

Challenges of Newspaper Circulation in Nigeria

(A Study of Punch, Guardian, Daily Trust and Leadership Newspapers)

SANNI, Azeez Olusegun

Department of Mass Communication, University of Lagos.
segunveteran@gmail.com

ISSA, Nurudeen Aremu

Department of Mass Communication, Fountain University, Osogbo, Osun State.
issanurudeen@gmail.com

Abstract

The study investigated the challenges facing the circulation of newspapers in Nigeria, using Punch, Guardian, Daily Trust and Leadership Newspapers. It aimed at understanding the causes of the challenges, the effect of the challenges on newspaper organizations and to proffer solutions to these challenges. To achieve the objective of this study, an in-depth interview was conducted individually on the Circulation Managers of the selected newspaper organization, where it was discovered that high cost of living, advent of social media, bad roads, ethnic and religious sentiments, cost of transportation, late printing, high cost of production materials, armed robbers attack among others are the causes of the challenges. While some of the respondents suggested likely solutions to the challenges, by enjoining the newspaper organizations to have proper planning, prepare ahead of eventualities, introduction of prepaid policy, adequate maintenance of the materials, others said severe investments on online papers is the way out. This study is recommended for newspaper and magazine organisations to adjust and get solutions to the challenges facing the circulation of their copies to potential readers.

Keywords: Challenges, Newspaper circulation, Newspaper revenue, political economy

Introduction

Many newspapers published in Nigeria are general interest titles intended for a mass audience, including both the general public and academics. A typical Nigerian newspaper has news, articles, stories and features. Nigeria had a buoyant newspaper industry until 1986 when the International Monetary Fund (IMF) – inspired Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) was introduced. Before the introduction of SAP, newspaper circulation in Nigeria peaked at about 2 million copies daily (Igwe, 2004).

Also with the coming of SAP, the middle class, a potential newspaper reading class disappeared, thus leading to decreasing demand for newspapers. All these factors, among others, caused a strain on newspaper businesses, leading to a decline in circulation, readership and revenues. Newspaper circulation in Nigeria has since been on a sharp decline.

In many developed countries, newspaper circulation is falling due to social and technological changes such as the availability of news content and other newspaper contents on the internet.

Newspaper circulation in Nigeria is gradually on the decline with newspaper organisation now selling fewer copies. The problems are not farfetched as majority of Nigerian readers are poor in reading and finance thereby finding it difficult to buy a copy of newspaper at the rate of 150-200 naira; they resort to looking for a newspaper stand to read free or pay just a token amount of 20 to 50 naira to read as many newspapers as possible. Another contributing factor is the fact that people can now read news on a daily basis online.

The study, therefore, examines the challenges of circulation in newspaper production in Nigeria with a study of *Punch*, *Guardian*, *Leadership* and *Daily Trust* newspapers.

Statement of the Problem

Circulation of Newspaper in Nigeria has been on a sharp decline. It is assumed that the newspapers in Nigeria presently are recording loss of readership and revenue in circulation. For instance, the total circulation figure quoted for 2009 when the survey by ADVAN was conducted was 295, 000 copies. This figure was extremely low considering that even Nigerian Concord was circulating over 50, 000 daily while it operated. (Sanni, 2013)

The year was a non-election year, hence the slide in the figure compared to 530,000 recorded in 2007 which was an election year, and 570,000 in 2003 another election year.

A further pointer to this is that no newspaper in Nigeria presently makes the list of the first 100 newspapers in the world concerning ranking. Newspapers in the world have circulation figures ranging from 14.2million to 5.6million daily especially in Japan and China (Vision 2020:26).

According to Ekpu, as reported in Guardian (Sept. 2, 2002), he observed that, there is hardly any newspaper in Nigeria today that prints 100,000 copies, which shows that the business is shrinking, even though there are more publications and increase in cover price.

This research has, therefore, been instituted to find out the major challenges faced by the newspaper in the process of circulating copies to potential readers, using Punch, Guardian, Leadership and Daily Trust Newspapers, being well established newspapers which have capacity to print as many copies as demanded. Also in accordance with the above, the study seeks to examine the challenges facing the circulation of newspaper in Nigeria.

Research Objectives

The study is based on the following objectives:

1. To identify the major challenges facing newspaper organisations in Nigeria in the area of circulating copies to readers
2. To unearth likely causes of these challenges
3. To situate properly the effects of dwindling circulating figures by Nigerian newspapers
4. To proffer likely and workable solutions to the challenges militating against circulation of newspapers in Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following are the research questions that guided the study:

1. What are the major challenges facing circulation of copies of newspapers in Nigeria?
2. What are the causes of these challenges?
3. What are the effects of the challenges on the newspaper organisation?
4. What are the possible solutions to the identified challenges?

Literature Review

The press in Nigeria dates back to 1846 when a printing press was established in Calabar. It was established by the Presbyterian Church and the essence was to print religious books and pamphlets. The establishment of the first newspaper in Nigeria can be traced back to 1859 when Reverend Henry Townsend of the Anglican Mission (A missionary) established a newspaper that was called "Iweirohin Fun AwonEgba" meaning, "the newspaper for the Egba people". The Next newspaper to be established after Iwelrohin was the Anglo African Newspaper. It was the second newspaper that was established in Nigeria by a foreigner West Indian immigrant called Robert Campbell. The newspaper was established in Lagos in 1863 to promote the interest and welfare of Lagosian.

Newspaper's circulation is not sufficient to support a newspaper unit. Conversely, a newspaper unit cannot get adequate revenue from advertising unless the circulation of a newspaper is extensive. Extensive circulation also enables a newspaper unit to keep its 'freedom' intact. Circulation is the blood of a newspaper. It is an index of the influence of a newspaper. (Newspaper's image in the public mind and its value.) Survival and expansion of a newspaper unit depend upon to a great extent on the revenue from advertisements which may be little or nil. Marketing department looking after sales and distribution of newspaper looks after the vital problem of circulation.

It is assumed that the newspapers in Nigeria are presently recording loss of readership and revenue, but

the extent of the loss is unknown. However, it is considered by the majority of the respondents to be substantial as to necessitate drastic revenue drive by the newspapers. A further pointer to this is that no newspaper in Nigeria presently makes the list of the first 100 newspapers in the world regarding ranking. Many scholars have defined the challenges facing newspaper circulation in various aspects, in journals and published books.

According to Esimokha (2014), in his book titled "Newspaper and Magazine; Editing, Production, Marketing", He indicated various problems of newspaper circulation in Nigeria to include: low literacy level among Nigerians, poor newspaper reading culture, the review of the newspaper on radio and television stations in the morning affecting the circulation of the newspapers. He also averred that high cost of transportation and lack of maintenance culture by the newspaper organisations is a factor. The activities of free readers association and "vultures" (going from one newsstand to another, stretching their neck to read newspapers) also affect the circulation of newspaper production. Etc... (Esimohka, 2014).

A largely disputed 2009 survey by the Advertising Association of Nigeria (ADVAN) even put the circulation figure at 295,000 copies, with figure fluctuating between 500,000 in 1999, 570,000 in 2003 and 530,000 in 2007, until the fall in 2009, said to be as a result of the year not being an election year (Newspaper Circulation Check 2009: 17-18).

Another factor that causes loss of readership and revenue is the internet and the explosion in new technologies, particularly the GSM phones. The Nigeria National Communication Commission (NCC) in 2009 recorded 132.7 million mobile telephone subscribers, a 50% increase over the previous year (Ekwo, 2011: 4142).

According to (Vision 2020:26), A further pointer to this is that no newspaper in Nigeria presently makes the list of the first 100 newspapers in the world in terms of ranking. Newspapers in the world have circulation figures ranging from 14.2 million to 5.6 million daily especially in Japan and China.

Another factor that causes loss of readership and revenue is the internet and the explosion in new technologies, particularly the GSM phones. Newspapers often have a stable circulation, but declining market penetration becomes a problem when there are a large number of competing products. Advertisers will usually go for newspapers with a more extensive circulation, meaning that newspapers with lower circulation, if not catering to a niche market, will be starved of advertising. Newspapers are constantly facing new threats from new technologies escalating the cost of production or upgrading existing facilities.

In a study "The Effects of Online News on Print Newspaper Circulation in Nigeria: A Study of Daily Trust Newspaper" by Isyaku, Mohd-Nazri, and Engku-Suhaimi (2015) findings showed that the overall effect of online newspaper on the circulation of newspaper is significant. The study took into consideration the fact that even the newspaper under study had more subscribers requesting for the e-copy than those who subscribed to the print copy. The study however recommended that newspapers should pay more attention to the growing online requests by the subscribers.

Anyanwu, Chibuzor and Agwu (2017) found out in their study on newspaper problems in Nigeria, that, circulation is a major problem of newspaper in the country. They submitted that the figures attached to circulation was daily dropping and called on the different newspaper organisations to strategise towards improving the circulation figures.

Theoretical Framework

The systems theory of management was used to drive this study. It is the interdisciplinary study of systems. A system is known as a body with related and dependent parts, and its boundaries define it. As companies grow, they develop more and more complex subsystems that must coordinate with each other in the process of transforming inputs to outputs (McShane and Von Glinow, 2003). These interdependencies can quickly become so complex that a minor event in one subsystem may amplify into severe unintended consequences elsewhere in the organisation.

All the parts involved in the system are interdependent, as when changes occur in one piece of the system

it affects other components and the whole system. The most common use of the system in media is in the system structure of media or newspaper organisation on how they gather, process, and circulate their production to potential readers.

All system in the newspaper organisation is interdependent. Through the gathering of news by a body in the system, process (edit) it by another body and circulated by the circulation department which is another body in the system, and this will then influence the progress of the system. In the absence of this production flow in the system, whether by a particular body of the system, this will lead to the decline of the set goals. Also, the situation where a body in the newspaper system is moving towards the deterioration, i.e. the reporting unit did not provide needed and relevant information and also there is a backward and ill-doing from the circulation unit, this will also develop destruct and affect the running of the system and this will build loss of readership to the productions by the system.

Based on this, this theory is, however, buttressing and substantiating how the decline in one part of the system causes destruct to the system entirely, i.e. the Challenges of Newspaper Circulation in Nigeria.

Methodology

This study adopted in-depth interview research design. It is used to capture rich and in-depth descriptive data about people's attitude and perception, and unfolding complex processes. The instrument employed in gathering data for this study was interview guide, which assisted the researcher in getting data from the interviewees concerning various challenges of newspapers circulation in Nigeria. The population of this study covers all the national newspapers in Nigeria, which is 39 (Thirty Nine). (Wikipedia, March 9 2018).

The sample of this study comprises the circulation managers of *Punch*, *Guardian*, *Leadership* and *Daily Trust* Newspapers. The study adopted purposive sampling technique in selecting the newspapers according to the two main regions in Nigeria- South and North. Respondents (circulation managers) for the interviews were also purposively selected as the researchers think that they are in the best position to provide answers to the research questions. The researchers carried out the investigation independently, by conducting the interviews face to face and one after the other on the sample of the research, which are the circulation managers of *Punch* and *Guardian* Newspapers in Lagos State, South-West Nigeria, *Daily Trust* and *Leadership* Newspaper in Abuja, North-Central of Nigeria.

The data collected was presented in descriptive and narrative data analysis method, as all the data gathered were vividly narrated and well described.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Research Question 1: What are the major challenges facing the circulation of copies of newspapers in Nigeria?

The various challenges faced during the circulation of newspapers were discussed by the respondents interviewed, which include, timing and delivery, the time it takes to deliver the paper to newsstands after printing can be delayed by unforeseen circumstances, which may consist of bad roads, traffic, vehicles developing fault, scarcity of fuel or hike in price, which affects the cost of transportation and also vehicles being attacked by armed robbers, as it was stated in the interview by the Senior Copy Sales Officer of *Punch* newspaper that, "we have cases of some of our drivers being attacked on the road by armed robbers on the highway, that one is quite rampant, now and then especially around Ore expressway we get attacked". Also the Circulation Manager of *Leadership* newspaper said that "armed robbers attack of our transporters when conveying papers to different locations in the federation".

Circulation was also faced with some other challenges as submitted in the interview which includes, late printing due to the breakdown of machines, the high cost of production materials. Also, some organisations may not have newsprint (papers use in printing) which is also applicable to delaying or avoiding the newspaper organisations to go to market for that period. Another challenge is the advent of social media or online media where all reports or news available in the hard copy are also present on the

online media.

As it was stated by Guardian newspaper Circulation Manager that “Parts of the country experience high sales and low sales dependent on sentiments. E.g. Daily Trust is loved in the north because it is seen as a northern paper, The Sun in the East, Vanguard in South-South, and Tribune in many parts of the South West ...”

It is evident that newspaper organisations face numerous challenges when circulating their copies to potential readers.

Research Question 2: What are the likely causes of the challenges facing newspaper circulation in Nigeria?

From the analysis and reply on what causes the challenges of newspaper circulation in Nigeria gotten from the Circulation Managers, it was discovered from the data obtained from the in-depth interview that, the causes can be pinned down to late printing which can also be caused by lot of things like, delay from any process of news making or reporting (gathering of story, prepare the story to be newsworthy, pass to the editor to edit, move to typeset guy, prepare printing plate and print papers) so delay from any of these processes can hinder late printing, which will cause the paper to probably not circulate for that day. Another cause can also be narrowed down to lack of maintenance of printing materials. However it was also indicated by the interviewees that when transporting the copies to the readers there are some factors that can also cause the papers not to be circulated to readers, which includes terrible roads, cars get accident that leads to loss of drivers and the copies, breakdown of vehicles used in transporting, increase and scarcity of fuel that may leads to not circulating the papers to some particular locations, fluctuation in the exchange rate of naira which has led to expensiveness of materials require for printing and also returning of unsold copies from the vendors and distributors to the organization also causes minimal circulation as indicated by the Circulation Manager of Daily Trust newspaper, that “... you see I just meet with the vendors, you see vendors and distributors will take your paper to sell it and come back and tell you stories give your outstanding, you will not see the paper because they sold it but if it is not sold they will bring it unsold, but since they didn't bring unsold its means they have sold it, but they will tell you they have not been paid, either they are telling series of lies or all sort of stories, those are the kind of specific challenges that affect us directly.”

Technological advancement or embracing modernization in the industry is also seen as a cause of challenges facing circulation of newspaper in Nigeria, as it was stated by the Circulation Manager of Leadership newspaper that, “the cause of this challenges is technological, leadership newspaper like any other print media does not want to be regarded as local champion or an organization that is not ready to embrace modernization in the industry, therefore decided to go digital by establishing online newspaper and or uploading news stories online immediately they are being developed”.

Therefore, it is evident that all the challenges facing the circulation of newspaper in Nigeria have severely affected the circulation of newspapers in many newspaper organisations, during the process circulation and the circulation entirely, which is then affecting the revenue generation and service of the organisations.

Research Question 3: What are the effects of the challenges on the management of newspaper organisations?

The effect of challenges facing circulation of Nigerian newspaper to potential readers has drastically affected the service and funding of many newspaper organizations, as discovered from the in-depth interview administered to the circulation managers of four different National Newspapers that, the topmost effect of the challenges is the reduced revenue generation, that is lack of getting funds for the organization through the sales of little or fewer copies daily.

The reduced revenue generation which was as a result of tremendous decline in copy sales whereby the organizations do not sell enough copies in a day, has really affected the funding of many newspaper organizations, as it was said by Leadership Newspaper respondent, that “decline in sales has led to poor

revenue generation for the organization.” The decline in sales revenue also serves as a source of debt to the organisations which are held by the distributors and vendors, and it is a diminution of the revenue to the organisations.

Another effect is on the service of the organisation. If there is the occurrence of any challenge as it was found out in the study, it will affect the function of the organisations, in which the service of the organisation will not be run smoothly. From the analysis and report, it is evident that the challenges of newspaper circulation have extremely affected the service and revenue generation of the newspaper organisations.

Research Question 4: What are the possible solutions to the identified challenges?

From the data gotten from in-depth interview administered on the respondents of the selected newspapers, on the causes and effects of the challenges facing the circulation of newspaper to potential readers, the solution to the challenges was argued, which includes proper planning ahead/thinking ahead. Planning ahead will give no room to any form of challenges as it means provision of needed material for future use, it will also avoid making the newspaper not to go to the market for that period. Another solution is the quick use of the nearest commercial printing press; this will also serve as a solution when there is the occurrence of running out of material for printing.

Writing of sound, standard, human angle stories, stories that people can relate well with, stories that serve the interest of the people, can also aid quick and high demands of the newspaper by the people and it will be well circulated, as this will solve the problem of circulation challenges.

Another solution as gathered from the in-depth interview administered on the respondent of Leadership newspaper is an investment of online newspapers, for the recovery of the loss encounter from the lack of circulation and copy sales.

The introduction of prepaid policy for the payment of newspapers given to the vendors and distributor before they have been supplied has curbed to a large extent the issue of returned copies. Therefore, it is evident that, thinking ahead, proper planning, availability and maintenance of materials for printing are seen as vital act to solve the challenges of newspaper circulation and also working together in circulation of newspapers and higher investment on the online papers, in other to replenish the lost revenue from the sales of hard copies.

Discussion of Findings

Analyzing the in-depth interview with the respondents of the selected samples (*Punch, Guardian, Daily Trust, Leadership* Newspapers), it was discovered that, there are enormous challenges facing the circulation of newspapers to the readers, which negatively affect the revenue generation of the organizations, this fact is supported by Dapo Olorunyomi the Managing Editor of Premium times Newspaper, who said “Nigeria Newspaper Circulation Has Collapsed”. There are lots of factors indicated by the Circulation Managers, which are regarded as the challenges facing the circulation of newspapers to the readers, these include, late delivery time, traffic, bad roads, this fact is supported by (Miettinen, 1999) where he stated that large circulation of a newspaper is the result of construction of road linkages, modern sources of transportation and significantly extended home delivery of a newspaper at the reader's door.

The study find out that, identified faults from the delivery vehicle, issue of fueling the vehicles, cost of transportation, late printing due to break down of printing machine, high cost of printing and production machine, also as the factors that hindered the challenges facing the circulation of papers, as supported by NUJ (1996) that “other costs of materials, machinery and equipment needed for production and circulation of newspapers and magazines also rose correspondingly, the effect was that cover prices rose astronomically reducing readership and circulation figures. The armed robbers attack, the advent of social media, economic challenges, high cost of living that makes individuals not to purchase newspapers, ethnic and religious sentiment are also seen as other factors that lead to challenges facing the circulation of newspapers.

However, the study also identified the following as the causes of the challenges of newspaper circulation,

which includes, lack of materials for production and transporting, networking of vendor, lack of printing materials (ink, papers, standard machines), lack of maintenance for the equipment, delay from any of the newspaper production process either from the event or the editor or the press guys.

It was also identified that advent of social or online media which can also be refer to as technological advancement, where many of the media houses also don't want to be regarded as an organisation that is not ready to embrace modernization in the industry, so they advance to establishment of online media, this statement was supported by (Zubair, 2015), who said, another factor that causes loss of readership and revenue is the internet and the explosion in new technologies, particularly the GSM phones. With these technologies and the free news on the internet, readers seem to be moving online, thus creating a loss of revenue for the newspapers. Another cause is the returning of unsold copies by the vendors and distributors, where they take the paper from the organisation and come back to give the papers unsold.

The effect of the challenges is also seen to affect the service of the organization, whereby workers and actions in the organization may not operate efficiently, and this will leads to a significant decline to the organization and make it not possible for them to compete with other organizations in the higher level, this point was supported by (Vision 2020:26) which stated that A further pointer to this is that, no newspaper in Nigeria presently makes the list of the first 100 newspapers in the world in terms of ranking. Newspapers around the globe have circulation figures ranging from 14.2million to 5.6million daily especially in Japan and China.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and analysis made, it was discovered that the circulation of newspapers in Nigeria is on a free fall due to some challenges indicated by the respondents. The study then recommends that the newspaper organisations should concentrate more on proper planning and thinking/preparing ahead of eventualities.

Also, recommended that the organisations should be active in working together to circulate their copies to potential readers. Introduction of prepaid policy whereby the distributors pay before being supply is also recommended.

Moreover, the study recommends that the organisations should allocate more funds to purchasing and maintenance of printing materials and other materials needed for circulating the newspapers because delay or fault from the transport will hinder the newspaper circulation for the day and will lead to loss of revenue.

Lastly, the study recommends that the newspaper organisations should also work towards investing in online media, to regain the damage from the decline in hard copies circulation

Conclusion

In conclusion, the decision-making process does not take place in isolation. It is influenced by the psychological, observational and situational factors. Newspaper organisations can assist the prospect of their organisation through the adaptation of the listed solutions to the challenges of newspaper circulation to make the effect of the challenges less confine on the organisations. Following the findings of the study, it was concluded that proper planning and availability of printing materials and other solutions giving by the interviewees would serve as a means of correcting the loss of revenue and decline in activities of the newspaper organisations.

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