	14.40
High production cost	25	9.73
Poverty	15	5.84
Low patronage	33	12.84
Competition from the broadcast media	5	1.95
Low advertising patronage	31	12.06
Limited circulation	25	9.73
Total	257	100.00
Period in COVID-19 Pandemic that affected the Operations Selected Newspaper		
Pre lockdown period	47	18.29
Lockdown period	145	56.42
Post lockdown period	53	20.62
Not sure	12	4.67
Total	257	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

Table 3 is concerned with the major factors that affected the survival of selected Newspapers during COVID-19 era in Nigeria. Data revealed that COVID-19 awareness level among respondents in the Newspapers selected was high (93.00%) to a great extent while a handful

(5.06%) to a little extent with few others (1.95%) who were not sure. Meanwhile, COVID-19 lockdown measures (15.18%), poor readership (14.40%), low patronage (12.84%), low advertising patronage (12.06%), dwindling economic factors (10.12%), limited circulation (9.73%), high production cost (9.73%) were the major factors that threatened the survival of Newspapers in Nigeria compared to insufficient finance (6.61%), advent of ICTs (1.56%), poverty (5.84%), competition from the broadcast media (1.95%). The survival of the Newspaper was more threatened during Lockdown period (56.42%) compared to post lockdown period (20.62%) and pre lockdown period (18.29%).

It implies therefore, that COVID-19 lockdown measures, poor readership, low patronage, low advertising patronage, dwindling economic factor, limited circulation and high production cost were the major factors that threaten the survival of Newspaper in Nigeria compared to insufficient finance, advent of ICTs, poverty and competition from the broadcast media which were the least factors. The period of lockdown threatens the survival of Newspaper compared to pre lockdown period and post lockdown periods.

Table 4: Extent to which COVID-19 threatened Survival of the Selected Newspapers in Nigeria

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Extent COVID-19 pandemic Affect the Operations Selected Newspaper in Nigeria		
To a Large extent	245	95.33
To a Little extent	8	3.11
Difficult to say	4	1.56
Total	257	100.00
Areas COVID-19 Affects the Operations of Newspaper more in Nigeria		
News gathering	71	27.63
News Processing	31	12.06
News production	35	13.62
Distribution	41	15.95
Marketing	54	21.01
Administration	25	9.73
Total	257	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

Table 4 is concerned with the extent to which COVID-19 threatened survival of the selected Newspapers in Nigeria. Data revealed that the pandemic threatened the survival of the Newspapers to a great extent (95.33%) compared to a little extent (3.11%) of the impact; meanwhile news

gathering (27.63%) followed by marketing (21.01%) were areas mostly affected by the Newspapers operations in Nigeria, while distribution (15.95%), news production (13.62%), News Processing (12.06%) and administration (9.73%) were other areas COVID-19 that affected the operations of the Newspapers in Nigeria.

This means therefore that COVID-19 pandemic threatened the survival of Newspapers, particularly in the areas of news gathering and marketing to a great extent.

Table 5: Major Survival Strategies of Selected Newspapers during COVID-19 Era in Nigeria

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Use of ICT platforms	41	15.95
Cutting operational cost	38	14.79
Online presence and adverts	21	8.17
Publishing of advert and important notices only on hard-prints	17	6.61
Improved graphics	18	7.00
Social media interface	25	9.73
Mobile (online) Newspaper	23	8.95
Multimedia publishing	35	13.62
Subscription	15	5.84
Discounts in the cost of advert placement	24	9.34
Total	257	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

Table 5 is concerned with the major surviving strategies of selected Newspapers during COVID-19 Era in Nigeria. Data revealed that adoption of ICT platforms (15.95%), cutting of operational cost (14.79%) and multimedia publishing (13.62%) were the major surviving strategies adopted by Newspapers during COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria compared to social media interface (9.73%), discounts in the cost of advert placement (9.34%), Mobile (online) Newspaper (8.95%), Online presence and adverts (8.17%), publishing of adverts and important notices only on hard-prints (6.61%), improved graphics (7.00%), subscription (5.84%) were the least.

This implies therefore that ICT platforms, cutting of operational cost and multimedia publishing were the major surviving strategies adopted mostly adopted by Newspapers during COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria.

Table 6: Major effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Potential Newspaper managers in Nigeria

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Still interested in owning a Newspaper when need arises	167	64.98
Not interested in owning a Newspaper	73	28.40
Undecided	17	6.61
Total	257	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

Table 6 is concerned with the major effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Potential Newspaper managers in Nigeria. Data revealed that despite the COVID-19 pandemic, majority (64.98%) of the people are still interested in owning a Newspaper outfit when need arises, compared to the minority (28.40%) who are not interested in owning a Newspaper outfit and those (6.61%) who were undecided.

This implies that despite the debilitating effect of the disease COVID-19 did not prevent many Nigerians venturing into Newspaper business in Nigeria.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Based on the data analyzed and the research questions raised, the following are the findings of this study:

COVID-19 lockdown measures, poor readership, low patronage, low advertising patronage, dwindling economic factors, limited circulation and high production cost were the major factors that threatened the survival of Newspaper in Nigeria compared to insufficient finance, advent of ICTs, poverty and competition from the broadcast media which were the least factors. The period of lockdown threatened the survival of Newspaper compared to pre lockdown period and post lockdown periods. The implication of this finding is that Newspapers actually faced a number of challenges that threatened their survival during COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. This finding agrees with the finding from the study conducted by Samuel & Ihejirika (2019) as earlier reviewed in this study: which established that paucity of fund, poor infrastructure and lack of digital knowledge among operators of local Newspapers in Rivers State resulted in the extinction of some Newspapers. Also, the fact that Newspaper management and operation is quite challenging and a lot of Newspapers established in the past suffered mortality were acknowledged thus:

Newspaper business in Nigeria is seen as challenging and risky. The risk involved is attested to by the fact that all publications established between 1859 and 1972 are no longer on the newsstand, except the Nigerian Tribune and the New Nigerian which were established in 1949 and 1966 respectively. While the 80s and 90s produced a profusion of Newspapers-some 43 major

Newspapers were established during this period-29 have since ceased publication (Adebanwi, 2001, p.6).

Ekhareafu, Asemah & Edegoh re-echoed this fact when they posit that the various challenges confronting the Newspaper industry have led to the mortality of most Newspapers. According to them, the challenges are so pervasive that only a few are in production continuously for 10 years and above (Adebanwi, 2001). Salman et al particularly observes that the challenge faced by conventional media, especially Newspapers, has to do with the perfect storm of the global economic crisis, dwindling readership and advertising dollars, and the inability of Newspapers to monetize their online efforts (Salman, & Haiza)

Another finding is that COVID-19 pandemic threatens the survival of Newspapers, particularly in the areas of news gathering and marketing to a great extent. The implication of this finding is that COVID-19 pandemic poses a great threat to the survival of the Newspapers in Nigeria. Jatula found out study that the Nigerian press do not only operate in a volatile ethnic and challenging economic environment but also encounter enormous political pressure which complicates, and often compromises the media's ability to fulfill its constitutional role (Jatula, 2007).

Finding also revealed that adoption of ICT platforms, cutting of operational cost and multimedia publishing were some of the major surviving strategies often adopted by Newspapers during COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. The implication of this finding is that despite enormous challenges faced by the operations and management of the Newspaper, there are chances of survival in the industry. This finding agrees with the earlier finding in the study by Aliagan (2015), that when a business organ reaches a cultural lock-in stage, to break even and avoid bankruptcy or total extinction, such a business (Newspaper) must undertake some fundamental survival strategies.

Furthermore, finding revealed that despite the impact of COVID-19 does not prevent many from wanting to venture into Newspaper business in Nigeria. the implication of this finding is that the establishment of Newspaper will never cease because of challenges in the industry. After all, (Garry, 1994), earlier observed that the print media are not a place for quick profit. Abiola, (1999, p.20) believes that managing a Newspaper contains too many uncertainties because you can never predict what is going to happen tomorrow. Media business is challenging because "we are not only journalists, we are also managers of the business (Igiebor, 1999).

CONCLUSION

COVID-19 lockdown measures, poor readership, low patronage, low advertising patronage, dwindling economic factor, limited circulation and high production cost were the major factors that threatened the survival of Newspaper in Nigeria compared to insufficient finance, advent of ICTs, poverty and competition from the broadcast media which were the least factors. The period of lockdown threatened the survival of Newspaper compared to pre lockdown period and post

lockdown periods. COVID-19 pandemic threatens the survival of Newspaper, particularly in the areas of news gathering and marketing to a great extent.

Meanwhile, the adoption of ICT platforms, cutting of operational cost and multimedia publishing were some of the major surviving strategies often adopted by Newspapers during COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. COVID-19 does not prevent many Nigerians from wishing to venture into Newspaper business in Nigeria.

Finally, during pandemic like the COVID-19, Newspaper faces a number of challenges that threatened its survival but strategies that can prevent it from total collapse if properly adopted exist.

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