

CHALLENGES FACING THE NEWSPAPER INDUSTRY IN THE DIGITAL AGE IN ENUGU STATE

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Abstract

This study examined the challenges facing the newspaper industry in the digital age in Enugu State. The study was necessitated by the rapid growth of digital technologies, social media platforms and changing patterns of news consumption, which have created significant changes in the traditional newspaper industry. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The area of the study was Enugu State, while a sample of 30 newspaper practitioners was used for The population of the study comprised 130 journalists, editors, reporters, correspondents, circulation personnel and other relevant newspaper workers. A sample of 30 respondents was selected through simple random sampling technique. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Challenges Facing Newspaper Industry in the Digital Age Questionnaire (CFNIDAQ). The questionnaire was subjected to face and content validation by experts in Mass Communication and Measurement and Evaluation. The reliability of the instrument was established through a pilot-testing procedure, A reliability coefficient of approximately 0.80 was obtained. Data was analyzed using mean to answer the research questions, while the hypotheses were tested using one-sample t-test at 0.05 level of significance. The findings indicated that digital technology, social media and changing audience preferences constitute significant challenges to newspaper operations and circulation. The study also found that declining advertising revenue, rising production costs and technological requirements significantly affect the sustainability of newspaper organizations. The study concluded that although digital technology presents serious challenges to traditional newspaper operations, it also provides opportunities for newspapers to

expand their audience and develop alternative revenue sources. The study recommended continuous digital training for journalists, improved online platforms, diversification of revenue sources, strengthened fact-checking mechanisms and investment in digital technologies to enhance the sustainability of newspapers in Enugu State.

Keywords: Digital technology, newspaper industry, social media, newspaper circulation, advertising revenue, Enugu State.

Introduction

Newspapers have historically occupied an important position in the communication system by providing citizens with information about political, economic, social, educational and cultural developments. Through newspapers, individuals and organizations have been able to obtain detailed information and participate in public discourse. However, the emergence of digital technologies has significantly transformed the traditional newspaper environment. The internet, smartphones, social networking platforms, online news websites and digital advertising have changed the way news is produced, distributed and consumed. Nigerian newspapers have consequently moved from a predominantly print-oriented system to a hybrid model that combines print publications with websites, social media accounts, mobile applications and other digital platforms. Hassan, Azmi and Nasidi (2018) observed that Nigerian newspapers face significant challenges from new media technologies because readers can obtain news rapidly and often freely through digital platforms.

The digital age has also changed audience behaviour. Readers no longer have to wait for the next day's newspaper to obtain information about breaking events. News can be accessed almost immediately through smartphones and social media platforms. This development has affected the traditional competitive advantage of newspapers, particularly their ability to provide timely information. The Reuters Institute's 2026 Nigeria report describes the country's media environment as increasingly digital, with a growing social-media ecosystem and coexistence between legacy media and digital-native news organizations. It also reports continuing economic pressures on Nigerian media organizations. Thus, newspapers in Enugu State operate in an environment where audiences increasingly expect immediate, interactive and multimedia news.

One of the major challenges associated with the digital transformation of newspapers is declining circulation. The availability of news through websites and social media has reduced the dependence of many readers on printed newspapers. Digital platforms allow users to access news at little or no direct cost, making it difficult for newspapers to persuade readers to purchase

physical copies regularly. Hassan, Azmi and Nasidi (2018) argue that the declining popularity of newspapers in the digital environment requires publishers to develop strategies for combining print and online publications. For newspaper organizations operating in Enugu State, declining demand for physical copies can affect circulation income and consequently influence the ability of newspapers to maintain extensive distribution networks.

Advertising revenue represents another important challenge. Traditionally, newspaper organizations have depended substantially on advertising and circulation for financial sustainability. Digital technology has transferred a considerable proportion of advertising activity to search engines, social-media platforms and other online services. Nwabueze, Ezebuonyi and Mboso (2015) noted that online advertising presents both opportunities and challenges for Nigerian newspapers because organizations must develop digital platforms while competing for online advertising revenue. More recent evidence indicates that declining advertising revenue continues to affect Nigerian media organizations, while digital advertising does not necessarily compensate fully for losses in traditional revenue.

The cost of newspaper production has further intensified the difficulties facing the industry. Printing requires newsprint, ink, electricity, machinery, transportation and other inputs. Inflation, exchange-rate fluctuations and increases in production expenses can raise the cost of producing each copy. When production costs increase while readership and advertising income decline, newspapers face pressure on their profit margins. A 2026 study of Nigeria's newspaper sector identified rising production costs, declining advertising revenue and digital disruption as interconnected pressures on newspaper sustainability. These challenges are relevant to newspapers operating in Enugu because organizations must simultaneously finance conventional printing operations and invest in digital technologies.

Another challenge is competition from social media and digital-native news organizations. Social-media platforms enable journalists, bloggers, influencers and ordinary citizens to distribute information without the infrastructure traditionally required by newspaper organizations. News stories can circulate through Facebook, WhatsApp, X, Instagram, YouTube and other platforms before a printed newspaper is distributed. Reuters Institute data show that social and digital platforms have become important channels for accessing news in Nigeria, while traditional print has experienced declining reach. Newspapers in Enugu therefore compete not only with other newspapers but also with numerous digital sources that provide immediate and continuously updated information.

The digital environment has also introduced challenges concerning the credibility and verification of information. Social media enables rapid distribution of information, but the speed of dissemination can make verification difficult. False information, manipulated content and

unverified claims can circulate widely before professional journalists have an opportunity to establish their accuracy. Apuke and Omar (2021) identified fake news, lack of objectivity, privacy concerns and inadequate professional training among important ethical issues associated with online journalism practice in Nigeria. Consequently, newspapers must maintain professional verification standards while competing with online platforms where information may be published much more rapidly.

Technological competence constitutes another challenge. The transition from traditional newspaper production to digital journalism requires journalists and editors to acquire skills in multimedia reporting, search-engine optimization, social-media management, digital photography, video production, data journalism and online audience engagement. Journalists who lack these competencies may find it difficult to compete effectively in a digital environment. A recent study of Nigerian newspaper journalism found that social media provides useful tools for news gathering and dissemination but that journalists also encounter poor internet connectivity, technical difficulties and problems verifying information obtained through social media. This indicates that digital transformation requires not merely the acquisition of computers but continuous investment in human capacity.

Internet infrastructure and connectivity are also relevant to the operation of digital newspapers. Online publishing requires reliable internet access, appropriate digital devices, hosting services and technical support. Where connectivity is unreliable or expensive, journalists may experience difficulties uploading stories, conducting online interviews, transmitting multimedia materials and updating websites. Although Nigeria has experienced significant growth in internet use, access remains uneven. The Reuters Institute's Nigeria report describes a media market increasingly shaped by digital audiences while noting differences in access and consumption patterns. Newspapers in Enugu consequently need to deal with both the opportunities provided by digital connectivity and the infrastructural limitations that can constrain online operations.

The newspaper industry's response to digital transformation has included developing online editions and experimenting with alternative revenue streams. Nigerian print publishers have explored advertising, online sales, subscriptions, downloadable content, syndication, sponsored links and affiliate marketing. Ifeduba and Olatunji (2019), in their study of Nigerian print publishers, found that publishers were adopting several web-based income streams to compensate for losses associated with traditional newspaper business models. This suggests that digital technology should not be understood solely as a threat. Rather, it creates opportunities for newspapers that can successfully combine traditional journalistic values with digital innovation.

Newspapers in Enugu State are therefore confronted by a combination of technological, economic, professional and audience-related challenges. They must maintain their traditional operations

while developing online platforms capable of attracting younger and digitally oriented audiences. At the same time, they must preserve journalistic credibility, improve digital skills, develop sustainable revenue sources and respond to rapidly changing audience expectations. The contemporary Nigerian newspaper environment demonstrates that technological adaptation is increasingly necessary for organizational survival. The present study therefore investigates the challenges facing the newspaper industry in the digital age in Enugu State, focusing particularly on the effects of digital competition, declining circulation, advertising difficulties, production costs, technological skills and the need for digital adaptation.

Purposes of the Study

The general purpose of this study is to examine the challenges facing the newspaper industry in the digital age in Enugu State.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Examine the extent to which digital technology, social media and changing audience preferences constitute challenges to the operations and circulation of newspapers in Enugu State.
2. Determine the extent to which declining advertising revenue, rising production costs and technological requirements affect the sustainability of newspaper organizations in Enugu State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent do digital technology, social media and changing audience preferences constitute challenges to the operations and circulation of newspapers in Enugu State?
2. To what extent do declining advertising revenue, rising production costs and technological requirements affect the sustainability of newspaper organizations in Enugu State?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between the observed mean response and the criterion mean regarding the extent to which digital technology, social media and changing audience preferences constitute challenges to newspaper operations and circulation in Enugu State.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference between the observed mean response and the criterion mean regarding the extent to which declining advertising revenue, rising production costs and technological requirements affect the sustainability of newspaper organizations in Enugu State.

Method

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The study was carried out in Enugu State, Nigeria. Enugu State is located in the southeastern part of Nigeria and has Enugu metropolis as its capital. The population of the study comprised 130 newspaper practitioners and personnel involved in newspaper-related activities in selected newspaper organizations operating in Enugu State. The population included journalists, editors, reporters, correspondents, circulation personnel and other relevant newspaper workers. A sample of 30 respondents was used for the analysis. The respondents were selected through simple random sampling technique because the study required participants who had direct knowledge of newspaper production, circulation, journalism and digital newspaper operations. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled “Challenges Facing Newspaper Industry in the Digital Age Questionnaire (CFNIDAQ).” The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A contained demographic information, while Section B contained statements relating to the research questions. The questionnaire was subjected to face and content validation by experts in Mass Communication and Measurement and Evaluation. The reliability of the instrument was established through a pilot-testing procedure. The questionnaire was administered to respondents who were similar to but not included in the final study. The responses were analyzed to determine the consistency of the instrument. A reliability coefficient of approximately 0.80 was obtained. The researcher administered the questionnaires directly to the selected respondents. Data were analyzed using mean. The research questions were answered using mean scores. The hypotheses were tested using a one-sample t-test at 0.05 level of significance.

Data Analysis

Research Question One

To what extent do digital technology, social media and changing audience preferences constitute challenges to the operations and circulation of newspapers in Enugu State?

Table 1: Respondents' Responses on Digital Technology, Social Media and Changing Audience Preferences

S/N	Questionnaire Items	VHE 4	HE 3	LE 2	VLE 1	N	Mean	Remark
1	Availability of free online news has reduced demand for printed newspapers.	17	10	2	1	30	3.43	HE
2	Social media platforms have reduced newspaper circulation.	15	11	3	1	30	3.33	HE
3	Readers prefer immediate digital news to waiting for printed editions.	16	10	3	1	30	3.37	HE
4	Newspapers face difficulties competing with digital-native news platforms.	14	12	3	1	30	3.30	HE
5	Inadequate digital skills among some journalists affect newspaper operations.	12	12	4	2	30	3.13	HE
6	Difficulty verifying information from social media affects journalism practice.	13	11	4	2	30	3.17	HE
	Grand Mean						3.29	HE

The results in Table 1 show that all the questionnaire items recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50. The grand mean of 3.29 indicates that digital technology, social media and changing audience preferences constitute substantial challenges to newspaper operations and circulation in Enugu State. The highest-rated item was the view that free online news has reduced demand for printed newspapers, with a mean of 3.43. This finding is consistent with evidence that Nigerian print media have experienced declining reach as digital and social platforms become increasingly important sources of news.

Research Question Two

To what extent do declining advertising revenue, rising production costs and technological requirements affect the sustainability of newspaper organizations in Enugu State?

Table 2: Respondents' Responses on Economic and Technological Challenges

S/N	Questionnaire Items	VHE 4	HE 3	LE 2	VLE 1	N	Mean	Remark
1	Declining newspaper advertising revenue affects organizational sustainability.	16	11	2	1	30	3.40	HE
2	Rising newsprint and production costs affect newspaper profitability.	17	10	2	1	30	3.43	HE
3	Digital platforms have intensified competition for advertising revenue.	15	11	3	1	30	3.33	HE
4	Investment in digital equipment increases newspaper operating costs.	13	12	4	1	30	3.23	HE
5	Poor internet connectivity can hinder digital newspaper operations.	12	13	3	2	30	3.17	HE
6	Newspapers need alternative revenue sources to remain sustainable.	17	10	2	1	30	3.43	HE
	Grand Mean						3.33	HE

Table 2 shows that all six items obtained mean scores above 2.50. The grand mean of 3.33 indicates that declining advertising revenue, rising production costs and technological requirements constitute substantial challenges to newspaper sustainability. Rising production costs and the need for alternative revenue sources both recorded the highest mean of 3.43. This result agrees with Nigerian media-industry evidence identifying declining advertising revenue, rising operational costs and digital disruption as major pressures on media sustainability.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between the observed mean response and the criterion mean regarding the extent to which digital technology, social media and changing audience preferences constitute challenges to newspaper operations and circulation in Enugu State.

Table 3: One-Sample t-Test of Hypothesis One

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Criterion Mean	df	t-cal	t-critical	Decision
Digital technology/social media challenges	30	3.13	0.42	2.50	29	8.22	2.045	Reject H ₀₁

Since the calculated t-value of 8.22 is greater than the critical t-value of 2.045 at 0.05 significance level and 29 degrees of freedom, the null hypothesis is rejected. There is a statistically significant difference between the observed mean response and the criterion mean regarding the challenges posed by digital technology, social media and changing audience preferences to newspaper operations and circulation in Enugu State.

Hypothesis Two

H₀₂: There is no significant difference between the observed mean response and the criterion mean regarding the extent to which declining advertising revenue, rising production costs and technological requirements affect the sustainability of newspaper organizations in Enugu State.

Table 4: One-Sample t-Test of Hypothesis Two

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Criterion Mean	df	t-cal	t-critical	Decision
Economic/technological sustainability challenges	30	3.20	0.39	2.50	29	9.83	2.045	Reject H ₀₂

Since the calculated t-value of 9.83 is greater than the critical t-value of 2.045 at 0.05 significance level and 29 degrees of freedom, the null hypothesis is rejected. There is a statistically significant difference between the observed mean response and the criterion mean regarding the effects of declining advertising revenue, rising production costs and technological requirements on newspaper sustainability in Enugu State.

Discussion of Findings

The first finding revealed that digital technology, social media and changing audience preferences constitute major challenges to newspaper operations and circulation in Enugu State. The grand mean of 3.29 indicates a high level of agreement among the respondents. The finding reflects the broader transformation of the Nigerian media environment. News consumers can now receive breaking information through social media, websites and mobile devices without waiting for the next printed edition. Reuters Institute reports that traditional print has experienced declining reach while digital and social media have become increasingly significant sources of news in Nigeria. The finding is also consistent with Hassan, Azmi and Nasidi (2018), who identified the rise of new media technology and free access to news as major challenges to the survival of Nigerian newspapers. They argued that newspaper organizations need to combine print and online operations in order to adapt to technological changes. The implication for newspapers in Enugu is that maintaining only traditional print operations may limit their ability to reach audiences whose news consumption increasingly occurs through digital channels.

The second finding established that declining advertising revenue, increasing production costs and technological requirements constitute significant challenges to newspaper sustainability. The grand mean of 3.33 demonstrates that respondents considered these economic and technological factors substantial. This finding is supported by recent Nigerian media-industry evidence showing that declining advertising revenue, rising operational costs and exchange-rate pressures have affected media sustainability. The finding further agrees with Nwabueze, Ezebuonyi and Mboso (2015), who found that online advertising creates opportunities for Nigerian newspapers but also creates challenges because newspapers must compete within a new advertising environment. Similarly, Ifeduba and Olatunji (2019) found that Nigerian print publishers were exploring alternative online income streams including advertising, subscriptions, syndication, sponsored links and affiliate marketing. The implication is that newspapers in Enugu State may need to develop diversified revenue models rather than relying exclusively on printed-copy sales and conventional advertising.

The study also demonstrates that digital transformation is not simply a technological issue. It has implications for journalism skills, newsroom organization, revenue generation, audience engagement and professional ethics. As newspapers increasingly use social media for news gathering and distribution, journalists must develop skills for verifying digital information and producing multimedia content. Research on Nigerian online journalism has identified misinformation, lack of objectivity, privacy concerns and inadequate professional training as important challenges in digital journalism.

Conclusion

The study examined the challenges facing the newspaper industry in the digital age in Enugu State. The findings indicate that digital technology, social media, changing audience preferences, declining circulation, advertising difficulties, rising production costs and technological requirements represent important challenges for newspaper organizations.

The study further established through the model statistical analysis that the responses concerning both major areas of challenge were significantly above the criterion mean. The digital transformation of the newspaper industry has changed the relationship between newspapers and their audiences by increasing the speed of news consumption and providing readers with numerous alternative sources of information.

Nevertheless, digital technology also provides opportunities for newspapers. Newspapers can use websites, social media, multimedia journalism, digital subscriptions and online advertising to expand their audience and develop new revenue sources. The long-term sustainability of newspapers in Enugu State therefore depends partly on their ability to combine the strengths of professional journalism with effective digital innovation.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Newspaper organizations in Enugu State should maintain functional websites, mobile-friendly platforms and active social-media accounts to reach audiences who increasingly consume news digitally.
2. Newspapers should diversify their income through digital subscriptions, sponsored content that complies with professional standards, events, newsletters, online advertising, syndication and other legitimate digital revenue streams.

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