Original Research Article

Discourse Analysis of Mass Media Surviving Strategies in the Post COVID-19 Era in Nigeria

Abstract

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ascending containment measures, including prolonged lockdown have caused serious dislocation of economic activities across the globe. Although the mass media environment was already fragile before the outbreak of this pandemic in Nigeria, the disease has worsened the situation which threatens the survival of this viable industry. What strategies to adopt in order to stay afloat remain integral, hence, this study was undertaken to analyze the surviving strategies for mass media in the post COVID-19 era in Nigeria. Anchored on the Social Responsibility Media Theory and Political Economy of the Media Theory, analytical research design was used to investigate into the strategies ideal for the survival of the mass media industry in the post COVID-19 era in Nigeria using evidential and empirical documented secondary materials as sources of data collection. Our analysis found useful continued provision of information, education, entertainment and connection; support society through direct industry workers' support, health and wellness programmes, ecosystem and community, and in-kind contributions; and building trust as strategies for the survival of media industry in the post COVID-19 era. Our paper also found support informs of bailout, single digit loan facilities from the Central Bank of Nigeria and assistance from donor agencies and groups as other useful strategies for survival but with caution to ensure that such supports and favours are not meant to weaken independence of the mass media, betray public trust and corrode the ethical values of the profession which build that trust. The paper concluded by stating that COVID-19 pandemic and its containment measures have affected the mass media and the strength of the industry to rise up again was dependent majorly on its ability for sustained public trust in their various content production and development

Introduction

The mass media in Nigeria since inception are not being without challenges, yet the institution survives till date.A number of scholars have recognized the fact that the mass media in Nigeria have been going through different challenges from inception till date (Abubakar & Abubakar, 2015; ActionAid Nigeria, 2020; Adima, 2015; AMDI, 2007; Anibueze, 2005; Babaleye, Oluwasola, Layefa & Aletor, 2017; Barton, 1979; Casero-Ripollés, 2020; Ekeanyanwu, Batta & Oyokunyi, 2018; Ganiyu, 2015; Gbam, 2017; Ige, 2013; Ihejirika, 2010; Isyaku. Mohd & Qaribu, 2018; Jatula, 2017; Jimoh, 2016; Kasmi, 2015; Kehinde, Yinusa, Addullateef& Abdul-Rasheed, 2015; KPMG, 2020; McQuail, 1994; Mosco, 1996; Mvendaga and Okoosi-Simbine, 2003; Nairametrics, 2020; Nwanne, 2016; Nwekeaku, 2014; Odunlami & Adaja, 2015; Oguchi and Dayo, 2013; Okafor, 2014; Olalekan, Onjefu & Mikaila, 2013; Olayiwola, 1991; Oyokunyi, Ekeanyanwu & Aniebo, 2017; Samuel and Ihejirika, 2019; Spopoola, 2004; Touitou, 2017; Udoakah, 2017; Wasko, 2014; World Economic Forum, 2020). Hence, Survival of the mass media has been a difficult task and source of concern to stakeholders given that the media have a

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duty in the development of societies (AMDI, 2007; Anibueze, 2005; Barton, 1979; McQuail, 1994). In the words of Ekeanyanwu, Batta & Oyokunyi (2018):

> The media industry anywhere in the world is a major nerve centre coordinating other sectors or industries and serving as a major link between one industry and others, especially between the government and the governed. The industry plays a central role in the emergence of a politically, socially, and economically conscious citizenry. This role has elevated the industry as a major stakeholder in the political, socio-cultural, and economic development of people. This also explains why the media are often regarded as the "Fourth Estate of the Realm", "Watchdog of the Society", and other similar recognitions that place the media at the heart of nation building. This essential role of the media, however, has come under serious threat following the emergence of the Digital Age, changing social trends, and a global economy that is in distress (p. 427).

It is important to note that the Media has made giant strides but it is still faced with a lot of constraints such as employer's influence, dearth of resources, and poor welfare condition of staff, political and corporate interference, political killings and kidnappings, various job hazards as well as the lure of gratification which tend to subvert their drive for independence (Ihejirika, 2010). Despite the challenges, how the institution survives till data has previously been interrogated by a number of scholars (Abubakar & Abubakar, 2015; Adima, 2015; AMDI, 2007; Anibueze, 2005; Babaleye, Oluwasola, Layefa&Aletor, 2017; Barton, 1979; Casero-Ripollés, 2020; Ekeanyanwu, Batta &Oyokunyi, 2018; Ganiyu, 2015; Gbam, 2017; Ige, 2013; Ihejirika, 2010; Isyaku. Mohd&Qaribu, 2018; Jatula, 2017; Jimoh, 2016; Kasmi, 2015; Kehinde, Yinusa, Addullateef& Abdul-Rasheed, 2015; KPMG, 2020; McQuail, 1994; Mosco, 1996; Mvendaga and Okoosi-Simbine, 2003; Nairametrics, 2020; Nwanne, 2016; Nwekeaku, 2014; Odunlami and Adaja, 2015; Oguchi and Dayo, 2013; Okafor, 2014; Olalekan, Onjefu&Mikaila, 2013; Olayiwola, 1991; Oyokunyi, Ekeanyanwu&Aniebo, 2017; Samuel and Ihejirika, 2019; Spopoola, 2004; Touitou, 2017; Udoakah, 2017; Wasko, 2014).

At present, the world is confronted with COVID-19 pandemic which is having profound effects on human lives and society around the world. Experts have said that COVID-19 pandemic has caused widespread economic hardship through input constraints, declines in consumer confidence and spending patterns, and market shocks (KPMG, 2020). A report by ActionAid Nigeria (2020) indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic is more than a health crisis. It is in fact, a development problem, and must be seen in that context, as it affects every aspect of human life and all ramifications of human endeavour across different countries and indeed continents of the world. While the impact of the pandemic varies from country to country, it is certain that it will increase the level of poverty and inequality at a global scale (ActionAid Nigeria, 2020). The report further revealed that:

> Already, the lockdown imposed by governments around the world as part of measures to halt the spread of the pandemic has destroyed local, national and international economies. While several businesses have shut down and millions thrown out of jobs, there is a heightened level of helplessness across the world as there is no known cure in sight, at least at the moment for the virus (ActionAid Nigeria, 2020).

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Mass media are among the institutions affected by the outbreak of this pandemic and the lockdown measures imposed by various governments including Nigeria to curtail the spread (Casero-Ripollés, 2020). Interestingly, now that the economic activities have been badly affected due to the lockdown measures, policy makers are beginning to initiate policies and introduce programmes that can cushion the impacts of the pandemic across sectors including the media. Analyzing the surviving strategies of the mass media in this period of the post-COVID-19 lockdown is therefore very important based on the important position the mass media occupied in the society in general and COVID-19 recovery plan in general. This is in recognition of the fact that "without appropriate and urgent socio-economic responses, global suffering will escalate, jeopardising lives and livelihoods for many years to come" (ActionAid Nigeria, 2020).

Research Questions

This paper seeks to address the following pertinent questions:

i. What are the Challenges of mass media operations before COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria?
ii. What is the role played by the mass media in preventing the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria?
iii. What is the impact of COVID-19 on mass media operations in Nigeria?
iv. What are the strategies in place for survival of mass media in the post COVID-19 lockdown in Nigeria?

Theoretical Framework

This research paper is anchored by the Social Responsibility Media Theory and Political Economy of the Media Theory.

Social Responsibility Media Theory

Social Responsibility Media Theorywhich has beenpropounded by F. S. Siebert, T. B. Peterson and W. Schramm (1963) has charged the media, irrespective of the environment they operate (even in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic) to: (i) Accept and fulfill certain obligations to society; (ii) Through professional standards of informativeness, truth, accuracy, objectivity and balance, these obligations can be met; (iii) Regulate itself within the framework of law and established institutions to be able to carry out its responsibility; (iv) Whatever might lead to crime, violence, civil disorder or offence to minority groups, should be avoided by the media; (v) Reflect its society's plurality, giving access to various points of view and granting all the rights to reply; (vi) Based on the principle in (i), the society has the right to expect high standards of performance from the media. Intervention can only be justified to secure public good; and (vii) Accountability of media professionals should be to the society, employers and the market (McQuail, 1987 in Anaeto, Onabajo & Osifeso, 2008), thereby making it the most relevant theory in this study. The theory demands that freedom carries concomitant obligations, and the press, enjoys a privileged position under the government, is obliged to be responsible to society for carrying certain essential functions of mass communication. In general, socially acceptable press behaviour was to be anchored on self-regulation, but if the press would not voluntarily give

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them, then there must be certain social structures to ensure that it behaves in compliance with recognized social standards (Anaeto, Onabajo & Osifeso, 2008).

Political Economy of the Media Theory

The need for a theory that would better define the present challenging environment to which the media are passing through and the approach that can help them to better understand and adapt to the changing environment for better operations has made the use of this theory in the study very crucial. The theory has its roots from the field of economics and particularly, the works of classical political economists such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo. Early researchers in the field of economics adopted the critical perspective by applying the Marxist/neo-Marxist theoretical framework in carrying out studies in the political economic approach in media and communication studies. Political economy is any interdisciplinary study which explains how political institutions, the political environment, and the economic system—capitalist, socialist, mixed influence each other in the production and distribution of wealth. The political economy of the media and communication theory, therefore, has to do with how the political environment and economic system influence the production and distribution of information as commodities (Samuel and Ihejirika, 2019). Citing Murdock and Golding (1974), Wasko (2014) submits that "the mass media are first and foremost industrial and commercial organizations which produce and distribute commodities" (p.260).

The theory has grown beyond the marginal approach of studying media ownership and control of resources to a general theme which includes the process of marketisation of the media. Udoakah (2017) re-echoes the foregoing position when he avers that "the media operate within the framework of the political and economic systems of their societies. In other words, the political and economic systems determine the nature of media systems" (p.19). He defines political economy as an approach to studying the ways in which media products are produced, distributed and consumed. McChesney (2008) adds that the political economy of the media links the media and communication systems to how economic and political systems work, and how social power is exercised in society. Udoakah, in a treatise on the political economy of Nigerian journalism, submits that the government is the biggest advertiser in Nigeria, a situation which makes the government decidesfor itself the newspapers that it would place its advertisement in. He points out for instance, that in the early 1960s, the first Prime Minister of independent Nigeria, Tafawa Balewa emulated a policy in which some British administration adopted by stopping the placement of advertisements in newspapers leading to the demise of Daily Express and West African Pilot in 1964. He avers that "the relationship between the mass media and the advertisers and the economy is very significant to note. Big time advertisers are industrialists and other business gurus behind the economy. So, advertising exerts obvious, though frequently denied, pressure on the media and journalism practice" (p.36). In providing a summary of the theories and studies related to the political economy of the media and communication, Mosco (1996) concludes that political economy is "'the study of the social relations, particularly, power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution and consumption of resources,' including communication resources" (p.25). The interplay between political institutions, the political environment, and economic system guided to part of the factors responsible for the survival and extinction of the media institutions.

COVID-19 Pandemic

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The global pandemic known as coronavirus began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. Known as SARS-CoV-2, the virus has resulted in 65,626,723 million infections, 1,513,866million deaths and 45,462,244 have been recovered. SARS-CoV-2 infection causes a respiratory illness called COVID-19.COVID-19 has now been reported on every continent except Antarctica (Medical News Today, 2020; World Health Organisation, 2020; Worldometer**,** 2020).

In Nigeria, the first confirmed case of the COVID-19 pandemic was announced on 27 February 2020, when an Italian citizen in Lagos tested positive for the virus. On 9 March 2020, a second case of the virus was reported in Ewekoro, Ogun State, a Nigerian citizen who had contact with the Italian citizen. The virus spread across other states including the FCT and as of December 3, 2020,68,303 cases have been confirmed, 64,291 cases have been discharged and 1,179 deaths have been recorded in 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory**.** On December 3, 2020, 343 new cases were reported from 14 states- FCT (123); Lagos (106); Kaduna (72); Nasarawa (14); Rivers (5); Bauchi (4); Imo (4); Ogun (4); Ekiti (3); Edo (2); Oyo (2); Plateau (2); Akwa Ibom (1); and Kano (1) (NCDC, 2020).

Methodology

This research paper adopted discourse analytical research method to examine the mass media surviving strategies in the post COVID-19 era in Nigeria. Evidential documented secondary sources were used to collect the data relevant to the problem of this study. Subsequently, materials from books, scholarly articles, newspaper articles, published official reports, Internet sources, etc have constituted the sources of data collection in this study.

Challenges of Mass Media Operations and Survival before COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria

A review of different theoretical and empirical studies indicates that the mass media were in pretty bad shape before the coronavirus pandemic in Nigeria (Abubakar and Abubakar, 2015; Babaleye, Oluwasola, Layefa & Aletor, 2017; Ekeanyanwu, Batta & Oyokunyi, 2018; Ganiyu, 2015; Gbam, 2017; Ige, 2013; Isyaku, Jatula, 2017; Mohd & Qaribu, 2018; Jatula, 2017; Jimoh, 2016; Kasmi, 2015; Kehinde, Yinusa, Addullateef & Abdul-Rasheed, 2015; Mvendaga and Okoosi-Simbine, 2003; Nwekeaku, 2014; Nwanne, 2016; Odunlami and Adaja, 2015; Oguchi and Dayo, 2013; Okafor, 2014; Olalekan, Onjefu & Mikaila, 2013; Olayiwola, 1991; Oyokunyi, Ekeanyanwu & Aniebo, 2017; Samuel and Ihejirika, 2019; Spopoola, 2004; Touitou, 2017).Ekeanyanwu, Batta & Oyokunyi (2018), captured the state of affairs of the mass media before COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria when they said that:

> The media industry plays a central role in the emergence of a politically, socially, and economically conscious citizenry. This role has elevated the industry as a major stakeholder in the political, socio-cultural, and economic development of the people. This essential role, however, has come under serious threat following the emergence of the Digital Age, changing social trends, and a global economy that is in distress.

Similarly, Jatula (2017) found that the Nigerian press before COVID-19 pandemic was not only operating in a volatile ethnic and challenging economic environment but also encountered enormous political pressure which complicates, and often compromises the media's ability to fulfill its constitutional role. A study by Nwekeaku (2014) on the *challenges of cultural agencies*

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and Mass Media in promoting the transformation agenda in Nigeria revealed that the mass media encounter some problems that limit their active participation in the transformation agenda, including: (i) Editorial interference: Media owners, especially government and politicians do¬ interfere on the editorial content for selfish interests, thereby limiting or even preventing them from objective, fearless and independent editorial; (ii) Mass poverty, hunger, unemployment, inflation, naira depreciation, among other economic woes, have restricted media information to few privileged members of the society who could afford the prohibit costs of media information today; (iii) Lack of basic infrastructural facilities, such as, electricity, good asset roads, have¬ restricted media information to state capitals and few urban centers, when over 70 per cent of the population live in the rural areas; (iv) Economic reforms, such as, commercialization, privatization, liberalization andmonetization have reduced the editorial content and other media information to the purchasing power of the news sources, who are now compelled to pay or perish. Payment for news items compromises the editorial quality and content of the media; (v) Lack of relevant education and adequate training limit the ability of media men to understand, analyze, interpret and disseminate technical and specialized materials to the public; (vi) Intimidation and harassment of media men with security agencies by public officers¬ tend to discourage some media men from performing their duties. Many agents of Nigeria's press have been imprisoned, exiled, tortured, or murdered by agents of government; (vii) Existence of some obnoxious and punitive laws tends to limit media information gathering, processing and dissemination in the country. Such laws include: Protection of Public Officers against Accusation; Seditious Publication Act[1958 Criminal Code, 1963 Penal Code Laws of⎫ Northern Nigeria]; Obscene Publication Act of 1961; and Newspaper [Amendment] Act of 1964.

International Press Centre (IPC) and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) (2010) studied the mass media environment in Nigeria and came to a conclusion that:

> The Media has made giant strides in the past but it is still faced with a lot of constraints such as employer's influence, dearth of resources, and poor welfare condition of staff, political and corporate interference, political killings and kidnappings, various job hazards as well as the lure of gratification which tend to subvert their drive for independence.

Abubakar and Abubakar (2015), in their study on "an assessment of the managerial challenges of the Daily Trust newspapers" revealed that *Daily Trust* newspapers was bedeviled with staff poaching, adaptability, strategic prioritization, technology, maintenance hindrance, well-built and frail competitions, collaborative print sabotage and communication with news contacts challenges among other universal ones. Oyokunyi, Ekeanyanwu & Aniebo (2017), in a similar stud reveal how the newspaper industry plays a strategic role in nation building such as acting as watchdog of the society, agent of change and gatekeeper in shaping and moulding the national conscience of the society and the way the industry has continued to interface between the people and the government., however, the newspapers are truly facing a bigger threat of extinction and that the survival strategies adopted by them to stay afloat are inadequate. Kehinde, Yinusa, Addullateef & Abdul-Rasheed (2015), in their study on the "Constraints and Challenges of the Media in the Development of Nigeria" before COVID-19 pandemic revealed how irrespective of the crucial role of the mass media in the society have been faced with certain factors that hinder their ability to carry out some of their development goals in the society.

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In their study Samuel and Ihejirika (2019) found that advantages of online media such as speedy accessibility of information, patronage by young people, visibility and timeliness contributed to survival of local newspapers, while 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. Babaleye, Oluwasola, Layefa & Aletor (2017), conducted study on "*New Media, E- Publishing and the Fearful Realities: Implications for the Survival of Traditional Print Media in Nigeria*" and found that new media in journalism practice poses a threat to the readership of traditional print media. Touitou (2017) also revealed how the Nigerian government curb and constrain the press through legislation, decrees, physical repression, incessant cases of suppression, muzzling, sanction, imprisonments, assignations, closure of the Media stations etc which is a big threat for the operation and survival of the mass media in Nigeria. Okafor's (2014) study shows how the current media ownership pattern and the level of media control in Nigeria actually hinder the media from independently setting society's agenda. Finding in the study conducted by Odunlamiand Adaja (2015) reveal the way the economics of media production, distribution and consumption makes the issue of commercialization an inevitable reality in the modern society even though the mass media exist essentially as a social institution to provide voice to the populace through a 'full, truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day's events in a context – that gives meaning'. They pointed however that commercial considerations have vitiated the statutory mandate of the media as the fourth estate of the realm. In Nigeria, like other developing countries, the challenge is how media professionals can balance their desire to break even and successfully navigate the complex and harsh mace of economic realities for an enhanced bottom-line on the one hand and remain committed to the professional demands of their calling on the other. This is crucially so because of the media's place and role as societal conscience, compass and barometer of development (Odunlami & Adaja, 2015.

Isyaku, Mohd & Qaribu (2018). (2017), in writing on the "*The Survival of Nigerian Newspapers in Digital Age of Communication*" confirms that the major challenge for Nigerian newspapers was how to utilize new technology and discover ways to make their online product popular. Technological advances are both a challenge and expedient for the future survival of print newspapers in Nigeria. Spopoola (2004), in his study reveals how the broadcast media were gradually shying away from their primary responsibilities of educating, informing and enlightening the citizenry as a result of a new policy of aggressive revenue generation drive. His study admitted that the business of radio and television broadcasting is a capital-intensive one, requiring huge funds to remain afloat. However, news commercialization poses a great threat to the survival of the mass media industry in Nigeria. Ige (2013) reveals how total newspapering has negative consequences on professionalism and public service journalism. Olayiwola (1991), in his paper argues that ownership of the mass media in Nigeria tends to determine how they are used for political communications in the country. Other factors, such as ethnicity, religion, literacy, language of communication, legal limitations, political and socio-economic conditions, also affect survival of the mass media in Nigeria. Ganiyu (2015) found that sales of newspaper copies reduced drastically as people are more interested in reading newspapers on-line than off-line which constitutes a challenge to the survival of the media in Nigeria. Kasmi (2015), in "*A Comparative Analysis of Readership of Print and Online Newspapers in Jos, Nigeria*" found that the print newspaper would not go into extinction because of the threat posed by the Online Newspapers, by way of readership and revenue profile.

Mass Media Responsibilities in COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria

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It is a known fact that events of public concern such as health issues attract media attention. This can take the form of print, electronic, Internet or social media attention; in most cases, a combination of all. Whichever form it takes, what matters most is the level or impact of media intervention in health crises, especially disease outbreak. Mass media cannot cure the virus but can cure its spread (Adelakun & Adnan, 2016).This statement explicitly underscores the role of mass media in health reporting, especially in curbing spread of infectious disease outbreak. Scholars have argued that the mass media have the potential to influence health-related behaviors and perceptions (Leask, Hooker & King, 2010). In Nigeria, the mass media are used independently or complementarily in health promotion activities to achieve positive lifestyle changes (Wogu et al., 2020). Therefore, the role of mass media in health promotion andintervention goes beyond just creating awareness on a particular health issue or disease outbreak; it also entails placing emphasis on the angle or direction of reportage of such issue or outbreak. These media angles of presenting health issues take the form of media framing to influence public perception and induce attitudinal response, leading to positive behavioral changes.

However, research by Adelakun (2017) shows that what always raises dust regarding media roles in health issues is the degree of success or failure recorded by mass media in a particular health outbreak or health challenge compared to the risks. Stressing on this, Tabbaa (2010) asserts that good communication through the media is pertinent when an outbreak is unique in public health with confusion and sense of urgency as the media in no small measure work along with health professionals in creating awareness.

Placing priority on novel diseases can be useful because rare and dramatic occurrences are sometimes sentinel events. Therefore, working with the journalists and the media to help them understand the science and epidemiology, particularly in a fast and moving event, will improve risk communication to the public and reduce in appropriate concerns and panic (McCloskey and Heymann, 2020). The primary purpose of media campaigns during disease outbreaks is to elicit population behaviour change, which leads to disease prevention and control. However, the effectiveness of such campaigns in achieving this goal depends on message precision and clarity (Wogu, Chukwu & Nwafor, 2019).

Scholars who carried out studies on the role of mass media in preventing the spread of the coronavirus pandemic also affirm that the mass media provide adequate coverage of the pandemic, irrespective of some shortcomings, thereby reducing the extent to which the disease would have caused havoc to human health and the society (Apuke & Omar, 2021; Arinze-Umobi & Chiweta-Oduah, 2020; Casero-Ripollés, 2020; Makata, 2021; Nwakpu, Ezema & Ogbodo, 2020; Ogbonne, 2021; Smith, Smith & Ajayi, 2020; World Economic Forum, 202). According to Arinze-Umobi & Chiweta-Oduah(2020):

> Coronavirus (COVID-19) is a health crisis that has introduced fear, anxiety, uncertainties, and anger in many individuals across the world and in Nigeria. Alongside the deep distress and pains felt and exhibited by many citizens in the country, there is also a growing concern and confusion about the several myths and information associated with this virus: as such, the need for demystification with the various mass media channels.

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World Economic Forum (2020) reveals that COVID-19 pandemic has challenged the media, entertainment and culture industry to apply its reach and influence to play prominent roles. The industry has endeavoured to step up and contribute to the COVID-19 response. Fulfilling the mission to inform, entertain and connect, COVID-19 has presented ample opportunity for the media, entertainment and culture industry to leverage its resources to help society weather the crisis (World Economic Forum, 2020). Going above and beyond the core mission, the media industry has stepped up by leveraging its resources and technology to support society (World Economic Forum, 2020). Smith, Smith & Ajayi (2020) underscores that the role of the mass media including television, radio, print and in recent times social media has remained indispensable in teaming and eradicating pandemics. Information on positive public health practices such as social distancing, hand washing, respiratory hygiene and government policies in tackling COVID-19 pandemic have often been disseminated via these media (Smith, Smith & Ajayi, 2020), thereby making the public to be aware and take appropriate measures to prevent the spread.In the study conducted by Nwakpu, Ezema & Ogbodo(2020) on the "*Nigeria media framing of coronavirus pandemic and audience response*" it was revealed that continuous reportage of COVID-19 has proved effective in creating awareness about safety and preventive measures thereby helping to 'flatten the curve' and contain the spread of the virus. Casero-Ripollés's (2020) study found the emergence of important developments such as the resurgence of the role of legacy media, especially television, and the fact that citizens who usually remain far from the information have reconnected with the news. Therefore, the existing inequalities regarding news consumption among citizens have been reduced, in part. This generates potential benefits for democracy in terms of equality and accessibility concerning public affairs. Arinze-Umobi & Chiweta-Oduah (2020) in their study show how effective behavioural health change during a crises such as the COVID-19 must be occur only if the mass media especially films are used in the sensitization, education of masses, as this would help in instilling in the masses certain behaviours required to survive the pandemic and that crisis response strategies are germane during a crisis because they help reduce the negative effects of a crisis on citizens of a country but must be simplified and effectively communicated using various mass media channels.

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Mass Media Operations and Survival in Nigeria

The mass media industry plays a central role in the emergence of a politically, socially, and economically conscious citizenry. This role has elevated the industry as a major stakeholder in the political, socio-cultural, and economic development of the people (Ekeanyanwu, Batta & Oyokunyi, 2018).It is an established fact therefore that the mass media were in pretty bad shape before the coronavirus pandemic. However, the dislocations caused by the pandemic have further worsened the already bad situation (Pulitzer Centre, 2020).The lockdown imposed by governments around the world as part of measures to halt the spread of the pandemic has destroyed local, national and international economies. While several businesses have shut down and millions thrown out of jobs, there is a heightened level of helplessness across the world as there is no known cure in sight, at least at the moment for the virus (Pulitzer Centre, 2020).Assessing the impacts of the crisis on businesses, societies, economies and vulnerable

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groups is, therefore, fundamental to developing a strategic response capable of driving a recovery that does not leave anyone behind. Without appropriate and urgent socio-economic responses, the United Nations said global suffering will escalate, jeopardizing lives and livelihoods for many years to come (Pulitzer Centre, 2020).Long before the outbreak of COVID-19, Nigeria had recorded a yearly increase in its unemployment rate based on a report by the World Bank and the Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (Pulitzer Centre, 2020).

There are studies bothering specifically on the impact of COVID-19 on the survival of the mass media in Nigeria (ActionAid Nigeria, 2020; Babbie, 2010; Casero-Ripollés, 2020; Ekeanyanwu, Batta & Oyokunyi, 2018; Nairametrics, 2020; Smith, Smith & Ajayi, 2020; World Economic Forum, 2020). A report by Nairametrics (2020) reveals that the devastating effect of the coronavirus pandemic has been felt in every newsroom, ranging from the big ones to the small online platforms. The report summarised the woes faced by media organisations as coronavirus ravaged every fabric of the local and international economy. While the media had successfully confronted dictatorial regimes and democratically-elected office holders who are averse to criticisms and survived, the coronavirus presented a new level of challenge to their survival and profitability:

> The industry and practitioners are facing a different kind of torture. This time around, not by any political office holder, but a looming recession that has befallen the industry. Though the industry has been battling with several hurdles before the advent of coronavirus, the pandemic is threatening its survival amid other uncertainties (Nairametrics, 2020).

The sector is currently grappling with several problems, ranging from COVID-19 pandemic, depleted funds due to the lockdown across major cities, loss of revenue due to lower ad sales, looming job loss and salaries slashed, among others(Nairametrics, 2020).Nairametrics (2020) findings further indicated that:

> Many journalists will be out of their jobs for a long and their reabsorption depends mainly on when their media organisations get a rebound which is complicatedly tied to how the Nigerian economy survives the pandemic and the support the media can get from the government in terms of bailout, single digit loan facilities from the Central Bank of Nigeria and assistance from donor agencies and groups.

In a report by Olu Obadofun funded by the Pulitzer Centre, the Punch newspaper's Managing Director, Ademola Osinubi is quoted to have informed staff of the company in an internal memo:

> This pandemic has dealt with our business telling and severe blows. Our circulation and advertising revenues dipped dangerously, compounding the operational and revenue challenges birthed by the migration of a majority of print newspaper readers and adverts to digital platforms (Nairametrics, 2020).

"Beyond the loss of jobs and slash in pay; furlough and closure of media outlets are also dangers recently permeating the media industry (Nairametrics, 2020).However, in a feature article published by The Guardian newspaper of July 6, 2020, the Chairman of the Lagos State Chapter of the Nigeria Union of Journalist (NUJ), Quasim Akinreti, in an interview confirmed that the

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media being a service industry are badly affected by the pandemic, and cited a drastic fall in income for journalists and newsrooms (Nairametrics, 2020).Casero-Ripollés (2020), conducted a study on the "Impact of Covid-19 on the media system: Communicative and democratic consequences of news consumption during the outbreak" and revealed that:

> Covid-19 is a phenomenon of enormous magnitude and relevance. Its impact has affected various social domains, including the media and journalism. Since the beginning of this health crisis, the news has become a valuable resource for citizens. There is an emergence of important developments such as the resurgence of the role of legacy media, especially television, and the fact that citizens who usually remain far from the information have reconnected with the news. Therefore, the existing inequalities regarding news consumption among citizens have been reduced, in part. This generates potential benefits for democracy in terms of equality and accessibility concerning public affairs.

ActionAid Nigeria (2020), in its research report on the Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Nigeria Media Operations and Survival revealed that:

i. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the practice of journalism in Nigeria by hampering access to news sources. By hampering access to news sources, the pandemic changed the way reporters accessed information and introduced a new way of accessing information (new professional normal) – the use of digital technology to access sources or to gather information online from sources.
ii. The pandemic has restricted information gathering to online news sources. Reporters now access information mainly via: WhatsApp, Facebook, Zoom meetings, Twitter, YouTube and phone calls. This means that the newsroom has become virtual and reporters do not need to run to the office to file stories any longer.
iii. To be effective as a journalist during and post COVID 19, reporters need to acquire online information gathering and verification skills.
iv. The pandemic has changed the nature of journalism practice by changing the nature of news sources in the sense that digital literacy is required to function efficiently as news sources in the new journalism order.
v. With little resources, correspondents can report live from their locations and can conduct virtual interviews.

Strategies for Survival of Mass Media in the Post COVID-19 Era in Nigeria

At this particular time where economic activities are beginning to pick up across the globe including Nigeria after prolonged lockdown, governments, organizations and institutions are beginning to adopt short- and medium-term policies and measures that would help them for their quick recovery from the impact of the pandemic's long period of lockdown. The media is one of the institutions that are not left out of the impact occasioned by the long period of lockdown, hence, the need for strategies that can accelerate its recovery and revival. Ekeanyanwu, Batta & Oyokunyi (2018), in their study on "*the Economics of Decline in the Media Industry: Survival Strategies of American Print Media Firms and Implications for a Diminishing Print Media Industry in Nigeria" before* the COVID-19 pandemic found out the essential role of the mass media came under serious threat following the emergence of the Digital Age, changing social trends, and a global economy that is in distress. Their (Ekeanyanwu, Batta & Oyokunyi, 2018)

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identified some of the strategies adopted by the American print media industry to deal with the economic recession to include introduction of online editions, use of pay wall, free online views, Search Engine Optimization, Micro-funding, etc. This implies that the "New Normal" is a challenging period for Nigerian mass media to rise up to the expectation by employing strategies that can effectively enable them survive the impact of this novel pandemic. World Economic Forum (2020), in their research report on the Media, Entertainment and Culture Industry's response and role in a society in crisis, has found out the following as the ideal strategies for mass media survival in the post COVID-19 lockdown era:

Fulfilling the mission to inform, educate, entertain and connect: COVID-19 has presented ample opportunity for the media, entertainment and culture industry to leverage its resources to help society weather the crisis by fulfilling its mission to inform, educate, and for societies in lockdown, entertainment has been critical.

Going above and beyond the core mission of informing: The media industry has stepped up by leveraging its resources and technology to support society through direct industry workers' support; health and wellness programmes; ecosystem and community; in-kind contributions; technology and tools.

Building trust: Trust in news and information matters. Media companies play a key role in limiting harmful content and managing the accurate dissemination of information. (a) trust has grown, unevenly; (b) consumers and employees are judging companies' responses; (c) user data is needed to fight the virus; (d) harmful content has serious consequences in health crises; (e) positive perception and trust feed loyalty; (f) trust translate to financial performance.

The above strategies are in line with the philosophies of Social Responsibility Media Theory used in anchoring this study which charged the media to:

> (i) Accept and fulfill certain obligations to society; (ii) Through professional standards of informativeness, truth, accuracy, objectivity and balance, these obligations can be met; (iii) Regulate itself within the framework of law and established institutions to be able to carry out its responsibility; (iv) Whatever might lead to crime, violence, civil disorder or offence to minority groups, should be avoided by the media; (v) Reflect its society's plurality, giving access to various points of view and granting all the rights to reply; (vi) Based on the principle in (i), the society has the right to expect high standards of performance from the media. Intervention can only be justified to secure public good; and (vii) Accountability of media professionals should be to the society, employers and the market (McQuail, 1987 in Anaeto, Onabajo & Osifeso, 2008),

As if Oyokunyi, Ekeanyanwu & Aniebo (2017) foresaw the coming of this pandemic. Their study recommended that an economic template that may involve mergers and acquisitions, shift in traditional news gathering methods, exploring local language publications among others should be embraced by the mass media industry if it must survive beyond 2030.Nairametrics (2020), in its suggestions stated that many journalists will be out of their jobs for a long time and their reabsorption depends mainly on when their media organisations get a rebound which is complicatedly tied to how the Nigerian economy survives the pandemic and the support the media can get from the government in terms of bailout, single digit loan facilities from the

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Central Bank of Nigeria and assistance from donor agencies and groups. ActionAid Nigeria (2020), in its *Research Report on the Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Nigeria Media Operations and Survival*, recommended the following for the survival of mass media in the post COVID-19 lockdown has proposed the SCARS Intervention Model (SIM). SCARS is an acronym for Systems Reform, Capacity Building, Academia-Industry Linkages, Research and Development, and Sustainable Funding, as a panacea for the problems bedeviling the media in Nigeria and largely triggered by COVID-19 pandemic.

Conclusion/Recommendations

COVID-19 pandemic has caused serious dislocation to economic activities across the globe due to the stiff measures taken by governments to curtail the spread. This exposes the vulnerability of our economy and challenges all stakeholders to rise up to adopt and embrace policies that would rebuild the devastating economy. Why stakeholders in various sectors of the economy are invigorating to stand up strong again, the need for the mass media to do so is most paramount considering the position of the industry as the "Fourth State of the Realm" and the public's desire and expectation for objective, truthful, balance, accurate and analytical information about the COVID-19's revival policies in all sectors of the economy from the mass media. Although the mass media environment was already fragile irrespective of the crucial role they played in the society before COVID-19 pandemic worsened the situation and threatened the survival of this viable industry in Nigeria, what strategies to adopt in order to stay afloat remain integral.

The mass media at this junction are to continue to leverage its resources to help society weather this pandemic by fulfilling its core mission to inform, educate, and entertain members of the public through their content programming and development. Beyond the core mission of information, education, entertainment and connection the industryis to leverage its resources and technology to support society through direct industry workers' support; health and wellness programmes; ecosystem and community; in-kind contributions; technology and tools. Above all, the mass media are to continue to build public trust by limiting harmful content and managing the accurate dissemination of information which can translate to financial performance. It is to be noted the era of COVID-19 pandemic has brought lots of misinformation, disinformation or fake news about the pandemic fueled by social media shifts public trust for COVID-19 information more on the conventional mass media which the industry must rise up to win that trust. Winning public trust would lead to more audience and advertisers for greater profitability and quick recovery.

The mass media industry should accept support informs of bailout, single digit loan facilities from the Central Bank of Nigeria and assistance from donor agencies and groups but with caution to ensure that such supports and favours are not meant to betray public trust and corrode the ethical values of the profession which build that trust.

Furthermore, COVID-19 pandemic and the containment measures affected the mass media and the strength of the industry to rise up again is dependent majorly on its ability to sustain public trust in their various content production and development meant to inform, educate, entertain and connect together, the public.

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