

Factors Influencing the Rise of Online Newspaper in Northwestern Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Advancements in communication technology have greatly facilitated news delivery and readability. However, this development has led to a significant decline in print newspaper readership globally. As such, many newspaper owners have fully embraced new technology, while others are still hesitant of “going digital”. Thus, understanding how online newspapers gain popularity can guide media owners’ decisions. In Nigeria, the daily sales of print newspapers have been in decline at an alarming rate since 2010. According to the Advertisers’ Association of Nigeria (ADVAN), only one in every 470 Nigerians buys a newspaper daily. Research shows that this decline could be due to internet proliferation and the introduction of online newspapers. Therefore, this study aims to explore the factors influencing the rise of online newspapers in North-western Nigeria from the perspectives of media experts and readers of local newspapers. The study employed a mixed-method approach in which standardized open-ended interviews and survey questionnaires were used as data-gathering instruments. The data were collected and analysed in two phases. First, interview data were gathered from a purposive sample of six educated professionals consisting of two newspaper marketing and circulation managers and four news production experts. The data were analysed using inductive thematic analysis. Subsequently, findings obtained from interviews were further examined from newspaper readers’ perspectives using a descriptive survey. The survey data were collected from a random sample of 330 local newspaper readers via self-developed questionnaires and analysed using descriptive statistics. The study is guided by the theoretical assumption of the Uses and Gratification theory that audiences are powerful in the course of media impact. Findings from the interview data showed that factors responsible for the rise of online newspapers include accessibility, affordability, timely updates, convenience, the emergence of social media, ability to verify news stories, readers’ demography, tabloidization of print newspapers, the general decline in reading culture worldwide, as well as reluctance to reinvent print newspapers technologically. Findings from the survey data further revealed that timely updates and the emergence of social media are the most significant factors influencing the rise of online newspapers. Despite continuous improvements in technology, print newspapers may continue to exist. However, publishers must integrate the Web and strengthen their online presence, and simultaneously, employ technical decisions to provide quality print. This is because readers, most of whom have migrated to the Web, are influential in the course of media impact, as specified in the central theoretical assumption of Uses and Gratification theory. It was envisaged that this study would influence the decisions of media owners, journalists, and media professionals in strategizing ways to fully embrace the new technology by highlighting the importance of integrating the Web. This study is limited to factors influencing the rise of online newspapers in North-western Nigerian, further research may include other parts of Nigeria to provide more generalizable results in the Nigerian context.

Keywords: Digital news, new media, newspaper, readership, online reading