

## **Discourse Analysis of Mass Media Surviving Strategies in Post COVID-19 Era 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 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 study found **a factors that challenged mass media existentiality in during coronavirus in Nigeria which.** It found useful the 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. 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. Thus, to rise again was dependent majorly on ability for sustained public trust of their contents.

**Key Words:** Discourse Analysis, Mass Media, Surviving/Containment Strategies, Post COVID-19 Era

### **Introduction**

**The mass media in Nigeria, since inception have not been 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; 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; Mvendaga & Okoosi-Simbine, 2003; Nairametrics, 2020; Nwanne, 2016; Nwekeaku, 2014; Odunlami & Adaja, 2015; Oguchi & Dayo, 2013; Okafor, 2014; Olalekan, Onjefu & Mikaila, 2013; Oyokunyi, Ekeanyanwu & Aniebo, 2017; Samuel & 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 duty in the development of societies (AMDI, 2007; Anibueze, 2005). Ekeanyanwu, Batta & Oyokunyi (2018) have recognized the role of the media in social, political and economic development of the social but observed that the “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). Also, 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 gratifications which tend to subvert their drive for independence are some of the challenges that the mass media were struggling with before the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in Nigeria (Ihejirika, 2010).

Although, 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 & Okoosi-Simbine, 2003; Nairametrics, 2020; Nwanne, 2016; Nwekeaku, 2014; Odunlami and Adaja, 2015; Oguchi & Dayo, 2013; Okafor, 2014; Olalekan, Onjefu & Mikaila, 2013; Olayiwola, 1991; Oyokunyi, Ekeanyanwu & Aniebo, 2017; Samuel & Ihejirika, 2019; Spopoola, 2004; Toutou, 2017; Udoakah, 2017; Wasko, 2014).

The media industry has survived to this moment despite the challenges as observed above, the advent of the coronavirus pandemic has caused tremendous effects across sectors of the economy, including the media globally. Reports indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic was more than a health crisis. It was 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. 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; Casero-Ripollés, 2020; KPMG, 2020). In his observation of the challenges of the media during coronavirus pandemic:

Newsrooms worldwide are under intense financial, physical and psychological pressure during this pandemic, just like in many other sectors, the coronavirus pandemic has also had a great impact on the media. In a time when professionals from different occupations are trying to manage work from home, correspondents, who usually spend a significant part of their time on the field, running after stories and people, and the whole media sector, in general, find themselves face-to-face with new challenges. Fighting an increase in fake news, managing work remotely, and the traditional media's adaptation of a new digital model will be among the many tests the sector will have to go through (Abdullahi, 2020, p. 1).

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, jeopardizing lives and livelihoods for many years to come” (ActionAid Nigeria, 2020).

### **Objectives of the Study**

The broad objective of this study is to examine the strategies of the mass media for survival in post covid-19 Nigeria. specifically, the objectives include the following:

- i. To review the concept of Covis-19 pandemic.
- ii. To review challenges of the mass media operations before COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria.
- iii. To look at responsibility of the mass media during COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria.
- iv. To examine the impact of COVID-19 on mass media operations and practice in Nigeria.
- v. To understand strategies in the survival of mass media in post COVID-19 lockdown Nigeria/Discussion.
- vi. To present the conclusion and recommendations of the study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

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

#### **Social Responsibility Media Theory**

Social Responsibility Media Theory propounded by Siebert, Peterson & Schramm (1963) 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 them, then there must be certain social structures to ensure that it behaves in compliance with recognized social standards (Anaeto, Onabajo & Osifeso, 2008).

The relevance of the social responsibility media theory to this study is dependent on the fact that the responsibility of the media during pandemic like the coronavirus is to provide accurate, reliable and truthful information that can lead to effective understanding about the pandemic towards enhanced prevention. The principles and tenets of this theory are to guide the media in its role of contributing to ending the pandemic.

### **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 & Ihejirika, 2019). Citing Murdock & 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 decides for 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 theory 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.

## Literature Review

### COVID-19 Pandemic

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, 1,513,866 million 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. Consequently, the virus spread across other states including the FCT (NCDC, 2020).

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

Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, the mass media in Nigeria like many other developing countries of the world were faced with a number of challenges as identified by different scholars (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.

It can be deduced from the above that there were challenges confronting the mass media before the advent of the coronavirus in Nigeria. 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) 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 and monetization 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 & Abubakar (2015), in their study 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.

In their study, Samuel & 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) found that new media in journalism practice also 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, assassinations, 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 Odunlami and 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) 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.

It is evidenced therefore, there were challenges prior to the advent of the pandemic but the industry continues to survive till date. However, the challenge posed by the 'new normal' can never be underestimated in the survival of the industry, particularly in the post period of the pandemic.

### **Mass Media Responsibility during Coronavirus in Nigeria**

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 such as coronavirus. 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 and intervention 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.

In health communication and promotion, what always raises dust regarding media roles in health issues is believed to the degree of success or failure recorded by mass media in a particular health outbreak or health challenge compared to the risks (Adelakun, 2017). To that effect, good communication through the media is understood to be 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 (Tabbaa, 2010).

Consequently, placing priority on novel diseases can be useful because rare and dramatic occurrences are sometimes sentinel events. Therefore, it is observed that 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). Accordingly, 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). A joint appeal by the UN and the WHO (2020), as cited in El-Behary (2021) has clearly recognized the responsibility in the coronavirus pandemic which it stated that:

To members of the media: Yours is a critical role. This is the time for accurate reporting from official sources. Your role in an outbreak is not simply to chase the story; it is to perform a public service. Your actions are public health actions in every respect. You play a significant part in protecting the health and well-being of your fellow citizens (p. 2).

This really indicates that the mass media have a crucial role to play during pandemic. Other 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.

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) recognized great contributions of the mass media in different ways in tackling COVID-19 pandemic.

In a study conducted by Nwakpu, Ezema & Ogbodo (2020), 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.

Similarly, Omoloshio (2020) reveals in a study that Nigerian newspapers gave adequate coverage to coronavirus in Nigeria because the number of stories used in reporting the issues were high. For Igboeli & Ezebuenyi (2021), through the newspaper report of the pandemic, majority proportion of the people was influenced by the way they view the virus, concluding the selection and packaging of the novel Coronavirus enjoy positive reactions in the media. Chukwu-Okoronkwo (2020) believed in a study that the information at a people's disposal has a remarkable way of shaping their perception of life and issues in their environment and their reactions to them. Oketunmbi, Aderibigbe & Olajuwon (2021).

Another study by Ojebuyi, Mobolaji & Kolawole (2022) has found majority (94.8%) out of the respondents sharing news items about confirmed cases and recoveries, and applying various newsworthiness criteria such as *intensity* (25.2%), *proximity* (14.0%), *consequence* (12.3%), *bizarre* (11.2%) and *personality* (10.9%) in their news sharing and consumption. The media according to a study by Tsegyu & Kente (2021) are inevitable in the dissemination of information on health related crisis such as coronavirus. Conclusion in a study conducted by Ekwutosi, Ezema & Ogbodo (2020) indicated 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. Olagoke, Olaniran, Adunola & Olatunji (2021) attested in their study that radio has the potential to influence opinions, change behavior and accurately inform the public about COVID-19. Akarika, Kierian & Aniekeme (2020) found out that during health emergency situation like the covid-19 pandemic which was occasioned by anxiety, tension, fear and uncertainty, residents depended more on the media to obtain information that can help reduce tension and fear. According to them (Akarika, Kierian & Aniekeme, 2020), the mass media should be objective, fair, honest and devoid of bias during health emergencies like covid-19 pandemic since a lot of media audience rely on them for health updates.

A study conducted by Akarika & Udo (2020) has revealed that majority (98%) of respondents was aware of the coronavirus information, and that majority (75%) of them was satisfied with the level of media sensitization of the coronavirus pandemic information, though the level of compliance was very low. According to a study by Kavya, Keerthi, Venkatesh & Leslie (2020), 94% of people agree that social media is boon. 68% responder says that the media mostly convey the correct news Most of the people responded that the media panic the situations by giving false news but it can also manage the situation by giving the awareness and giving updates on the current situation of pandemic condition

Although, the media were useful in providing adequate information about coronavirus, some studies reported unpleasant activities of the media in reporting the pandemic (Chukwu & Ekwunife, 2022; El-Behary, 2021; Johnson, 2021; Soyemi, Olagoke & Charles, 2021). There were some incidences of fake news, panicking and fear spread by the media in the course of reporting the pandemic. However, this does not invalidate the great contributions made by the media in containing the pandemic.

### **Impact of Coronavirus Pandemic on Mass Media Operations, Practice 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). Although, there were challenges facing mass media practice prior the advent of the coronavirus disease, the advent of the pandemic has further worsened what Pulitzer Centre (2020) described as the already bad situation. The local, national and international economies were destroyed due to the lockdown imposed by governments around the world as part of measures to halt the spread of the pandemic has. There was a heightened level of helplessness across the world as several businesses have been shut down and millions of the people were thrown out of jobs (Pulitzer Centre, 2020). Abdullahi (2020) affirmed that:

The Covid-19 pandemic is posing a serious challenge to the media industry globally.... The sudden sharp shock to the global economy led to an immediate collapse in advertising revenue that most news organizations are dependent on to

stay in business. As well as job losses, journalists have had their pay cuts or been temporarily laid off, while some publications have already ceased publication (p. 4).

There are studies bothering specifically on the impact of coronavirus on mass media survival sustainability (Abdullahi, 2020; ActionAid Nigeria, 2020; Casero-Ripollés, 2020; Nairametrics, 2020; Smith, Smith & Ajayi, 2020; Trust, Lungile & Mbongeni, 2022; World Economic Forum, 2020). A report by Nairametrics (2020) indicated that many media professionals 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. The pandemic has exposed the media practice into serious challenge that Abdullahi (2020) expresses the fear:

It is not hard to imagine that human journalists will be replaced by software in the near future. In fact, this transition exists already. Editors have been replaced by software editing programs. Stories will be increasingly generated by robot journalists in the near future. Maybe production is all about the volume of articles these days. But in the future the focus will be more on the richness of the content produced by the joint effort of both the data resulting from algorithmic journalism and a yet necessary human finishing touch (p. 5).

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.

According to a study that was conducted by Trust, Lungile & Mbongeni (2022), journalists suffered traumatic experiences such as job losses, covid-19 related illness and fatalities. At a regulatory level, there were perennial challenges with media freedoms. Newsrooms have had to maximise digital affordances for news gathering and dissemination as old revenue streams dried up. As a result, print media scaled back in its operations as a response to containing the spread of the virus. The Covid-19 crisis, according to a study by Abdullahi (2020), “has made newsrooms completely irrelevant, as journalists easily worked from the comfort of their homes, came up live for radio and TV from anywhere and exchanged material with colleague and editors without physical contact” (p. 1). Abdullahi (2020) maintains that:

Newsrooms worldwide are under intense financial, physical and psychological pressure during this pandemic, just like in many other sectors, the coronavirus pandemic has also had a great impact on the media. In a time when professionals from different occupations are trying to manage work from home, correspondents, who usually spend a significant part of their time on the field, running after stories and people, and the whole media sector, in general, find themselves face-to-face with new challenges. Fighting an increase in fake news, managing work remotely, and the traditional media's adaptation of a new digital model will be among the many tests the sector will have to go through (p. 1).

From the above review, it is reduced that coronavirus has tremendous impact on mass media practice. Its impact on mass media informs of reduced revenue generation due to a drastic fall in advertising patronage; job losses and staff entrenchment among media professionals; reduced publication/closure of some media houses; salary slash down among media workers; challenge in the adoption and use of technology introduced suddenly as a result of the new normal; containment with fake news spread by social media on the pandemic; trauma; violation of media freedom; and harassment and intimidation of media professionals by security agencies and government officials, among others. Therefore, the post covid-19 era is quite challenging for mass media practice as the industry would have to adopt some measures to realign to navigate and effectively cope with the situation.

## **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. Qualitative techniques were used in the analysis of the data obtained from the secondary sources.

## **Strategies for Survival of Mass Media in the Post COVID-19 Nigeria/Discussion**

At this particular time when 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 is 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.

Based on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on mass media practice and operations, the following strategies are essential for survival in the post covid-19 era Nigeria:

Enhance revenue generation through advertising and commercials, soft loans, voluntary supports; ensure editorial independence and integrity; re-entrenchment of media professionals which were affected during covid-19 lockdown and recruitment of new one to take care of the shortage in staff to enhance productivity; increase in content production in terms of quality and quantity to address the information needs of the audience; increase in the salaries of media

workers among employers that slashed it down at the peak of the covid-19 pandemic; consolidating on the use of technology which became more popular among media professional during covid-19 lockdown; mental health support and intervention for media professionals who suffered mental related issues, including psychological trauma due to the pandemic; training of media professionals on the use of new technologies in media practice to support remote reporting and publishing, advanced verification and fact checking, among others.

Abdullahi (2020) has observed that:

The media sector will have to adapt to survive. Technology will play a bigger part in the sector as digital media gains power. Yet, digitalization surely will bring along new challenges and problems with it. For instance, as social media takes place of conventional media, the problem of fake news will be more obvious than ever, but the journalists, who could be the backbone of challenging the fake news in the new media platforms, continue to lag behind in terms of its usage. After this period of confinement ends, just as in many other sectors, it is inevitable that traditional media will have to reflect to either adapt to the new digital world, or perish for good (p. 4).

It has been observed from the above that technology will play a very big role in assisting the survival of mass media in the post covid-19 era in Nigeria. 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 trust in news and information as key for mass media survival. According to the report, 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 demands high level of responsibility and good conduct from the mass media in the discharge of their duty (McQuail, 1987 in Anaeto, Onabajo & Osifeso, 2008)

### **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.

Reduced revenue generation due to a drastic fall in advertising patronage; job losses and staff entrenchment among media professionals; reduced publication/closure of some media houses; salary slash down among media workers; challenge in the adoption and use of technology introduced suddenly as a result of the new normal; containment with fake news spread by social media on the pandemic; trauma; violation of media freedom; and harassment and intimidation of media professionals by security agencies and government officials, among others were some of the challenges that were faced by the mass media industry in Nigeria during the covid-19 pandemic.

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 industry is 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.

Enhance revenue generation through advertising and commercials, soft loans, voluntary supports; ensure editorial independence and integrity; re-entrenchment of media professionals which were affected during covid-19 lockdown and recruitment of new one to take care of the shortage in staff to enhance productivity; increase in content production in terms of quality and quantity to address the information needs of the audience; increase in the salaries of media workers among employers that slashed it down at the peak of the covid-19 pandemic; consolidating on the use of technology which became more popular among media professional during covid-19 lockdown; mental health support and intervention for media professionals who suffered mental related issues, including psychological trauma due to the pandemic; training of media professionals on the use of new technologies in media practice to support remote reporting and publishing, advanced verification and fact checking, are some of the strategies that the mass media can adopt for survival in the practice.

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 supports 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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