

Entrepreneurial Strategies for Promoting the Newspaper Industry in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The newspaper industry just like any other industry in Nigeria requires various strategies to remain in business in an ever competing business environment. It warrants the owner(s) to perfect possible strategies in order not to only be in business but relevant in the scheme of message dissemination in particular and communication in general. This work therefore discusses the entrepreneurial strategies for promoting the newspaper industry particularly in the present Nigeria's fourth republic. The major aim is to boost the interest of existing and intending newspaper entrepreneurs in Nigeria so that they can actively engage and invest in the newspaper industry for enhanced local, national and international news coverage and dissemination. The study observes that though the newspaper industry has witnessed tremendous improvements in terms of ownership since the beginning of the fourth republic in Nigeria, yet, the entrepreneur has a great task of having good editorial policies, good sense of organization, adequate cost control and financing mechanisms to enable the medium stay afloat. Hence, the newspaper entrepreneurs should always conduct feasibility studies on the newspaper project to ascertain the cost, viability (economic and technical) and resources needed (human and material) to execute the venture. These will articulate long-term visions and goals for the newspaper industry in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Newspaper, Entrepreneur, Strategies, Media, Communication*

INTRODUCTION

Understanding entrepreneurial strategies in the newspaper industry deals with issues of ownership, training, professional ethics and practice, finance and funding, socio-political economy as these issues affect the internal and external running of the newspaper industry. From the nationalist struggle to the present democracy in which Nigerians have accepted electoral and multiparty politics, liberties and freedoms as enshrined constitutionally, the newspaper industry has the standards and norms for equal participation by all in Nigeria. Newspaper as a medium of communication covers a broad range of publication. It includes a small local weekly, a school or church bulletin and a large national daily. Newspapers are published at intervals and must cover a wide range of information for different interest groups. A typical newspaper according to Nwosu (1995) must contain news (the most important element), advertisement (the major source of revenue generation), editorial, feature, other columns and cartoon. A newspaper must be mechanically and timely produced. Hence, a newspaper is seen as news or advertisement made of typed ink and printed on newsprint to inform and influence readers.

Team work is needed to produce a newspaper. The members of the team may be grouped into five departments, each reflecting its jobs and roles. These departments are editorial, production, advertising, circulation and administration. So, the entrepreneur in the initial recruitment must require people with the professional training on newspaper production. These training will lead to professionalism in terms of ethics and practice, because the fulcrum of the newspaper industry rests on the professionalism of the producers of such a newspaper. These people should at least be conversant with the geopolitical arrangement, culture and dynamics of the society they will serve. The training will ensure that only suitably qualified and like-minded people are employed. For instance, Nigeria is made up of several indigenous autonomous communities and national groupings with different degrees of social distance and interaction with each other. According to Aina (1986), Nigeria represents an amalgamation by the British of a large area made up of different types and levels of social and political organization, thus, resulting in a process of class formation, uneven and unequal development of both human and natural resources.

Underdevelopment and dependency is a product of the element of transitionality. Under-development and development ensure that indigenes neither were unable to nor allowed (especially during the colonial period) to contribute to the development of the productive forces in any significant manner, because energies were channeled towards issues and not accumulation of local wealth (Ake, 1992). With this in mind, the socio-political structure affects the newspaper industry because most people do not have the needed capital to invest thus leaving the industry in the hands of government and some powerful few. Hence, Udoakah (2006) believes that recruitment into the industry should reflect professionals with like minds in terms of training, social, economic and class standing. This will help the industry to grow because the professionals will have a vision for the growth of the industry. From the above analyses, the new media environment in Nigeria today presents enormous challenges to the newspaper industry. The entrepreneur has a great task of having a good editorial policies, good sense of organization, adequate cost control and financing mechanism to enable the medium stay afloat. Hence, this study presents the entrepreneurial strategies for promoting the newspaper industry in Nigeria.

THE NEWSPAPER INDUSTRY IN NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC

The newspaper industry has witnessed tremendous improvement in its ownership since the beginning of the fourth republic in Nigeria. A close analysis of the performance of the industry shows that the media environment is quite different from what was preferred many years ago. People have time to read the news as well as have access to it in several dozens of daily, weekly or monthly newspapers. They equally access such news instantly even through internet services. This is something that was not available in the former republic when news dissemination and distribution were done at a very slow pace based on the technology available that time. By controlling labour, the newspaper entrepreneur decides on what goes out of the media house. He sets his codes and sometimes ignores the professional ethics of journalism. These set codes favour him and his business concern, thus, the media environment in Nigeria today presents challenges to both the entrepreneur in particular and the industry in general. Apart from informing the people, the newspaper

industry brings entertainment into play. The newspaper entrepreneurs figure out what the consumers of the newspaper want and give it to them. Before now, newspapers functioned as journals of record and opinion. Most newspapers came into existence as a result of the need by political groups to propagate their views. Some were published for political empowerment of their owners, and folded up at the realization of their objectives. The fourth republic Nigeria recorded immense progress in the ownership of newspaper industry. The State as controller of most resources takes first stand in the entrepreneurial stage. Next is the private entrepreneur and “followed closely by partnership either privately or jointly by government and private individuals. Employee - Employer ownership equally thrives in the fourth republic. State controlled entrepreneur invariably works for the State, project the image of the State. In fact, the State decides what it publishes. Whether established, owned or managed by the State, private individuals or government private partnership, the fact is some claim to be daily journals, but most of them are not publishing daily. Ekwelie, (2003) sees these groups of newspapers as megaphones of the government.

ENTREPRENEURIAL STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING THE NEWSPAPER INDUSTRY IN NIGERIA

Private entrepreneurs are individual owners and such owners have absolute control of the newspaper. For the employee - employer owners, it is equally regarded as in-house ownership because the owners are the workers. Owners give total dedication and commitment to duty. Between 1999 and today, there has been a boom in the newspaper industry as new entrants stormed the stage with new innovations and contributions, older publications came up with new titles for midweek editions and weekends editions. Here are some of the entrepreneurial strategies the newspaper entrepreneur may adopt in order to stay in business.

Branding: Some publications have branded their news to suit their purpose. These brands include news on economy and commercials, commerce, entertainment, environment, politics, religion, science and technology, social welfare and sports. These help the entrepreneur to determine what type of news to produce, at what particular time and which particular group of people. Unlike previously, when news were not branded in most newspapers.

Publication on the World Wide Web or International Networking: According to Udoaka (1998), apart from news branding, the forth republic newspapers not only present news on pages of newspaper but also hook it to the internet thereby making it possible for the newspaper to be accessed from anywhere in the world through online services. These are innovations by the entrepreneurs.

Fairness, Objectivity and Balanced Reporting: In order to develop, build and maintain loyal audience, most entrepreneurs build their publications around fairness, objectivity and balanced reporting.

Accuracy and Adequacy in Reporting: Imbibing the spirit of accuracy and adequacy in facts, truth and in handling issues is an indispensable entrepreneurial strategy a newspaper entrepreneur should possess. These help in drawing and maintaining the loyalty

of consumers (readers). Thus, it is seen that most newspapers nowadays tends to have brand loyalty and preference, as most readers will want to read a particular newspaper hence maintaining loyalty.

Adequate use of Advertisement: Another indispensable strategy is the use of advertisement. Present day entrepreneur has done much in this area. Akpan (1993) believes that the media (newspaper) sell promise, prospect and proof of the attention obtained from the consumers to advertisements. With funds provided by advertisers, the entrepreneurs are able to fund their publications and make their newspapers to become successful business. The entrepreneur present effective advertisement in order to create consumer audience for the product advertised.

Adequate Circulation Scheme: Entrepreneurs should equally take into consideration the area of circulation of their newspapers. The higher the circulation figure, the better the income to the organization. Therefore, the Fourth Republic entrepreneurs encourage vast circulation by opening up offices almost in the entire State capitals in the country. This helps to increase the circulation and sales of their newspapers. With good vehicles, sometimes with air transport system, the newspapers are distributed very fast as against the previous system in which newspaper meant for today were read the next day.

Good Production Quality: In the area of production, most entrepreneurs make use of captivating banner headlines and also set a greater part or the entire newspaper in colours. Most newspapers now no longer have black and white in its pages but are set in full colours with good picture qualities. These equally draw not only the readers' attention, but the urge to buy and read such newspapers. Some entrepreneurs adopt magazine format by casting only headlines on the front pages with the stories in the inside pages. Still in the areas of production, most Fourth Republic newspapers own their printing presses. This makes it faster and easier to print the newspaper and on time.

Special Project: The newspaper entrepreneur in the present republic introduces special projects into newspaper production. This special project includes supplement in which news and issues about a particular thing is done and included free in the newspaper. For example, a supplement on Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and its projects in the different States of the federation can be included in the Guardian Newspaper for the readers at no extra cost, (Wilson, 1997). This is equally an innovation by the entrepreneur to win patronage.

Employment Creation: In terms of employment, the entrepreneurs nowadays act as a boost to the Nigeria economy. It has provided employment to Nigerians. Think of the vast number of news correspondents employed by the newspapers and posted everywhere around the world. With these, the world has become a global village such that what happens in Lagos could be read by somebody in Uyo within the same period that such thing happened. In terms of funding, the new era witnessed a transformation from the traditional method of local funding to an international concern. Here, the State does not only provide the funds but such funds are equally provided by individuals, banks and even rich countries through multinational co-operatives.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the past, when ownership of a newspaper outfit was the exclusive reserve of governments, it was an inalienable right of the various governments in Nigeria to operate and own newspaper firms. Since the policy then was for the government to use its papers to propagate its programmes, there was very little attention given to the private sector. The governments did not permit press freedom, but the forth republic has emerged as an era where newspaper ownership has metamorphosed to include private owners. Today, the entrepreneur, be it governments or private individuals have provided a levelled play ground where a balance is maintained between press freedom and censorship. Arrests and detentions of media practitioners are at a lower level due to the strategies adopted in the industry by the stakeholders. With democracy in place, forth republic newspapers have witnessed tremendous changes in all aspects of the industry.

Therefore, with these developments, the entrepreneurs need to go beyond making their newspapers. They should ensure that their newspapers contribute meaningfully to making democracy in Nigeria popular politically, economically, socially and culturally. Economy wise, the entrepreneur should ensure adequate and critical assessment of the economy and state of living. The entrepreneur should conscientize itself and the rest of the people. The forth republic has witnessed what some people may term as proliferation of newspapers in Nigeria. But, in spite of these, the country still needs more publications as the country is assessed in terms of sex age, educational level, economic status, cultural and religious background, interest and values. Most entrepreneurs at the moment are offering mass circulated and not quality newspapers. Hence, focus by the owners of newspaper firms should include areas like gardening, motoring, holidaying among others on their publications. The newspaper entrepreneurs should always conduct feasibility studies on the newspapers project to ascertain the cost, viability (economic and technical) and resources needed (human and material) to execute the venture. In addition, the entrepreneur should endeavour to employ seasoned professionals who will put their wealth of experience to action in news reporting, dissemination and coverage. These will articulate long-range visions and goals for the newspaper industry in Nigeria.

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