



Traditional Media in the Digital Age: Survival Strategies and Economic Challenges

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Abstract. This research looks at the survival strategies and economic issues facing traditional media in the digital era. The internet, artificial intelligence, social media and mobile connections have revolutionized how people consume media, and the traditional revenue models of newspapers, radio and television stations are now under threat. The study examines the economic challenges traditional media are currently facing, how well adaptation strategies are working, and how data privacy laws and concepts of “free news” affect digital monetization, using a desk-based qualitative research methodology based on the analysis of secondary data from published scholarly articles, reports and industry publications. The research is based on the Technological Determinism Theory that states that technology has revolutionized media production, distribution and audience engagement. The analysis shows that traditional media's financial sustainability is hampered by the decline in advertising revenues, fragmentation of audiences, high operating costs, digital competition, and shifting consumer tastes. The study also reveals numerous companies are adopting digital transformation tactics like subscription models, sponsored content, integration of social media, streaming, platforms-first and audience engagement strategies. But, barriers like lack of digital infrastructure, skills, and rigid data privacy regulations remain in the way of successful monetization. The study's findings indicate that traditional media's future is contingent upon constant innovation, diversified revenue streams, strategic digital investments and a long-term commitment among traditional media to credible journalism. It makes recommendations for greater investment in digital infrastructure, staff training, an audience-first content strategy, and

privacy-preserving monetization models that will help sustain in the changing media landscape.

1. Introduction

Along with Artificial Intelligence and mobile connectivity, the internet has played a significant role in the transformation of the 21st century's media economy. The digital revolution has changed how the industry generates revenue, and the digital technologies platforms are where it's happening now, rather than in traditional venues. Such innovations have changed the established revenue structure of media houses. Media companies are pushing for new models of revenue generation and new structures to survive (Chen, 2024). The way people consume news has changed drastically (Mugil & Kenzie, 2025). This is compelling traditional media outlets such as magazines and television to keep up with the changes quickly. Citizen journalists now cover 30% of news stories, and they are responsible for 82% of viral materials, Oji (2024) said. The 40% of traditional media that still uses social media distribution with these structural shifts, are not without conflict with the severe economic headwinds described by Farid (2023). For traditional media, regulatory frameworks, operational costs, and the quest for demographics and ad revenue are the three legs of the stool that stand up for them to survive, according to Adams (2024). But as the internet captured the reader's interest, print circulation is taking a hit. According to Alzubi (2023), this is the same trend that is destroying the huge, consolidated audiences which TV and radio once has. Consumers are looking for content right now, whether it's on their phones or using via social media and news aggregators (Kemp, 2023). The change has taken a toll

on the print media and to a lesser extent, radio and television. The reason physical circulation has been declining is because of the massive number of free online news that is increasing, especially for national dailies, says Adelabu and Benson (2022). However, it's not all about money. The transition to digital has also compelled journalists to do a complete makeover of their jobs. Tuncan (2020) further adds that the over-dependency of social media has become a huge challenge for the industry to Nigerian readers.

The digital socialization process has also led to a zero-cost content, which represents a significant structural obstacle for legacy channels who try to monetize even high-quality reportage (News Media Association 2015:3). It's a "free-to-access" change, which puts traditional outlets in a decentralized fight. The competition has embraced industry giants, niche blogs and independent social creators, according to Al-Quran (2022). In this attention-overloaded landscape, acquiring attention is becoming more difficult and time-consuming (Chen 2024:12). In addition, there is a deep fiscal divide: those business models that are digital-first are built on agility with low overheads, while the legacy media are stuck to the spiraling material cost of the physical production – ink, paper, logistics etc. – as their traditional readership base is declining. As traditional advertising tactics fall short and become a penny-on-the-dollar proposition in the digital sphere, Santiago (2024) suggests a new approach: marketing through the lens of trust. Most media companies face a challenge finding the optimal balance between paywall and ads. Olagoke and Israel (2025) call this a huge loss to the main source of survival of the industry – that is, advertisement revenue. The results of the data reflect where the funds are being spent. Traditional income is declining, but digital is growing. Digital video revenue rose 19.2% to \$62.1 billion while social media ad revenue rebounded 36.7% to \$88.8 billion, per the IAB/PwC Internet Advertising Revenue Report (2025). Understanding and segmenting digital audiences is crucial for targeted advertising and content personalization. But the changing laws surrounding data privacy, such as GDPR, and the upcoming 'cookieless world' create difficulties for media companies to effectively collect and use user data (Team EMB, 2024; Oksanen, 2022; Aliagan, Suleiman & Babatunde, 2023). The industry, in turn, is pushing for brands to adopt first-party data strategies, contextual targeting, and privacy-safe solutions to overcome signal loss, seeing these as not only the compliance must, but also the most competitive advantage (IAB / PwC Internet Advertising Revenue Report 2025).

This study charts the financial turmoil of the traditional media institutions. It transcends the eye-in-the-sky approach to problems to examine the pivots that these organisations are making to make a difference to their survival in order to secure their longevity. The book dissects the obstacles and adjustments, providing a clear understanding of how stalwarts are not only remaining relevant but also financially stable.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

This study will be guided by the following objectives:

- To Evaluate the economic challenges confronting traditional media organizations in the digital age
- To Assess how effective traditional media outlets are in ensuring their financial sustainability in the digital age
- To Examine the extent to which evolving data privacy regulations and the free news mentality, stimulate the ability of traditional media to monetize digital content and engage audiences

2. The Economic Challenges Confronting Traditional Media Organizations in the Digital Age

The digital age has transformed the media industry in many ways, and has introduced significant financial divisions for traditional media. Print and broadcast media are no longer in the business business but now in the fight for existence. Research on the evolution of ICTs in education has shown that the most significant challenge has been the emergence of digital alternatives (Mugil & Kenzie, 2025). The internet has revolutionized the way that people look at the marketplace and the old media is no longer the king. For instance, Hassan et al. (2021) offer a relevant case study of newspapers. Building on a literature review, the authors sketch the precarity of the sector, in implicit terms, with reference to theories of technological disruption and media convergence. They see a set of problems: dwindling readership, print-related overheads, and an audience that wants to be updated for free and at their instant. Technology is not just a threat, it's also a lifeline, Hassan says. The main message is that newspapers need to strategically pivot to digital platforms for delivering trusted journalism if they are to stand up to such competition.

Notably, Namata (2025) examines the revenue tactics Ugandan media use to survive in the digital terrain. The work is based on a qualitative case study and a

theory, such as Disruptive Innovation, and demonstrates how digital disruption has challenged the financial bases of traditional advertising. The study indicates that traditional banner advertising is a waste of efforts. Instead, companies have moved to a blend of sponsored content, events, live streaming and monetization of archives. Namata advised that in order to remain relevant today, creativity is a key.

Furthermore, Olagoke and Israel (2025) explored the digital transformations that are affecting the print media landscape in Nigeria. Olagoke and Israel uncovered the particular obstacles that have been plaguing this transition based on a survey inquiry, which include a unique abilities gap, the infamous power issues in the country and the shortage of funds for fashionable tools. Despite these challenges, the authors say the industry is making good progress in breaking free from the challenges of physical printing. The study recommendation is that media houses must go digital especially on mobile platforms, with analytics and with data security to survive. Faustino & Ribeiro (2016) discuss specific issues related to media companies' management in a converging digital world. Results showed a decrease in profitability and that traditional business models were not sustainable because of the harsh economic climate and heavy competition from digital and Internet based companies. The paper argues that the move to dematerialized content means that monetising is challenging, for this kind of publicity may result in free distribution, due to the 'public good' nature of information. To sustain the future, Faustino & Ribeiro suggest that a much deeper diversification of revenues and a rethink of cost structures are needed.

Likewise, a research conducted by Patil (2020) focused on the traditional media (print, TV, radio) and the new media (digital). Online platforms are taking over audiences and advertising revenue as they evolve with a technological determinism framework. The study, however, defends a complete separation of the two. Rather it demands a "symbiotic" merging. The paper says traditional media must end their digital "war" and embrace the competition as a part of the business. In the study on rise of digital ad and woes of traditional advertising, Odun and Utulu (2015) both explored the rise of digital advertising and the stress it has been putting on traditional advertising outlets. By employing a snowball sampling technique, they discovered that new media has acquired a global love due to its cost reduction, and breaking the time and space barriers. In developing parts of the world, however, the study says the improvement is stunted by unreliable power, poor internet connections and high prices for the common man to access. For that reason,

the authors propose a truce. They contend that a unique fusion of the experience and strength of traditional and digital media is needed to weather the storm of a changing worldwide media landscape.

Cornia and Kalogeropoulos (2016) have researched the challenges and opportunities to news media and journalism. The results reveal how much competition there is in the market for the attention of traditional media outlets as well as for their ad revenue, despite their investments and increasing reach in the digital world. Thanks to technology and the huge transfer of advertisers, the authors say that this is a shift threatening the solvency of serious journalism. Moreover, it threatens to constrict the diversity of media voices. The study suggested that newsrooms can't stand pat to weather this squeeze, but they do have to double down on digital tools and try new revenue models. As a result, Onyenankeya (2021) explored the indigenous language newspapers and the digital media conundrum in Africa. The study adopted a qualitative method to explore the implications of the digitalization of media in Africa and to look at the potential for sustainability in the context of the theories of technological determinism and alternative media. The analysis shows that indigenous newspapers are facing competition from traditional and social media as well as poor funding and a reduction in patronage. It concludes that the future of indigenous language newspapers in the fast changing and technology driven world can only be achieved if they embrace the digital revolution and look at a business model that will be futuristic yet practical.

Onwe (2024) used Technological Determinism Theory to target 94 journalists, who are not internet literate, in Ebonyi State. The current study explored the professional reality of these journalists and examined their perceptions of themselves in the news industry, as well as the mechanisms they employ to survive without digital fluency. The study revealed that these journalists faced challenges in news collection, news writing, editing and news filing. Onwe noted that poor pay and lack of training in reporting with ICTs were among the causes of the problem and recommended that changes be made to the curriculum of journalism institutions to incorporate ICTs pertinent to the current practice of journalism.

It is found in other literatures that traditional revenue and audience engagement have generally been decreasing as a result of free and immediate online content. There are still challenges such as the operational costs and infrastructure restrictions, but strategic change is essential. Strategies that have proven to be successful include diversification of revenue streams from the traditional advertising model

to include sponsored content, subscriptions, and events. A great investment in digital infrastructure and skills development is essential. In the end, traditional media must accept the digital transformation, rethink their business models, and incorporate technology to effectively provide trusted media content in a rapidly changing media environment.

3. Effectiveness of Traditional Media Outlets Ensuring Their Financial Sustainability in The Digital Age

The media industry faced a dilemma in that time period of technological and economic volatility that swept the media market around the world in the early two thousand years, and that media organizations must start generating revenues from alternative sources to traditional advertising revenues. As the digital revolution has created financial difficulties for traditional media, it has forced media companies to rethink their financial sustainability strategies. Albadri (2023), for instance, conducted a qualitative study to examine how TM has adapted to DC, focusing on six outlets in Jordan and interviewing their executives and technicians. Focusing on the Diffusion of Innovation Theory, changes such as digital archiving, application development, web site implementation, and social media profile were identified. The results indicate that the convergence of traditional and digital media is important to keep the influence and to respond to the changing needs of the audience.

According to Pratama and Saragih (2022), old-school media's future is in a combination of e-papers, streaming, and social outreach. The problem, however, is that with the amount of "fake news" and a lack of public confidence, it is very difficult to maintain an audience. The authors make a good argument that technology is not the panacea. Rather, it's about a "best of both worlds" strategy: maintaining those same hard-earned journalistic ideals and moving faster in the digital space. This is a crowded market and that reputation for accuracy is their advantage. For example, Sultan & Amir (2023) discussed the "many facets" of the challenges and opportunities of the modern journalism in digital space. The findings were based on a wide range of academic sources and industry knowledge, and uncovered that many traditional outlets have trouble making a profit from digital media, and are competing with tech giants for advertising dollars. The paper ends by arguing that the sustainability of traditional journalism will depend on its ability to make the shift to profitable online business models. The paper also draws a conclusion that audience engagement and interactivity, achieved through the use of social media and commentaries, can be useful in the creation of community and trust. The

paper calls for the promotion of media literacy as a way to enable audiences to understand the information terrain.

In this digital world, Sultan & Amir (2023) discussed the various pressures and opportunities for journalism today. Based on a wide range of academic research and market research, it was found that a lot of the traditional outlets are not able to monetize digital content and are severely competitive against tech giants for advertising revenue. Conclusions: Journalism must have a working business model in the online world if it is to survive. However, it is not just a financial solution. The authors also advocate for a "community-first" approach, noting that to restore the public's trust, it is essential to engage with the community through the use of social media and comments. The paper concludes that the only way to help audiences "navigate the infoweb jungle" is to improve media literacy. Vara-Miguel (2021) has carried out an evaluation of the Spanish media landscape that shows that there is a significant difference between the financial sustainability of digital-native and legacy media outlets. Success wasn't necessarily correlated with digital-first start-ups—traditional and niche country platforms had a more advanced and innovative revenue model. Digital newsrooms, whether regional or general interest, have a distinct vulnerability: They need to access a diverse range of funding sources, but this is not available as a result of the absence of a structural established parent company. Vara-Miguel says a multi-faceted fiscal approach is crucial to the continued success of digital journalism as the standard advertising model languishes. It means going far from the "adonly" mentality and implementing a bunch of different income streams, such as sponsored storytelling, tiered memberships, e-commerce and high-priced consulting services.

Likewise, Nhedzi (2018) asked about the preference of traditional media and digital media. Using a uses and gratifications perspective of the use of media, the results showed differential patterns of use, most frequently along demographical lines, for different media (traditional media and digital media). The paper concludes that accurate audience measurement remains difficult because consumers of the media are mobile and there is a huge diversity in the media landscape. But the result can serve as a benchmark for media planners and advertising agencies for planning a target audience to be reached at the right time and right place. The relationship between motives of news consumption, perceived importance of news and willingness to pay for news was explored by Tandoc (2024). Using public goods and uses and gratifications

theories, the analysis was conducted on Singapore's national online survey and revealed that an individual's perception of the importance of news to him is positively correlated with his willingness to pay for news. The findings of the study challenge some common beliefs about the factors influencing news subscriptions, and offer a fundamental understanding of why news organisations need to find alternative revenue streams as the media landscape evolves.

The economic instability of the digital age then pushed media to seek out a variety of new revenue streams, other than advertising. Digital adaptation has been proven to be very important: outlets are going with apps, websites and social media. The future is dependent on the combination of trusted journalism and efficient digital delivery, as well as generating revenue from subscriptions and events. In this changing environment, audience engagement and media literacy are essential to being profitable. The recent rapid advancements in technology have created a host of significant shifts in the media landscape, not least in the way and who produces and delivers news and information, but also in terms of how it is consumed. Data privacy and 'Free News' have had a profound impact on traditional media's digital landscape in recent years – both in terms of how and who produces and delivers news and information, but also in terms of its consumption. With the top Internet companies making headlines for data privacy scandals, the issue has garnered greater public attention. One of the biggest and most prevalent issues is the changing regulations around data privacy and the “free news” philosophy that many consumers have. The current study by Obudho (2024) explores the far-reaching implications of international data privacy laws such as GDPR, CCPA, APPI, LGPD, and POPIA on digital marketing practices. Obudho discovered that such rules require a move towards more ethical and transparent data management, which results in greater compliance expenses, but also better consumer trust and engagement.

Abubakar et al. (2025) examined the effect of the new data protection regulations in Nigeria on PR, advertising, and journalism. The investigation, which was conducted on the basis of in-depth interviews, uncovers that the Data Protection Act (NDPA) undermines the industry's dependence on personal data for targeted messaging. The authors spotlight two types of difficulties: the risk of restricting investigative reporting and an increase in compliance conflict. They believe that this regulatory change demands a rebalancing of the ethics involved with that, as it directly impacts the way old media will be able to turn content into revenue through data powered ads and personalization. Kanuri and Pattabhiramaiah (2022)

explored current models of digital news revenue, including those based on scarcity, like paywalls and freemiums. Their study revealed that these approaches are under tremendous strain within the U.S. news industry, while others that are not scarce such as reader-focused fundraising events have enjoyed greater revenue growth. The paper considers the social impact of scarcity-driven models, and how they affect various demographic groups, as well as the omnipresent "free mentality", and makes speculations on the profitability conditions for scarcity-driven strategies.

In addition, Oriola, Akase, Akilla and Agbele (2019) discuss the multifaceted issues on privacy protection in the new era of the media, especially in the context of journalistic practices in Nigeria. Their research results indicate that new media technologies make the person more vulnerable to invasion of his or her privacy. The findings of the study show that new media need to pay attention to the reliability of data to adapt messages to the audience; and, by implication, when it comes to revenue models, digital monetization needs to be considered in relation to this possible gap, if traditional media are to be economically sustainable. As a result, traditional media is entering a complicated and complex economic crisis caused by digital disruption. The key for survival and growth is in strategic innovation within the content delivery, revenue generation, and business models—along with a continued dedication to quality, trusted journalism and emerging digital and regulatory realities.

4. Theoretical Framework

The study is basically based on Technological Determinism which suggests that technology, in particular its development, is one of the fundamental forces that influences society and its development path (Morah and Okunna, 2020). This viewpoint looks in a systematic way at the influence of technological factors on human thinking, behaviour and social organisation to a profound extent. Technological determinism can be traced back to Karl Marx who claimed that technological development, especially in the productive forces, has a fundamental impact on human social relations (Asemah et al., 2016). In this view, which holds that social relations and cultural practices are totally determined by the technological and economic base of a society, technology is seen as a force that affects historical and cultural development. Further developing this notion, Marshall McLuhan (1964) famously stated that "the medium is the message," that is, technology has a self-propelling ability to shape human communication and create meaningful social impacts.

The concepts underpinning technological determinism are especially relevant in the examination of new media's potential and the enduring difficulties faced by traditional media in the current digital era (Morah & Brown, 2024). Digital media technologies have certainly changed the traditional media environment, and this has caused a lot of difficulties for the traditional media. In this digital paradigm, technology is accessible to everyone and is allowing people to be content producers and distributors, which is a challenge to the long-standing gatekeeping role of traditional media (Nathan et al., 2024). Content can be easily produced and shared on platforms like YouTube, blogs, and podcasts, creating a plethora of different perspectives and stories. As this explosion of digital media also puts traditional media organisations under threat, it requires new business models and alternative revenue streams. As the audience increasingly shifts towards digital consumption, traditional media companies are constantly trying to evolve and find any new path to sustainable monetization.

In this background, the concept of technological determinism will help to explain the role of technological changes in societal and cultural changes, especially those accelerated by digital media platforms. While highlighting the pivotal role of technology in the culture of consumption, it is also important to recognise that media uses are shaped by the complex dynamics of techno-socio-cultural contexts. For this reason, this theory is used as a basic lens through which to review the complex relationships between technological development and the state of new and old media in the digital era.

5. Research Methodology

In this study a desk-based research methodology was used, in which only the systematic review and synthesis of secondary data using existing scholarly literature was relied upon. It was because of this methodological decision that this research enabled a holistic examination of the opportunities and threats of new media and of the traditional media facing the digital era, which was based on a wide variety of existing academic knowledge.

Data collection was mostly done through an exhaustive literature search, mainly using academic databases (Google Scholar). Various combinations of these and other terms were used in the search process, such as: "new media prospects," "old media problems," "digital age media," "traditional media challenges," "media monetisation strategies," "digital disruption media," and "media consumption patterns.

The intent of this systematic literature search was to find a wide and relevant range of published research. Literature was chosen on the basis of its direct relevance to the study's goals and its contribution to the understanding of the various aspects of the process of media transformation. Sources included academic journal articles, scholarly books, trusted conference papers and authoritative industry reports. The identified literature was critically analysed to highlight relevant findings, theories and empirical evidence on the economic, social and technological effects of the digital age on new and traditional media.

Then, the obtained data were synthesized and analysed by a thematic method. It included examining recurring patterns, themes and critical issues with the promise of new media and concerns for old media. This approach was a secondary data-driven evaluation, which ensured that the evaluation was well-informed, evidence-based, and reflected the current academic discourse on media transformation in the digital era, without requiring primary data collection.

6. Discussion of Findings

This study presents a thematic analysis of the literature reviewed, structured around the study's core research questions. The synthesis of findings from various scholarly sources provides a comprehensive understanding of the current landscape of traditional media in the digital age, highlighting both the systemic challenges and the adaptive strategies employed for survival and financial viability.

RQ1: Economic Challenges Confronting Traditional Media Organisations

Financial Losses due to reduced advertising revenue: One of the major reasons for the financial bleeding is the rapid decline in the traditional advertising revenue (Olagoke & Israel, 2025; Santiago, 2024). This erosion is due to advertisers shifting money to digital channels, which provide better targeting accuracy and provide measurable data (IAB / PwC Internet Advertising Revenue Report 2025).

The current reality of Legacy media is a harsh one characterised by the audience being split into a myriad of consumption habits. Today's harsh reality for Legacy media is one of audience fragmentation, with traditional audiences effectively split into a thousand pieces (Alzubi, 2023; Kemp, 2023). Modern news consumers have acquired a unique and possibly insatiable appetite for "snackable," mobile-friendly content that flows through a decentralized social feed. The change has led to a gradual decline in print sales

of newspapers and, more significantly, the collapse of the old broadcast measurement system that had historically supported the newspaper industry (Adelabu & Benson, 2022; Tunçan, 2020).

The second economic obstacle is the well-established “Free News” mentality within society: The societal belief that digital information should be free (News Media Association, 2015; Al-Quran, 2022). That “gratis” attitude has become an institutional hurdle; and while legacy outlets can, and do, create good investigative reporting, getting readers to purchase a subscription is an uphill climb. The public has been primed over the years to think of quality news as a public good, and that’s a hard thing to monetize without turning around significantly.

The Walled Garden is Gone and the Rise of Domination Downstream: In today’s media environment, things are no longer as simple as a walled garden, but more like a saturated and sometimes chaotic marketplace. But it’s not only the digital natives and streaming services that are vying for our attention; it’s also the flood of niche blogs and decentralized content creators (Al-Quran, 2022; Chen, 2024). A fundamental change in the dynamics of the information world is underway, one that moves toward “downstream domination,” with the real power and profit generated at the ‘information pipes’ held by the IT intermediaries. That is a recipe for traditional content producers to lose even a fraction of their audience in a space that they can no longer dominate (Simon & Bogdanowicz, 2012).

A “double-burden” is an important aspect of digital transition: digital transition is frequently presented as a cost-saving initiative, but for many companies it is actually a “double-burden”. As the income continues to decline from traditional print media, print organizations are still grappling with huge operational costs, including paper, ink, and physical distribution (Aliagan, Suleiman & Babatunde, 2023). It’s a fiscal paradox, that is, keeping the old world alive is more costly now than the new world can pay for it.

RQ 2: Strategies for Financial Sustainability in the Digital Age

The economic pressures have driven traditional media organisations to take a range of measures, many of which are different from and have been less effective than others, to ensure they are economically sustainable.

Diversification of Revenue Models: This is one way to achieve diversification of revenue models, as

described by Vara-Miguel (2021) and Faustino & Ribeiro (2016). This includes exploring and implementing:

In addition, a number of outlets are using subscription and Paywall Models to secure direct reader monetary (Namata, 2025; Tandoc, 2024). This concept can, however, encounter dead ends because of the “free news” culture (Tandoc 2024) and difficult to achieve success by appealing to its social relevance.

Sponsored Content and Native Advertising: These new solutions are helping advertisers generate revenue where traditional ads are falling short, by seamlessly blending in advertiser messages with editorial content (Vara-Miguel, 2021; Namata, 2025).

Events and E-commerce: Activities such as hosting events and carrying out e-commerce activities are becoming other sources of income, taking advantage of existing audiences (Vara-Miguel, 2021; Namata, 2025).

Partnerships and Grants: It has been identified that collaborations with technology companies, social media and non-profit organizations are of great importance for sustainability in terms of access to new technologies, distribution and alternative funding (Odun & Utulu, 2015; Onyenakyea, 2021).

Targeted Digital Pivots: Traditional media is making strategic investments and adaptation in digital. This needs capital injection into web platforms and mobile apps, and the deployment of streaming to spread content (Albadri, 2023; Pratama & Saragih, 2022). The goal is to be in sync with digital beat, maintain weight while meeting smooth audience needs for instant, custom-made interaction (Patil, 2020).

Recalibrating operational costs is a consensus of the industry, along with an increase in engagement – the Cost Structure Re-evaluation and Audience Engagement. The assumption that building community and trust is the foundation of the survival of the long haul has become a norm (Faustino & Ribeiro, 2016; Sultan & Amir, 2023).

Persistent Challenges: However, the staffing challenges of having a workforce with certain talent gaps, coupled with the physical constraints of infrastructure in some zones (Olagoke & Israel, 2025; Odun & Utulu, 2015), present further challenges.

RQ 3: Impact of Data Privacy Regulations and the "Free News" Mentality on Digital Monetisation and Audience Engagement

Two related issues play a major role in the way traditional media can monetize and advertising digital content and capture audiences: changing data privacy laws and the "free news" attitude.

Consumers' "free news" mentality is a major obstacle to digital news monetization (Kanuri & Pattabhiramaiah, 2022). This implicit assumption that all information should be available for free online makes it harder to implement a subscription or paywall. Some research has indicated that people's perceived importance of the news influences the willingness to pay, yet the prevailing resistance to paying for online news continues, which has led to an exploration of alternative revenue streams (Tandoc, 2024; Kanuri & Pattabhiramaiah, 2022).

The other challenge is evolving Data Privacy Regulations: GDPR, NDPA of Nigeria and the not too distant 'cookieless world' (Obudho, 2024). The rules create huge challenges for media organisations to effectively gather and utilise user data for targeted advertising and personalised content. Although they add compliance costs, they also require a change in attitude towards handling data with greater ethical and transparency (Abubakar et al., 2025).

Effect on Data-Driven Advertising: The regulatory landscape directly affects the viability of data-driven advertising models, a cornerstone of digital revenue. Media companies are increasingly turning to first-party data strategies and privacy-safe solutions to cope with signal loss, viewing privacy-first advertising as a competitive advantage, not a compliance mandate (IAB / PwC Internet Advertising Revenue Report, 2025).

Restriction of personal data can affect the ability to create the appropriate messages and the freedom to investigate, thus creating challenges for journalistic practices (Oriola et al., 2019): 4. In conclusion, effective digital monetization must not only tackle privacy concerns but also engage consumers in meaningful ways while gaining their trust.

7. Conclusion

The present study investigated the complex economic constraints that are choking legacy media, and provided a critical analysis of the different survivalist strategies embraced by such media. Digital disruption, characterised by the decline of advertising revenue, fragmented audiences and an entrenched "gratis"

cultural mindset, is threatening the viability and editorial integrity of traditional news outlets. However, the data indicates that such "legacy" players are far from passive victims; in fact, they're aggressively moving toward digital-first infrastructures. Incorporating e-newspaper formats, decentralized social distribution, and a "basket" of income streams, ranging from sponsored storytelling to tiered membership and live events, companies are trying to ride out the disruption. Of particular interest, the research demonstrates that new global data privacy regulations have been impacting traditional targeted advertising in ways that are driving a difficult but necessary shift towards privacy-focused monetization. The question of their long-term sustainability, however, hinges on a paradox: they need to continuously reinvent themselves in how they deliver and yet they need to be extremely loyal to the old-world ethics of high-accuracy journalism.

8. Recommendations

From the results and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are suggested for traditional media companies in the digital era:

- Traditional media companies need to invest in digital infrastructure, such as mobile-first platforms, content management systems, and advanced analytics tools, in a strategic way.
- Media companies should diversify their revenue sources by pursuing and expanding subscription programmes (such as paywalls and freemium), sponsored content, native advertising, event management, e-commerce opportunities and grant applications/donations as well as possible, as well as dealing with the ongoing diminishing of traditional advertising.
- Media companies should leverage first-party data strategies, privacy-friendly solutions to deliver personalised content and advertising experiences.
- Continuous training on digital tools, data analytics and modern journalistic practices is needed to overcome the skills gap between media practitioners and the emerging demands of the technology.
- Traditional media must not only look for collaborations with tech companies and social media but also non-profit organisations.
- As information spreads like wildfire and people begin to distrust information, the most valuable asset of traditional media is its

commitment to accurate, verified and deep reporting.

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