

RESEARCH REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
ON THE IMPACT

OF  COVID-19
PANDEMIC

ON NIGERIA MEDIA OPERATIONS AND SURVIVAL



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Executive Summary

This study investigates the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mass media and journalism practice in Nigeria for the purpose of filling the yawning gap in existing literature and practice. It offers a rare peek into the ramifications of change the pandemic has brought to the practice of journalism in the country. In this context, the study contemplates the following questions: In what directions and to what extent has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted journalism practice in Nigeria? What measures or strategies could be adopted and implemented to sustain media operations during and post COVID 19? The study is predicated on two theories, Social Responsibility theory and Structural Functionalism theory. A survey research design which incorporated both qualitative and quantitative instruments for data collection was used. A 21 item *Impact of COVID 19 Pandemic on Journalism Practice Questionnaire (ICPJPQ)* was used to collect quantitative data, while In-depth Interview was used to collect qualitative data. Tables, charts (pie) and percentages were used to analyse quantitative data, while explanation building was used to analyse qualitative data. Based on strict social science tradition, an appropriate formula (Babbie, 2010) which recommends determination of sample size via percentages; a sample size of (119) respondents which represents 2 percent, was drawn from a population of 5,945 (media owners, editors, journalists, professional associations, advocacy and training groups). Five research questions were raised and addressed in this study. Some of the findings were as follows:

Key Findings

- The 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.
- 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, so reporters don't need to run to the office to file stories any longer.
- To be effective as a journalist during and post COVID 19, reporters need to acquire online information gathering and verification skills. But, the findings from this study smack of deep-seated ignorance and poor information gathering and verification as well as poor fact-checking skills of Nigerian journalists.
- A stunning finding reveals that the newsroom has become more efficient in the COVID 19 era. This appears to be the case because with little resources, correspondents can report live from their locations and conduct virtual interviews. As a result, news is served fresher than ever.
- Another finding shows in clear terms, how immensely COVID 19 has changed the newsroom culture because of the need to adhere to social distancing. A lot of newsrooms are working from home due to the social distancing rule. In response to this new trend, one of the respondents said 'the newsroom has become a cold room because most people work from home.'

Emerging Issues

- The demand for information hasn't dropped but the demand for newspaper has dropped. The question is, to what extent are the print media serving as the watchdogs of society in executing their surveillance role?

- The pandemic has affected revenue in the sense that advertisements are not forthcoming, what funding mechanisms would ensure sustainability of media organisations during and post COVID 19?
- Who should be responsible for training of media sources in digital literacy skills to be more effective sources of information during and post COVID-19 eras?
- There is need for media organisations to own their own means of transportation to aid the mobility of reporters in order to shield them from the risk of contracting the virus through patronage of the public transportation system.
- To be effective in the COVID-19 and post COVID-19, news sources would need to have not only digital media tools, but also digital literacy skills.

Conclusion

- The purpose of this research was to determine the extent to which the COVID-19 pandemic affected mass media organisations and journalism practice in Nigeria, and to figure out measures or strategies that could be used to address the situation. Specifically, the research was guided by five main objectives:
- To determine the extent to which the pandemic has changed the practice of journalism in Nigeria
- To find out the challenges that are confronting journalists and media organisations that are covering the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria
- To find out measures adopted by media organisations to survive COVID-19 related challenges in Nigeria.
- To find out how the measures adopted by media organisations are affecting journalists and media operations in the country.
- To determine the measures that could be adopted and implemented to keep Journalists and media organisations from going under during and post COVID -19
- This research was implemented to show how media organisations in Nigeria were operating under socio-economic dislocations that were caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This report will, therefore, serve as a resource material to journalists, media managers, research institutions and sundry organisations requiring information on how COVID-19 has affected media operations and journalism practice in Nigeria. It has suggested new operational models and intervention measures that are capable of keeping media professionals in business during and post-COVID.
- Further, findings from this research have opened new research frontiers on media business models, and the new skills that are required by journalists to function optimally in the increasingly digitised media industry occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Media professionals and policy makers will through this study; identify new challenges to the profession, develop new approaches and policies to address lapses and strengthen practices for effective service delivery.

Recommendations

- Based on the findings and emerging issues from this research, some recommendations were made to keep journalists and media organisations in Nigeria afloat during and post COVID-19.

- With the significant reduction in the number of staff available for work in newsrooms and the advent of virtual reporting, there is serious need for a new policy framework to address the emerging trend.
- The federal government through the Central Bank of Nigeria should create a single digit loan package to support media organisations in the country.
- There is need for government to lower tariffs on media consumables which are largely imported, grant tax holiday, and above all, build a solid economy that guarantees growth and investment.
- Media organisations should think of creating stronger virtual presence than they do now. In that way, they can attract more hits online, sale their contents and equally attract more advertisements.
- Low revenue caused by low sales and low advert intake. Yet the cost of production is on the rise because most of the consumables are imported like the newsprint, the ink, the machines and the printing plates. There is, therefore, an urgent need for intervention to reduce costs and to enable the media to stay afloat because they offer essential social services to the society.
- Government and entrepreneurs should invest more in information technology infrastructure that would create an enabling environment for robust media practice.
- There is need for media organisations to own their own means of transportation to aid the mobility of reporters in order to shield them from the risk of contracting the virus through patronage of the public transportation system.
- There is also need to develop a new remuneration template that takes cognisance of the new skillsets and usage of specialised digital tools needed to produce and deliver content capable attracting and sustaining public patronage.
- Since the operations of the media have now shifted largely to the virtual space, the high cost of data and the poor-quality service by telecommunications operators have become major issues of concern for the survival of the industry. There is, therefore, an urgent need for stakeholders to device ways of ensuring the media have access to data that is both affordable and strong in connectivity. Since the media fulfil social responsibility, it would not be too much to consider data subsidy and rebates on tariffs for the consumables used by the industry.
- There is a serious need for training and retraining of journalists and media managers on the business side of their operations, that is, how to run profitably without compromising professional ethics and social responsibility.
- It is absolutely important for media organisations to provide a broad spectrum of palliatives to motivate reporters and spur them on to greater productivity on the job during the pandemic.
- It is important for the Nigerian society to give close attention to the issue of the sanity, mental and psychological health of journalists because a dislocation in this area of well-being in their lives would amount to a dislocation on the entire nation.
- The recommendations made pursuant to this study could be implemented on the platform of the proposed SCARS Intervention Model (SIM) discussed in the segment on Research Outcomes.