

JOURNALISM AND BUSINESS: My Newspaper Odyssey



CHAPTER 1

**IN THE
BEGINNING**

...JUSTPOLITICS MAGAZINE

I completed my National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) in 1989 and the print media was the first place I wanted to work. Not surprisingly, I secured my first job with the *JustPolitics* magazine in Ikeja, Lagos, an unsuccessful weekly tabloid that focused on politics and economy. This was during the military regime when the government had a strong influence on political activities.

At the time, active politics was almost an aberration, especially after the government disqualified about 13 associations that had applied to become registered political parties in line with elected Constituent Assembly recommendations that met in 1988 and approved modifications to the 1979 constitution in that regard. With that high-handed approach, the process of party formation was stalled and instead of the military government allowing political parties to thrive, it created

two new parties, one, 'a little to the right' National Republican Convention (NRC); and the other, 'a little to the left' Social Democratic Party(SDP), both of which were partly funded and largely controlled by government. This obviously narrowed the scope of partisan politics and indirectly affected the growth of the print media industry in Nigeria at that time.

I spent only a six months period at the *JustPolitics* and was paid for only half of the time. Even though I was employed as an Advert Executive, I did almost all the work -including typesetting of stories on the tedious desktop publishing software that was just acquired by the company. Adverts were not forthcoming because the publisher himself found it difficult to get them and it didn't take long before the company folded.

Before my employment at *JustPolitics* in 1989, I had a stint with a publishing company called 'Lichfield Nigeria Limited', which mainly organized events to raise funds for publishers of books, especially those written by desperate authors. The Chairman of the company was an Oyo state born Prince who operated from his home in

Ilupeju and had made a media hype of his company, which regularly organized events at the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, Victoria Island, Lagos. The litany of books that were launched in a short time then was bewildering and it wasn't long before I came to the conclusion that there was nothing inspiring for me in that company. Also just as it was at *JustPolitics*, salaries were skipped in certain months, and when they were paid, they were handed out in an undignified manner. It was dehumanizing to be handed a paltry sum by the Chairman who often dispensed it from a swivel chair in his living room. I quit after three months, preferring to do something else. The experience at Lichfield was a unique one in some respects; if not for anything, it exposed me to the world of printing and publishing at the rudimentary level.

...THE CITIZEN MAGAZINE

I naturally responded to a newspaper advertisement in *The Guardian* newspaper in late 1989, placed by the northern-based *Citizen* magazine for their Lagos office. *Citizen* was established by some of the best northern journalists at the time; Mallam Mohammed Haruna

(Managing Director), Mallam Adamu Adamu, now Minister for Education (Executive Editor), Late Hajia Bilkisu Yusuf (Executive Editor), Mallam Kabiru Yusuf (Executive Editor) and other non-Executive Directors. Shortly after arriving at the venue of the interview at 12, Agidingbi Road, Ikeja, Lagos, a young man in safari and laced brown sandals walked past with a wavering smile at the reception guests. The man later turned out to be Mallam Kabiru Yusuf, the immediate past Chairman of Media Trust, who was then Executive Editor (South) of *Citizen*. He along with a panel conducted the interview. During the very warm interview sessions, I sensed the trepidation of the panel; it could not afford to make any mistake in hiring a hand for its southern operations. It was clear that the panel wanted result-oriented individuals who could add value instantly to the new magazine in the southern market. From the probing questions they asked, I could sense the panel's foreboding for a 'Lagos man', as they seemed to generally view everyone with distrust.

However, a few days after that interview, I got a letter informing me that I was successful and could resume

immediately. The rest, as they say, is history. I took the job head on and gave it all the commitment it deserved. Within the first few weeks of resumption, at the Lagos office, I took an official trip to the Eastern states of Benin, Onitsha, Enugu, Owerri and Port Harcourt to contact distributors of the magazine who were very reluctant to sell northern-based publications. For the three years or so that our team worked in Lagos, our major challenge was to penetrate the southern market. Readers, distributors and vendors harboured a strong bias against any northern publication. This bias, compounded by ethnicity and religion, was worsened by the fact that the average Lagos vendor already had a handful of titles for readers.

In the market place of competitive journalism, leading publications like *Newswatch*, African Concord, TSM and later, TELL magazines, were very dominant. At *Citizen*, we knew that breaking into the Lagos market required special discernment. The company therefore engaged very talented journalists like Ike Okonta, Bolaji Adebisi, Yinka Tella, Aliu Akoshile, Oji Onokoas core editorial team for the southern operations. While people like Bunmi Adeoye, Stella Emele and Yekeen Abdullahi were

active on the commercial side. At the Kaduna office were core editorial people like Mohammed Bomoi, Mahmud Jega, Zainab Okino, Tijani Isa, Abu Momoh while there was virtually no key person in the advert department.

At the Lagos office, it required good market intelligence for the editorial team to work on a story successfully. Knowing the market meant understanding the areas in Lagos where most northerners worked or lived especially in banks, immigration, customs and other agencies of government. It also required synergy between the editorial department and marketing department to identify issues that had mass appeal for the various segments of the stakeholders including the readers, advertisers, distributors and vendors. The magazine realized that this meant constant marketing research and proactive work on burning issues.

Incidentally at this time, President Ibrahim Babangida had just created new states in Nigeria, a move which the South East felt was not favourable to the region. It was appropriate therefore for *Citizen* to do a cover story that was a product of market research and editorial precision

by supporting the Igbo agenda for an additional state. The magazine published the cover story, entitled, '*Igbos Are Angry*.' Incidentally, 70% of the newspaper vendors and distributors then were mainly from the South Eastern States of Nigeria and were easily convinced to promote this particular edition, which they considered sympathetic to their cause. It therefore got the Lagos vendors to display *Citizen* sufficiently for the first time, making it visible enough for buyers to see and buy off the newsstands. It also paved the way for the magazine to enter the entire southern market, which had hitherto become difficult to achieve amidst poor display and relegation of the title.

However, in a short time, *Citizen* became an authoritative weekly. All the executive directors wrote well-informed weekly articles and columns; but paid little attention to the business side. Late Chief Gani Fawehinmi, Chief Ebenezer Babatope, Late Dr. Olikoye Ransome-Kuti became subscribers and would call in if their copies were not delivered on time. At the operational level, while the Lagos office was doing well, the Kaduna office was not, due to low advert patronage and lack of executive

oversight over revenue generation and general operations.

The Lagos office became quite powerful and autonomous in a way. Apart from the regular editorial contributions it made on weekly cover stories, it was also making enough money to run its operation and remitted some to the headquarters on a regular basis. It was also there that Mallam Kabiru Yusuf, the Executive Editor (South), raised a team including myself to organize the first *Citizen* dialogue conference at the then Nicon-Noga Hilton Hotel, Abuja, when the board gave him that assignment.

By November 1993, *Citizen* had published for about three years and had become a respected weekly journal. But it was clear that the revenue was quickly dwindling. Kabiru in his usual adventurous spirit had taken a leave of absence from the company to live in Southern Africa as a freelance journalist. Before then, he had recommended my transfer with Bolaji Adebisi, the then senior political correspondent of the magazine and later a media aide to former President Goodluck Jonathan, to the Kaduna head office of the company. The reason for the transfer,

especially at a time when the company had become comatose and had trouble paying its printer was not clear to me.

However, accepting the transfer to relocate to Kaduna was very easy for me. First of all, I was an upwardly mobile young man who was very enthusiastic to go back to the North where I studied for my University degree for three years and served as a corps member for another year in Yana, Shira LGA of Bauchi State. I also saw it as an opportunity to contribute whatever I could to the troubled *Citizen* that had started to decline rapidly in revenue and struggling to pay its bills in the head office.

Suffice it to say that for the next three years or so that I lived and worked in Kaduna as a result of the transfer, I paid frequent visits to *Citizen's* head office to catch up with friends and associates, even after I left it to join the *Sentinel* - another weekly magazine based in Kaduna.

...THE SENTINEL MAGAZINE

Sometime in February 1995, while still at *Citizen*, Mallam Adamu Adamu, a brilliant accountant and prolific writer

whose hearty life is greatly admired by many, had moved to *Sentinel* as Editor-in-Chief from his position as Executive Editor at *Citizen*. *Sentinel* was a general interest weekly magazine based in Kaduna with special focus on politics and economy. Late Shehu Musa Yar'Adua (*TafidaKatsina*) and elder brother of late President Umar Musa Yar'Adua, set it up to advance the political interest of the North and particularly to build bridges across the political divides. Mallam Adamu had invited me to come over to join him at *Sentinel* where he had been invited by the publisher to co-manage it with Stanley Macebuh, one of the leading lights of Nigerian journalism and former Managing Director of *The Guardian* newspaper, Lagos.

This was after the military government of General Sani Abacha arrested and incarcerated the publisher for what the regime perceived to be *Guardian's* tough stance in demanding for the return to civil rule and his role in playing opposition politics. During that period, the same late Head of State had created the Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF) and invited General Muhammadu Buhari (GMB), the current President of Nigeria, to chair it. It again fell

on Mallam Adamu Adamu to join GMB as Senior Special Assistant to run the PTF.

Consequent upon the exit of Adamu and Stanley from the *Sentinel* magazine, it became the responsibility of the late President Umar Yar'Adua, the younger brother to the publisher, to keep the ailing magazine alive. Unfortunately, Yar'Adua was then an average chemistry teacher that did not have enough resources to oil the big political machinery of his wealthy and influential brother. I remember the late president found it difficult to sign cheques of some running cost expenses when we took them for his signature in his three-bedroom apartment in Unguwa Dosa area of Kaduna in November 1994. When the situation with the company became precarious and the senior Yar'Adua died in detention, it became clear that there was no way *Sentinel* could continue to run.

Circulation had declined and adverts were not forthcoming. To make matters worse, unprofessional managers were sent by the late Yar'Adua family to run the company. In addition to that, an expatriate manager

who was already entrenched in the system single-handedly ran the press arm in an arbitrary manner without any financial returns to the group. The joke among staff then was that 'the dog' of the expatriate managers costs the company more than the salary of five workers who managed to get paid at the end of the month.

In one of the revival plans that was sent to the late president by the Editor of *Sentinel*, Mahmud Jega in July 1995 on behalf of the business committee of which I was the Controller of Business Operations, we had identified the need to acquire some printing materials that was worth about N3.4 million that would last the magazine for at least one year as panacea for survival in the face of declining revenue. The committee also recommended the merger of Sentinel Publications (the magazine) with the Nation House Press (the printing press), which were both owned by *Tafida* and situated in the same premises in Rigasa area of Kaduna. In order to stay afloat, the committee recommended some measures like, market expansion through effective distribution, more aggressive advertisement placements, expansion of

special projects, commercial printing, public relations and consultancy and special publications, among others as strategies to revive the magazine if the money requested by the committee was released.

The money was however never released and even though it was common knowledge that the sum of about N10 million was kept aside by *Tafida* in Habib Bank as running cost for the magazine, late president Umar Musa Yar'dua could not spend the money. *Sentinel* was therefore left to struggle on its own to print and circulate. The situation became precarious and at the turn of November 1995, I knew I had to leave, even at the risk of not having an alternative job. My plan B was to try my hands on private business.

Leaving *Sentinel* was indeed a blessing in disguise for me. It afforded me a short experience at supply business with the National Electricity Power Authority (NEPA) in Kaduna. Goke Adesiyan, the regional accountant, with whom I shared the same hotel accommodation for six months when I first came to Kaduna, provided the springboard by introducing me to the Regional

Administrative Manager, Hajia Hadiza el-Rufai.

The returns I made from my supply contract with NEPA gave me the confidence to settle down in marriage in December 1995 at the age of 32. The challenges that came with marriage and my weekend lectures at the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, for a master's programme (MBA) gave me further push for financial independence.

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CHAPTER 2

**FIRST, AS MEDIA AND
MARKETING
COMMUNICATIONS
IDEALISTS**

The idea of setting up a media company was first conceived on March 24, 1996, when Mallam Kabiru Yusuf and I met again at the premises of *Citizen* in Kaduna. We had worked at the Lagos office between 1990 and 1993.

After the exchange of usual pleasantries and discussion on our separate experiences during the gap period, I enthusiastically suggested to him that we consider setting up a northern-based media communications company having toyed with the idea for some time. This was based on my conviction that he has tremendous goodwill as one of the foremost northern journalists and the need for a virile media communication company in the North to bridge the obvious gap between the South and the North in that business. I sensed that we could succeed in a new media initiative since there was no functional one at that

time compared to at least half a dozen of such successful media outfits in Lagos and Ibadan axis. Tanus Communications Company, then newly set up by Dr. Yemi Ogunbiyi, former Managing Director of *Daily Times*, particularly inspired me, looking at the proper mix of PR and brand management that the firm was delivering in the media market place then in Lagos.

Mallam Kabiru immediately agreed to my proposal and invited me to his home for further discussions on the matter. He asked me to see one Hassan, a security man at *Today* newspaper in Malali, where he worked as Editor, to take me to his house in Malali low cost housing estate, which was few metres away from *Today*. From that first meeting in his house and the subsequent ones, we discussed the new idea and had a burning desire to succeed. We took and reviewed the minutes of every meeting. Kabiru would sign off as chairman and I as Secretary.

Subsequently, we moved our regular meetings to an open garden at the Safana Garden Hotels, Kaduna GRA,

where we would review previous plans and strategies, which included the need to do a market survey, register a company and reach out to people. As the meetings and discussions progressed, Rabiou Garba, a friend of Kabiru gave us a Boys' Quarter room in his printing press in Ungwuan Sarki, where we began writing proposals as Media Consultants.

Deciding on the name of the company was not that easy as we wanted a name that hinted at unique core values of Trust, Dependability, Balance, Courage, Reliability etc. To this end, the first set of names considered was:

1. Media Corporation
2. Integrated Media Limited
3. Integrated Communications Ltd
4. Media Trust Limited

After some weeks of consultations and considerations, the name Media Trust Limited was adopted and the rider was (Media and Marketing Consultants).

We later incorporated Media Trust Nigeria Limited, with five listed shareholders; Kabiru Yusuf, myself (Isiaq Ajibola), Manir Dan-Ali, Umar Abdullahi, Rabiu Garba and Mohammed Jibrilla (who did not eventually take up his allotted shares). Out of these shareholders, only Kabiru and I were executives working in the company. While he was the Managing Director/Editor-in-Chief by title, I was General Manager.

Starting with about twenty thousand naira cash (N20,000) we made two tables and chairs in the one-room Boys' Quarter office and began to write proposals for media and related consultancy jobs. We also embarked on aggressive contacts, first of all to members of the business communities in Kaduna, Abuja, Kano and Zaria and followed up with visits, calls and reminders.

Contrary to speculations about any 'big name' behind the establishment of the company, the founders were collegial, relatively young and business associates, who FOUND A NEED and FULFILLED IT in line with the 'FANAFI' principle in management.

Our relatively modest salaries of N15,000 for the Managing Director and N10,000 for the General Manager were not regular due to lack of funds. Starting modestly as a communication company, in a one Boys' Quarter room office where businesses trickled in and up until two years later in 1998 when the *Weekly Trust* commenced, we never wavered.

At a point, we weren't too sure whether to engage in other businesses outside the media to multiply our income stream. While we were toying with the idea, we engaged the Kaduna Chamber of Commerce and Industry to partner with them in organizing their annual trade fair exhibition, which was well established then in the north.

We also approached the Kano Chamber of Commerce and Industry for collaboration. We even toyed with the idea of running a supermarket and carried out feasibility studies to determine the cost-benefit. As fate would have it, we eventually decided to settle for media business. It

was after this decision that Mallam Kabiru decided to resign his lecturing job at the University of Sokoto to join the new endeavour full time.

From our one-room Boys' Quarter office in Unguwa Dosa, we moved to a 3-bedroom bungalow on Yakubu Gowon way in GRA Kaduna, which was facilitated by Mall Bashir Kurfi, a renowned lecturer of the Department of Business Administration of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. In this office, we had a bigger space to operate and this encouraged us to engage an office clerk, Smaila Tanko, to stay around whenever we travelled out of town to run administrative errands and keep the office in good condition. This way, we traversed the major cities of Kaduna, Abuja, Zaria, Kano and Lagos in search of business opportunities.

With the benefit of my MBA, which I was just completing at ABU, I kept the company's records meticulously. This effort helped the Kaduna-based audit firm of Zakari Sada & Co. to produce the company's first audited accounts in about one year after we opened for business

in December 1996. Even though the first account of the company showed some profit before tax, we could not afford to pay the audit fees and had to encourage the auditing firm to convert the fees to shares in our company. This they agreed to, and the shares are still being held in the company till date.

In mid-1997, Abuja became a hotbed of business with the federal government spending in all sectors of the economy. Most Kaduna-based elites became portfolio businessmen heading to Abuja for contracts. Kabiru and I followed up on some of our proposals in Abuja one sunny day. As we stayed late in Abuja till evening, we decided to sleep over as it was late to travel. We therefore headed to Alhaji Bello Damagun's house in Asokoro with the hope that we would meet him. It was the pre-GSM era, with the popular phone then being the Thuraya handheld that was being flaunted by few wealthy Nigerians. Even though our supposed host used the Thuraya, we could not reach him.

Notwithstanding, we went to his house but were

disappointed that he was not at home. The male housekeeper we met told us that Alhaji had traveled and he didn't have access to the keys to any of the rooms in the house. We had to sleep on the couch in the living room till the following day when we returned to Kaduna.

We started by engaging in media communication business of no particular area of focus; from Public Relations, to writing articles and sometimes going off the media realm to supervising oil lifting business at the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) depot in Kaduna for a friendly company like TijaraNig Ltd. We eventually started doing business with two business names – Niger Rand and Makanjib Nigeria Enterprises, belonging to both of us respectively. The first N30, 000 we got was saved in Makanjib Enterprise bank account with the defunct Trade Bank in Kaduna, because Media Trust had not completed its registration with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) then and was yet to open a bank account.

In retrospect, I believe it was my first stint with the media,

at *JustPolitics* and later at the *Citizen* and *Sentinel* that shaped my affinity with the print media and my understanding of the imbalance between the so called Lagos-Ibadan press versus the northern press in Nigeria. Having read leading writers like, Mallam Mohammed Haruna's views on this subject, I was well informed enough to see the problems that deepened the dichotomy and bias of one region against the other.

It was obvious that the solution would be the formation of an equally virile media outfit in other parts of the country. The suggestion to establish a media company in Kaduna therefore was a watershed in my own personal growth and advancement. At inception, though a Director, my title was General Manager and it remained so until April 2004 when my nomenclature changed to Executive Director (Operations) of the company. The reason was to establish an organic structure that accommodated everyone and that could lead to the sustainable growth for the company. I later became Managing Director/Chief Operating Officer (COO) on August 29, 2007.

Since the original idea was to set up an integrated media company, it was imperative to focus on the north and strategically entrench ourselves in it. At that time, there was no major media communication company in the North. There was also no successful independent newspaper in the region. The several advertising agencies in Lagos which were quite successful including Tanus Communications Ltd, SO&U, Prima Garnet, Lintas, Guy Saries, naturally inspired us because they were rightly sized and capitalized.

It was our desire to make a quick impact in the North with our varied experiences in the media and to drive home this point. Our first set of business proposals was taken to local industries in Kaduna, Kano, Zaria and subsequently, to government parastatals and agencies in Abuja. They were painstakingly delivered to the right persons and with the enormous goodwill of the company, some companies quickly gave us briefs and these include:

- 1) Cotton and Agricultural Processing Company Zaria, where Alhaji Muhammadu Nadada Umar was Company Secretary.

- 2) Agromatrix Nigeria Limited, Kaduna owned by Alhaji Abdullahi Y. Shuaibu.
- 3) Zarinject Pharmaceutical Limited, Zaria where Alhaji Ahmed Tijjani Mora was Chief Executive.
- 4) National Administrative College of Nigeria, Topo, Badagry, Lagos, where Professor A.D Yahaya was Director General.
- 5) Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF) Abuja, where the late Mallam Salihijo Ahmad was Chief Project Consultant of AfriProjects.
- 6) Bureau of Public Enterprises (BPE) where Mallam Nasir el- Rufai, current Governor of Kaduna State, was Director General.
- 7) National Human Rights Commission, where Mr. Bello Buhari was Executive Secretary

Most of the briefs from these private companies involved printing of fliers, brochures, production of outdoor billboards, direct newspaper adverts, concept origination and Public Relations. Even though we were rookies in core advertising business, we wrote effective advertising messages. What about the famous billboard copy

'Tractor is no Bicycle' that we produced and mounted for Agromatrix Nig Ltd, a company that sold tractors in Kaduna in 1997. It was a pleasant surprise that the rusty and faded messages on the billboard were still there, 15 years after.

There was also the first major Public Relations job that we got which came from National Primary Education Commission (NPEC) in Abuja, through a third party firm, Bifocal communication, run by Alhaji Idris Mohammed, now chairman of *Blueprint* Newspaper. The job, which involved writing syndicated articles in the newspapers to enlighten the public on the activities of the commission, was well delivered and the paltry fee it fetched was very timely.

The big briefs later came from Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF), under which we coordinated activities as media consultants on their nationwide sensitization programme. The PTF had appointed individual professionals and organizations across the country to sensitize the public on its seven major intervention areas,

which included Education, Health, Security, Roads, Water, Power and Infrastructure. Pundits have said that, PTF in fair assessment was very successful however much the civil servants hated it. To them, it was actually the first time public funds were rightly channeled and impacted the lives of ordinary people in Nigeria. Our job as National Communication Coordinating Consultants (NCCC) was to ensure that the various media consultants did their jobs before each tranche of payments were disbursed. That way, we reviewed their print and electronic media works, workshops, seminars, talk shows and the like.

However, there came a time when it became difficult to reconcile the good stories about the PTF with the ill feelings of some elites and civil servants who seemed to have lost out on direct project execution and implementation of government contracts. These elites successfully mounted pressures on a willing President Olusegun Obasanjo's new government to scrap the Fund - perhaps out of vengeance against General Sani Abacha, who created the laudable programme.

Luck lit our path again in 2000, when the Bureau of Public Enterprises (BPE) appointed us Zonal Coordinating Communications Consultants for North Central Zone on their Privatization programme, which was introduced by the then Obasanjo regime.

Under the BPE brief, Media Trust organized community participatory programmes such as workshops and seminars in Abuja, Ilorin, Minna, Jos, Lokoja, Lafia and Markudi to garner support for the privatization programme. Our job was to sensitize traditional rulers, labour unions, professional bodies, academicians, students, religious bodies, media and other stakeholders in the privatization programme in the North Central states of Abuja, Plateau, Benue, Nassarawa, Kogi, Niger and Kwara.

Sensitizing the North on the benefits of privatization was another challenging assignment for us because the general opinion about privatization, which included selling off government assets, was seen as an antithesis to the growth and development of Nigeria and to the North

in particular. Mohammed Yusuf, then President of Kaduna State Chapter of Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR), a consummate communicator, was invited to join us in the organization of workshops and seminars across the zone.

Needless to say, the money the consultancy engagements fetched us was very handy. Expanding our operations was made easier and keeping an Abuja office at 14, Tunis Street, Zone 6, Abuja, made possible.



CHAPTER 3

...THEN,
A WEEKLY
NEWSPAPER

We had planned to publish a newspaper rooted in the immediate community, which is the North. By mid-1996, Abacha's government had fallen out with the media and civil society. Press intimidation by the regime was rife. Copies of newspapers and magazines were confiscated by the regime for daring to publish anti-government articles. The *Guardian* newspaper, which was owned by a minister under Abacha regime, Alex Ibru, was proscribed and shut down after it criticized the government in its editorial. Ibru was nearly assassinated by those who were perceived to be government agents. In the north, there was silent opposition to the regime especially by the elites but unfortunately there was no virile newspaper platform to express their views.

The apparent need for a community newspaper was therefore necessary and that yawning gap overwhelmed the consultancy dream of our media sojourn. In 1997 therefore, a meeting between Kabiru, Manir and I revisited the idea to start a newspaper. We thereafter wrote a memo to select individuals inviting them to invest in what we called the 'Newspaper of the Future'. In the memo, we pointed out that we were going to run a business-oriented media outfit and conspicuously quoted Robert H. Estabrook who said that, "*Journalism must be a business before it can be a profession. Before you can register editorial excellence, you need to apply business expertise.*" The purpose of the quote was to make it clear that the newspaper of our dream would be run like a business in addition to feeling the needed gap in the society.

At the end of it, the desire of many elites to have an independent newspaper at that time rather than the conviction that it would yield any tangible financial returns led to the positive responses we received. The collective desire was to have a credible voice for the

people. First call up for shares was on October 1, 1997, and was meant to last up to 1st March 1998. At the time, the Asset Valuation Report prepared by Hassan & Co Estate Valuers, put the value of the company at about N28m, largely comprising furniture and assets bought to execute the PTF job.

The coming of new investors, which was a major positive development for the company, provided ample capital to start the paper and constituted a fountain of knowledge for running the business of the company at the board level.

From the quality of minds of new investors and what we both shared, arguments and different shades of opinions done in good faith were a major check on those of us who wore three togas as insider Directors, Shareholders and Managers of the paper at the same time. As small as we were, there were calls for caution in administrative and personnel expenses, from external directors. Similarly, there were challenges that we should meet some a set target in revenue. This collective wisdom charted the

rapid course for the growth and development of the newspaper.

In previous tabloids where I had worked, editorial and business success was never simultaneously achieved. Mallam Mohammed Haruna, who was Managing Director of *Citizen* in Kaduna up to 1994, once said that the magazine made editorial success but not business success. This could largely be attributed to poor revenues coming in from the North, generally because of low patronage in advertisement placement but perhaps largely due to lack of requisite business direction at the top management level.

Media Trust on the other hand, gained strength in editorial as well as in business operations simply because management considered both as very critical from day one. While Mallam Kabiru managed the editorial section, I manned the business section with both sides merging as General Operations.

The company started the publication of a weekly title precisely on Friday, January 23, 1998. It was a time when Nigerians were tired of the military government headed by General Sani Abacha, who wanted to metamorphose into a civilian president. The regime had terrorized politicians, students and the media to an unprecedented level. Political killings were the order of the day and people were generally afraid to talk. The death of MKO Abiola, the man who was generally acclaimed to have won the June 12, 1993 presidential election, had orchestrated a big political vanguard, especially in Lagos and other southern states. Brutal force was used to silence these movements while Abacha tried to transmute into a civilian president.

The north's political economy was destroyed and the only economic reprieve for the emerging business elites was created by new opportunities like the consultancy jobs of PTF gave out to many professionals. It was therefore the right time to start the newspaper with the main purpose of reporting and telling the truth to the powers that be. The paper assembled men and women of

integrity as editorial members and columnists. People like Mallam Bashir Yusuf Ibrahim, present national chairman of the Peoples Democratic Movement (PDM), late Professor Tijani El-Miskin, Dr Usman Bugaje, Mallam Sanusi Lamido Sanusi (now Emir of Kano), Hajia Aisha Umar Yusuf, Dr. Aliyu Tilde etc. Their respective columns and contributions became a must read every week.

The first cover story in the preview edition of the *Weekly Trust* entitled, "If Abacha Runs...." was written by Mallam Bashir Yusuf. The story was balanced and analysed the implications of Abacha transmuting to a civilian president.

Similarly, the editorial of that edition was forceful, precise, logical and indicative of the purpose of the newspaper. The editorial is reproduced below:

IF ABACHA RUNS....

"If the experience of publishing in the north has so far been dismal, our generation should not relent, but rather

rededicate itself to changing the picture in the 21st century. The media is strategic to society and political arrangement of the future. And as education expands and income improves, it would become good business as well. But unless a solid media company is set up and nurtured now, it would not be there when it is needed.

That is why we have taken up the challenge of producing a new national newspaper, based in Kaduna, but with strong presence in Abuja, Lagos, Kano and other regional centres. We think that our society badly needs a clean mirror, to reflect with news and pictures of what is actually happening around us. At the moment, most media, especially in the north, government owned or private, merely broadcast 'official news,' which while useful, can be boring and one sided. We should cover government, but also business and politics, markets and mosques, arts and science, villages and towns. We would try to do this competently and professionally, with no apologies or sentiments because our aim is not to seek popularity or promote any particular agenda, but to serve and light the way.

Our general editorial aim is to produce an independent, newsy, good-looking, entertaining and elevating newspaper. In the liberal tradition of all great newspapers, we would source news from wherever we could get it, present it in depth and analyse it from all sides. We would seek to educate and guide our readers through informed commentary and balanced views, to make the hard and realistic choice necessary for survival.

Weekly Trust would support the government of the day by covering its activities, offering honest advice and policy suggestions, while remaining totally independent of it. We shall submit ourselves to the dictates of the market by running a commercially viable operation in which readers get value for their money, workers are well remunerated and investors could receive a healthy return.

This is where we stand. It is easy for us to parade our credentials or to claim lofty ideals of truth or excellence, but to paraphrase a well-known advert slogan, when

you make a great product, you don't need to make too much noise! Sooner or later, you the reader, will catch on. We know how hard it is in the present climate, to win people's trust. But we did not choose our name lightly or as a smokescreen. We do mean to win you over, oh you, the doubting Thomases and Tanimus! So help us God!!”

The paper lived up to the above expectation and passed the litmus test of editorial integrity from the early stages. Starting from the story of massive stealing and corruption at the National Primary Education Commission (NPEC) then in Kaduna, which implicated the then Executive Secretary, the magazine stepped on many toes from the beginning. While the magazine had planned to run the story on a week's edition, an emissary came from the Executive Secretary to kill the story with some amount of money concealed in large envelopes and to be delivered to the Editors. Of course the money was rejected and the story was published as planned. The story was a major editorial break-through, as readers called in for more copies. This apparently annoyed the Executive Secretary, who instituted about N100 million

libel in frustration, against the about one year old newspaper. The court struck out the case for poor prosecution.

Beginning with a circulation figure of about 2000 copies, the weekly magazine increased steadily to a five-digit figure overtime. Advertisement revenue also increased and steady progress was made on all fronts. The modest circulation figures were minded tenaciously and every copy printed was accounted for, from the printing press to delivery.

The weekly tabloid took another strategic leap by printing in colour against all the fundamentals that it would not increase revenue. A newspaper had started the colour rave in Lagos and most established papers there were foot dragging because of the cost. However, that was what the readers wanted. It was new in the Nigerian newspaper market and quite appealing to the ordinary reader.

The *Weekly Trust* started the colour immediately after debut and won the hearts of readers in both content and look. The *Weekly Trust* grew steadily from a circulation of 2000 copies edition that was printed on a cord offset printing machine in Kaduna and increased to 3000 copies overtime.

The magazine literally became the voice of the people especially in the north and unarguably the most respected by elites and government alike. Barely after running for one year, the then speaker of the House of Representatives, Hon. Ghali Umar Na'Abba, visited our cramped three bedroom bungalow on Alkali Road, at the twilight of the new government of democracy that began in 1999. In his remarks on the visit, he praised the relatively young magazine for its professionalism, brevity and rich content. He called on the management team to keep the flag flying.

By 2001, the consultancy earnings, specifically from PTF and BPE, were about 20per cent of our total earnings, meaning that revenue from copy and advert sales was

about 80 per cent of annual turnover and relegating the consultancy. At this time the newspaper job had become more engaging and presented a conflict of interest with running of a PR firm. While PR engagement was supposed to make every situation look good for individuals and organizations that engaged us, newspaper publishing on the other hand, published facts, some of which our principals wanted to cover up. The paper remained resolute and consistent in publishing facts no matter whose ox was gored. When it became obvious we could not manage the PR firm alongside the newspaper under the same trade name, the integrated communication functions of the company naturally had to give way.

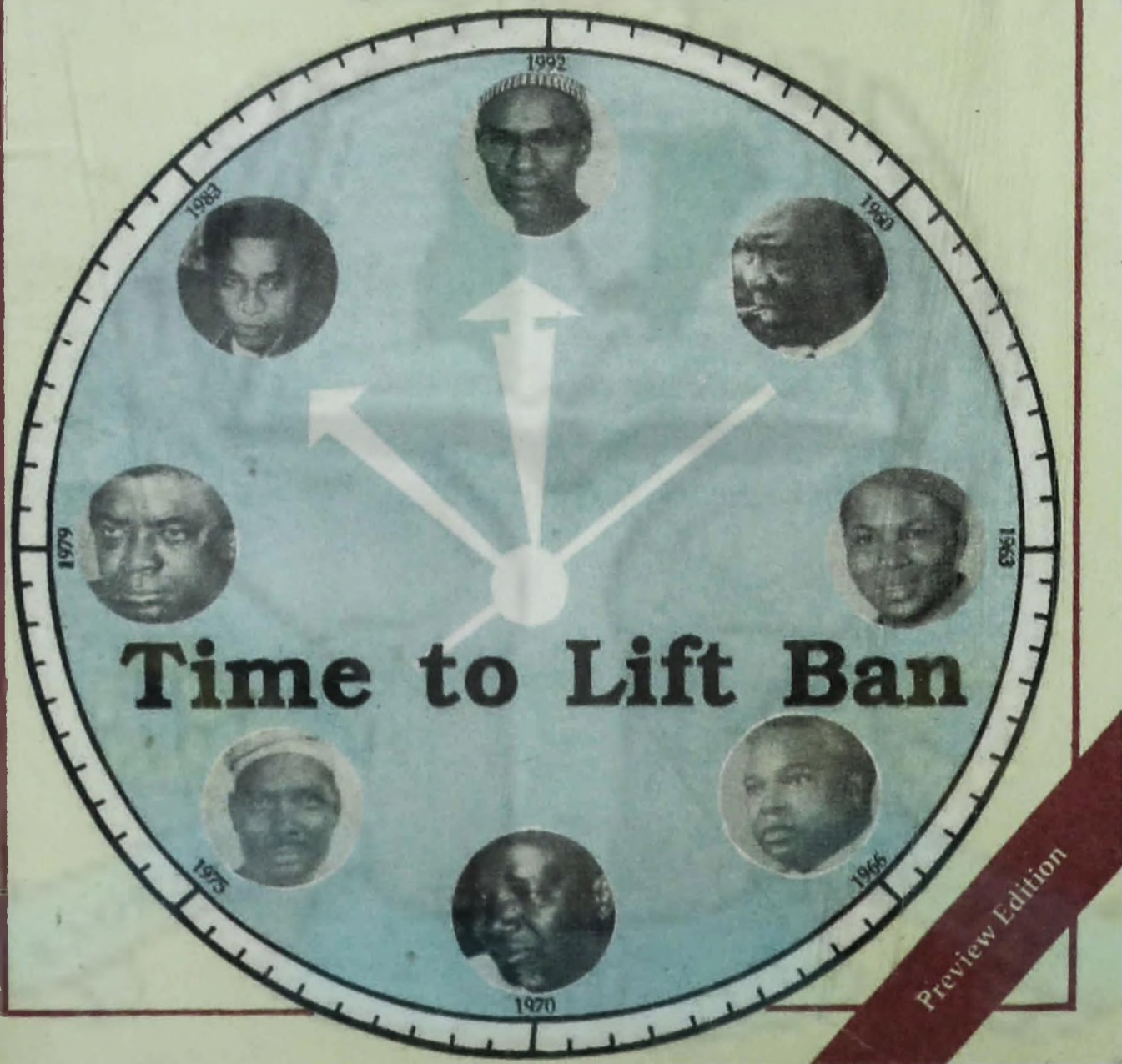
July 30—August 6, 1990

Citizen

Politics • Economics • Culture •

Not for sale

Old Politicians



Preview edition *Citizen* magazine, July 30-August 6, 1990



At the launching of *Weekly Trust* Newspaper, Arewa House, Kaduna on March 21, 1998. From left is Mall. Kabiru Yusuf then (CEO), Yekini Abdullahi, Isiaq Ajibola then (GM), and Mohammed Kari



L - R Mall. Kabiru Yusuf CEO Media Trust Ltd, Uncle Sam Amuka (standing), Publisher of Vanguard Newspaper and Isiaq Ajibola then Executive Director (Operations) at the launching of simultaneous printing of *Trust* titles in Lagos at the Golden Gate Restaurant Lagos on 25/7/2007

Coup video: Should it have been shown? - P7

Weekly

TRUST

Friday, January 23, 1998

INSIDE

Why we chose the sidelines
Rimi p.5

The making of Palestinian suicide bombers p.18

Effective health-care for women p.11

The murders before Sora p.23

IF ABACHA RUNS . . .

PREVIEW EDITION (NOT FOR SALE)

A political reporter peers into the misty months ahead.



General Y. Abacha
Special for Weekly Trust

TRUST goes inside the political scene in Nigeria's current transition to civil democracy - military, political and economic. Will the spirit of the 1993 election be revived? Or will the military, in its quest for power, once again dominate the nation's fate? What will be the role of the military in the new Nigeria? Will the military be able to resist the temptation of power? Will the military be able to resist the temptation of power?

the idea of writing just what I like. One question was the ethics, quite apart from the possibility of personal gain, or the risk of not making any sense.

In the 17 years since its independence, Nigeria has tried to build an almost everything imaginable in the public sector: from the Ministry of the Environment, Health, and Social Services to the Federal Reserve. The country has become a great political laboratory. It has tried military regimes against the wish and finally with a sliver of success. But it seems to have found a way that is more subtle. Today, only two years away from the end of the century and millennium, Nigeria is in

Continued on Page 7

Traffic wardens sue Inspector-General of Police - P3

Preview edition of Weekly Trust, January 23, 1998

DAILY TRUST



Abuja's First Daily Newspaper

Trust Is A Burden

JANUARY 15, 2001 WEDNESDAY 11, 141, 618

RAKUD ENGINEERING LIMITED

Shagari: A Quiet Man Opens up Pg. 25

AD Chairman scores Obasanjo low

Pg. 20

LEMINGWAY STORES

A convenient spot for total shopping

Location: Leventis Centre, Central Area District, Abuja.

Danjuma, Abubakar Delay Cabinet Reshuffle

Abuja, Nigeria — The much-awaited cabinet reshuffle by President Obasanjo has been delayed by the illness of one prospective minister...

Although, Danjuma has feigned his desire to retire on ill health, other sources claim that he has become uncomfortable with the rigors of the administration which have incurred the displeasure of ministers of whom he is an intimate figure.

Sources close to him explained that he has only declined from joining public relations of the administration because of his personal relationship with President Obasanjo and because he is one of the persons who convinced Obasanjo to stand election and had spent his personal fortune to ensure his victory.

The source said that rather than dispute with his boss and friend of many years he preferred to leave the cabinet as well.

The source cited President Obasanjo's inability to act promptly in the first three days of the recent CPC race in Lagos, an action that caused the death of many people of northern origin.

Obasanjo's reaction in the first three days of the race was also said to have caused...

Continued on Pg. 2



Abuja: Hassan Danbaba, Magaji Gwari, Danbaba's grandson and first vice.

Others to appear at Oputa Panel

Abuja, Nigeria — The Human Rights Violation Investigation Panel (Oputa Panel) has today in Port Harcourt, Chief of Staff Lt. General Dike (rtd) has named to testify 10 individuals...

35 cases the Oputa Panel will examine in the next two weeks of its sitting in Port Harcourt.

Other cases to be heard include the petition of newspaper editors Ray Fipu, Yakubu Mohammed and Dan Agbuar over the unlawful arrest over the interview granted them by Brigadier-General David Mark in 1994.

Overzealous security men caused Airport mishap

By Yehieman Muhammad

Investigations have pointed to the lack of leadership on the part of the National Security Adviser (NSA) to the president, Lt. Gen. Aliyu Gwari (rtd) revealed that when the tragedy occurred...

Create Ahmadu Bello Foundation

From News Chief Karamu, in Sokoto

Governor of Zam Zam State of the North, Ahmadu Bello Danbaba, Magaji Gwari has called on the government to set up a foundation in honour of the late Ahmadu Bello, Northern...

First edition of Daily Trust, January 15, 2001.





CHAPTER 4

...AND THE
DAILY TRUST

It was clear that we needed to increase the frequency of *Weekly Trust* publication even though it was going to increase our running cost by almost 300 per cent.

On January 15, 2001, we started the daily publication with the title *Daily Trust* and with the cover story, “*Danjuma, Abubakar Delay Cabinet Reshuffle.*” We started printing with Heritage press, Abuja, and did that for about seven years, after leaving our local printers in Kaduna. Heritage press, perhaps the biggest press in Abuja then, was particularly supportive in printing our newspaper at the time and the production came out fairly well. Heritage had capacity to do a lot more with many colour units and expansive facilities.

One of the policies of Heritage Press was not to print less than five digit-figures for its customers, a policy that

forced us to increase our print run from about 3000 copies weekly to about 10,000 copies daily! Expectedly, this led to huge cost of printing, which was not matched with revenues at the initial stage and which the company accountant pointed out - we were going bust in three months unless we could generate more revenue to cover costs.

Luckily, the company got positive response from the market, in both readership and advertising and instead made progress in turnover and profitability every year. Readership expanded rapidly in key cities of Abuja, Kaduna, Kano, Bauchi, etc .The company also expanded into a multiple press, with plants in some strategic cities. The newspaper titles quickly became the "King of the North" and advertising patronage increased in an amazing record time.

From the circulation figures of about 2000 copies in 1998, the figures now run in high five figure digits and one of the highest in the Nigerian print industry. The report of an independent Lagos market research

company, *Media Reach*, rated *Daily Trust* circulation second highest in Nigeria in the year 2012. As the goodwill of the newspaper increased, so did its influence across the country.

The Trust Annual Dialogue and the African of the Year Awards are the two most important annual events instituted by the company few years into its operations. These two events have become very well known by many elites in the society.

My role first as General Manager, then to Executive Director (Operations) and later Managing Director had also expanded and more opportunities evolved for career growth and capacity building. That gave me the privilege of undertaking a study visit and attachments to established newspapers houses abroad at one time or the other.

PEOPLE AND SYSTEMS

As our business grew into a daily publication, it came with the challenge of organizing the right people and

systems to deliver value. Systems are the structure around which the other parts of company work are framed and without them, there would be chaos. But you need to have the right systems. Sloppy systems can limit the growth of any organization.

In an organization, despite that most managers know that People and Systems are both important; they still would wonder which they should give a priority. I think it is both. Certainly it is important to have the right people in the right jobs but I would argue that it is equally important to have the right systems in place.

They are the two company elements that must be equally prioritized to keep the business running. When the people and the systems are strong, the company will confidently run well.

Sure, it is not impossible that the two are skewed, but the imbalance shouldn't be too obvious. Clever people working in poor environments usually worn out easily or worse still, imagine a situation where the business fails to deliver so often that it gradually goes under despite everyone's best efforts to keep it afloat.

On the other hand, great systems without good people is useless; it makes for a nice looking structure, but creates a culture in which people follow the rules so religiously that they make what will seem like committing operational blunders every day.

Therefore, by careful selection and a stroke of luck, the need for the finest, most enthusiastic, result-oriented crop of staff to work in an organization usually goes a long way. Thus, from day one, we created a system and set the standards; for example we said that no staff, including executive directors, should go on an official trip and bring back receipts for reimbursable expenses. We thought it was better to estimate what each would reasonably need on a trip and pay him in advance without any further interest in how he spend it. Also we abhor pre-banking spending from sales money etc.

This is not to say that our system was flawless. The system also conferred many people's jobs on one person, which visibly overstretched the average staff who had to shuffle many duties. The system clearly did not distribute

the stress thereby making the managers often look like the 'bad guys'. When systems are designed so that the next step can't occur without the previous part being done correctly, they work better because the pressure naturally occurs from the team and not just from the boss.

Therefore looking at the combination of People and Systems in the organization, some of the key drivers of success in the growth path of the company were:

1. THE PIONEERS

One of the greatest assets that facilitated the smooth take off of the paper was the availability of competent and committed people. Some of the pioneer editorial staff at the inception of the *Weekly Trust* at Alkali Road, Kaduna, were late Durosinmi Irojah, a first class graduate in English Language from Ahmadu Bello University, (ABU) Zaria; Dennis Mordi (a second class, upper degree holder in Mass Communications from University of Nigeria, Nnsuka (UNN); Aisha Umar Yusuf; Zainab Okino Suleiman (now Executive Director, *Blueprint* Newspaper); late Zainab Musa

Kperogi; Ishaku Dikko; Garbadeen Mohammad (now GM with NNPC); Farooq Kperogi (now a professor and teacher of journalism in Atlanta, USA); Adagbo Onoja; Abdulkareem Baba Aminu (still with the *Trust* as Editor); late Suleiman Mohammed, Onah Odu, Aliyu Ma'aji, Joe Oroye and a few others I may not remember now.

The first acting editor of the *Weekly Trust* was Ishyaku Dikko, now a politician of sorts in Katsina State. Even though he came from the academia, he contributed immensely in removing the initial bottlenecks in the editorial work. Then Garbadeen Mohammad who, even though was new to journalism, did an impressive job of it before turning the paper over to other editors.

At the operational level were Mohammad Rayyan in Accounts, Eunice Okeke in Adverts, Abdulrasaq Usman in Marketing/ Circulation who were heads of these departments.

As the prospects of the weekly publication increased, there was the need to bring on board, more qualified

people like Aminu Bebeji; and Shehu Mohammed, who was already a chartered accountant at that time and now the current GM (Management Services) of the company. Salisu Mohammed, now a member of the Kano state house of assembly joined as advert manager, Ibrahim Rabe and Baba Daban headed marketing department.

At the second level of staff that came to help when the company started the daily title was the first Editor of the *Daily Trust* who was late Jibrin Daudu, who successfully steered the paper through the teething period, then Ishaq Moddibo Kawu, who came from Kwara TV as General Manager. Next came Abdullahi Abdulazeez in acting capacity, Mahmud Jega, Habeeb Idris Pindiga and now Nasiru L. Abubakar in that order.

The *Sunday Trust* started later with Ahmed Shekarau as Editor, followed by Theophilus Abbah and now Lawal D. Adamu

At the next level of staff were people who headed various departments and Strategic Business Units(SBUs) and who helped stabilize the system. Those who stayed long doing this are; Jibril Sule(Administration), Alhassan Yusuf (Personnel), Suleiman Shabi(Production), Nura Daura (Audit/Finance), Abdullahi Ladan (Production/Maintenance), Akeem Mustapha(Advert), Abdulafeez Sonaike, Hassan Karofi (Marketing), Rasheed Yusuf(Research/Distribution), Abbas Abiri (Credit Control) etc.

Developing the right systems in Finance, Personnel, Information Technology and the revenue generating departments were particularly the catalyst that stabilized the several trials we were having in growing the organization.

At the management level, we were uncompromising with any misdemeanor. Sharp practices in business dealings and acts of indiscipline were not tolerated and were decisively dealt with. I later learnt that I was codenamed '*Janwuya*', by staff, literally meaning "a tough army

general that wears a red neck uniform on account of his no-nonsense stance.”

A lot of other good quality staff too numerous to mention here eventually joined to build the company.

One of the core issues the board had pushed from day one was training and manpower development. Training was initially not taken seriously until the human resource capacity of the company began to rapidly expand. Thus, regular training, tailored at job improvement and efficiency was prioritised and which later extended to overseas trainings for senior managers. Training of staff became regular and better coordinated at the human resource department

In 2007, Manir Dan-Ali, now the Chief Executive Officer, who had been an investor from inception, joined the paper as Editor-In-Chief. In the Business Section, Aliu Akoshile, who hitherto was the pioneer Head, Lagos Operations, also re-joined the stable in 1998 as GM (Business Strategy), after leaving the bank. He is now an

Associate Director (Business) in the company. In between these changes, there were others in tune with every stages of development of the company.

In addition, columnists came with their premium value and became major drivers of circulation. According to our limited internal market research, the columnists that our reading public mostly read included, Dr Aliyu Tilde, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, when he was GM in UBA (now the Emir of Kano), Aisha Umar Yusuf, then Mohammed Haruna, Adamu Adamu, Sam Nda-Isaiah, Ishaq Moddibo Kawu, Ndang Alibi, Tunde Asaju, Mohammed Algazali, Mahmud Jega, Issa Aremu and Bala Muhammad. More columnists are now in the papers to further enrich the content of the titles.

With contributions of columnists the different titles quickly assumed their unique character and gained tremendous confidence of readers especially in northern Nigeria.

2. EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE

The editorial focus of the organization was built on professional and good ethics. Under the table deals were discouraged. Basic tenets of journalism such as accuracy, balanced and fair reporting were echoed as core values from day one. The Editor-in-chief could 'shoot with a gun' if an editor compromised these essential values.

This triggered regular conflicts with politicians and oscillated our relationship from good to bad from time to time.

The belief in good ethics and professionalism encouraged us to institute an annual Good Ethics award termed 'Diamond Award for Media Excellence' (DAME). We also introduced the 'No, Thank You!' slogan to discourage gratification from the public to our reporters.

3. OUTSOURCING OPERATIONS

Outsourcing is an outside engagement of company (A) by company (B) for services company (A) has better capacity

to deliver in terms of facilities and experience. Such services could otherwise have been provided by company (B); but perhaps poorly and at a cost that may be inherently higher.

Outsourcing is a trend that is becoming more common in information technology and other services that were hitherto regarded as simple to manage. In some instances, the entire information management of a company is outsourced, including planning and technical matters like networking and workstations.

In the case of *Trust*, the printing was outsourced to Heritage Press for at least seven years. The press in Heritage and the quality of jobs *Trust* was getting from it would have cost about N300m to set up at the time.

Similarly, we outsourced the distribution of the papers to independent transporters who run their vehicles at various locations. The usual practice where newspapers acquired many distribution vehicles before they start their operations was discarded. Our belief was that, even

though we had the money, it was not expedient to run vehicles on the road with all the associated risks and logistics-related nightmares when we could just arrange transporters already in the system to do same.

Our experience in consultancy with BPE became very handy here. We had invited transporters for an open bidding to quote for routes that we wanted to send our newspapers from Abuja. They were invited to our office on 14, Tunis Street in Wuse Zone 6, Abuja, where we opened the bids and used the lowest bid as basis for negotiation in the presence of all stakeholders. This method obviously saved the company the cost of accident liabilities and other risks that could have run into several millions of Naira. It brought down our cost and made us lean and efficient in that area from day one.

4. TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION

With the increasing demand on newspapers in the world to innovate and embrace new technologies as well as cope with the challenges of online and social media digital option, it became imperative for *Trust* to innovate on

both editorial and operational levels, especially at the company's headquarters. The company therefore invested heavily in hardware, software and processes that led to technological innovations. New designs came up from time to time, easier ways of news aggregation emerged, while revenues were better tracked in and out of the system.

Ironically, those of us on the inside hardly saw these changes, which brought greater efficiency in the operations. We lost sight of the software that helped in key departments like Accounting, Human Resources and improving the aggregation of news in the Editorial department, as well as several internet migration platforms and operating systems that were located in Abuja and out station offices.

Closely related is the enormous capacity to respond to new changes and market on a regularly basis. We quickly adjusted print- run to meet new market demand by "flooding" the market or cave in on print run at a particular time. Similarly we constantly introduced new

editorial sections, columnists etc,

5. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Performance management is the process through which managers and those they lead agree on work expectations, exchange performance feedback, identify learning opportunities and evaluate results from time to time.

To this end, organizations are able to create and sustain a workforce that values:

- * Continuous Improvement
- * Adaptation to Change
- * Ambition and Goals
- * Creativity
- * Learning and Professionalism
- * Rewards for Employees

Growing from the initial Performance Appraisal to Performance Management, the company was able to institute a practice of regularly assessing the input of

every staff in the organization. The appraisal, which cut across various departments, enabled management to have a fair knowledge of who was contributing what to the bottom line.

Reporters and editors were appraised on a monthly basis based on number and quality of stories and articles that were published against their by lines in the newspaper, while operations staff were appraised through assigned value added in terms of revenue generation, cost savings and general efficiency.

Once in a while, management staffs are engaged in Enterprise Management Assessment (EMA), to commit to a certain threshold of performance during a period of six months. These performances were reviewed with them from time to time.

This practice certainly set out competition in the true sense of the word, as individuals in the organization strove to score good performance records. However imperfect this seemed, it enabled the management to

determine who was due for "promotion", "caution" or "disengagement".

The company ran a fairly open management system that predictably motivated the work force. The aim was to run a cost effective and efficient organization. Top management was mindful of the fact that cost must be minimal, to allow for steady growth of business at all times. To this end, the company ran an open management system by drawing up policies and manual of operations around and about almost everything. Manual of Operations, Manual of Accounts, Manual of Audit, Staff Conditions of Service, Approval and Spending limits and other policy documents made it easy to run an auto pilot system where the rules were clear to everyone.

Similarly, several internal committees were put in place to guide management in areas like promotions (Welfare Committee); Purchases, (purchases committee); Personal loan disbursement, (Works Committee); in sales of assets and scraps (Waste Disposal Committee) etc.

The open management system did not allow any management staff to take what was not due to him because every payment must be in tandem with an agreed policy and had to go through auditing process.

...AND THE ODDS

Even though our organogram and chain of command looked fairly well structured, the problem of absolute control by a single individual bedeviled us and created cracks in our smooth operations few years into existence; an odd that can be attributed to the nature of partnerships especially in Africa, where the principal partner wants total domination in all spheres. The problem is one of overwhelming, if not an overreaching behaviour to gain sole importance and recognition in a company. The problem of egocentrism and dictatorship that usually hamper organizations from running smoothly to achieve desired success.

At *Trust*, when I noticed that this problem was rearing its ugly head, I drew up a memo to the Chief Executive Officer, Mall. Kabiru Yusuf on December 19, 2000. The

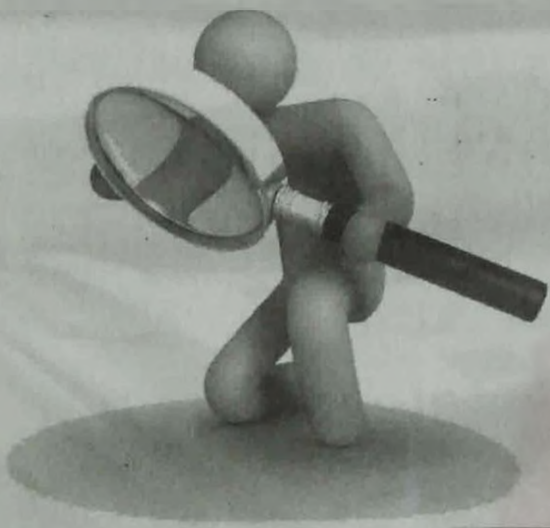
import of my memo was the need to quickly put in place a defined Company Organogram, a Business Policy, a Salary Structure, Staff Condition of Service etc that would allow us tap the vast potential we had and make us achieve the set target of about N80m revenue which we had set for ourselves for the financial year 2001. Even though the CEO was amenable to my suggestions, we constantly had problems of implementation as our perceptions on matters differed in this regard.

The major contention was the perceived role of a Chief Executive Officer which Peter Drucker had resolved a long time ago when he answered a pertinent question of "What is the work of a CEO?" since enormous attention is paid to them and they are sometimes revered as corporate saviors and reviled as corporate scoundrels.

Drucker, in one of his last work before he died 2005 had said, "The CEO is the link between the inside, that is, the organization, and the outside of society, economy, technology, markets, and customers. Inside there are only costs. Outside, there are only results."

The desire to control the inside became a compelling worry for me and sometimes caused friction between the two of us as executive directors having separate schedules of duties from day one.

Drucker's statement turned out to be true as we got a dose of such ills. Indeed our experience showed there was truly a need to avoid over concentration of power in an individual especially in a newspaper operation that calls for daily attention and details. No wonder, some publishers in Nigeria who can't restrain their personal influence and control from the daily running of their companies continually hamper the growth of their businesses. They consequently deny themselves more returns on investment because things work less efficiently with the overbearing attitude of one individual.



CHAPTER 5

**EVOLUTION OF
BUSINESS
OPERATIONS**

In the last three decades in Nigeria, newspapers have evolved through many stages. One of the most remarkable changes is that you don't need to travel miles on the road in the night to deliver your newspapers.

In the 70s, 80s and up to the 90s, newspaper companies bought many distribution vans to move copies across the country. Students and regular commuters who wanted to travel from towns like Lagos to Ilorin, Kaduna, Ibadan, Kano, Port-Harcourt, Benin, Enugu, Jos, and so on, waited for distribution vans to hitch a ride. As bad as the roads were then, newspaper vehicles crisscrossed the roads at night to deliver the first edition of newspapers that were printed at night usually to far-flung markets.

The first editions were printed at about 9p.m, immediately after the 'News at 9' on the Nigeria

Television Authority (NTA). Since late stories could barely be accommodated, some newspapers even printed as early 7p.m to enable them distribute early to far markets. The *Kwara Herald* newspaper, which was run by the Kwara State government, sent pick-up vans to many towns and I remember as a student in ABU Zaria in the mid-80s, I sneaked into one of the newspaper delivery vans to Kaduna whenever I missed my train from Ilorin on my way back to school.

In no time, however, most newspapers lost these vehicles to accidents, which took a huge toll on operational costs. Apart from the misuse of these vehicles by drivers, the high cost of fuel and insecurity on the roads made it impracticable for most newspapers to replace them.

In the mid-80s, the Concord Press established a subsidiary company 'Bulk Delivery Company Services Ltd', that was to deliver newspapers for Concord Press and other newspapers in Nigeria. Good as the objective was, the company did not survive for long.

At *Citizen*, by the time I was transferred to the Kaduna office in 1993, the company had two of such distribution vehicles driven by relatively old men that relied on younger men like us to push the vehicles intermittently whenever the ignition failed. In fact, often they did. The first Hausa word I picked from the elderly drivers of the vehicle when I arrived in Kaduna then was '*sai antura*', literally meaning 'except it is pushed!'

Just as distribution logistics was a nightmare, so was printing of the papers for most organizations. Most media houses acquired printing presses that occupied large spaces but printed mostly black and white pages. Most newspapers used the popular but relatively expensive Goss Community machines to print only 16 pages in black and white at a run speed. That required 3-runs to achieve the standard 48 pages newspaper in one night. In the production process, the pre-Press took a huge part of production time. The Computer-To-Plate (CTP) technology had not evolved in the industry at the time, while the 'copy and paste' method into the computer wasted time compared to the modern digital

process. Same with Computer-To-Film – plate, which delayed production time for not less than two hours behind the printing schedule.

In the entire work flow system, from writing the stories to imputing in the computer, to sub-editing, pre-press, Press and finally to distribution, the newspaper business was a daily lesson in crisis management of sorts.

But over the years the tide has turned. For example, reporters now use laptops, phones and other gadgets to file in their stories and send directly to the newsroom without passing through the typesetter or computer operator. Even in the area of news editing itself, modern software has made it easier for reporters and editors to edit and control the news flow.

Also in terms of news variety, there are now limitless news sources for editors, bloggers, citizen journalists, photo streams on internet etc. The stages of production have also been made easy through the use of Computer-To-Plate machines; quality has also been improved.

What about also the satellite transfer of editorial materials from one point to the other, which has enabled newspapers to print simultaneously in different locations? As such, most Nigeria newspapers now have printing presses outside their main markets. Those located in Lagos now simultaneously print their editions in Abuja and those based in Abuja similarly print in Lagos for their Lagos market.

Overall, the printing machines are now better with auto-colour units, which help to produce good quality newspapers in record time. Nigeria newspapers are certainly looking better in terms of printing now. Indeed, news currency is now better and newspaper content trailing real time posts on the internet.

....BUT THE KNOTTY ISSUES

Many have asked why most newspapers continue to run their own presses. The answer has been elusive in the Nigeria media set up. When we visited the legendary, *Gothenburg Post* in Sweden, which was founded in 1813, they didn't have a printing press of their own. The

management took us to another company that prints their titles. Even at *The Nation* in Nairobi, the company set up a subsidiary company that prints for them.

Nigeria newspapers continue to pile up presses because there is limited co-operation within the industry. Newspaper owners obviously don't trust one another. Worse still, there are not enough commercial presses set up mainly for that purpose.

If the 'printing problem' has now been resolved through the ownership of presses by newspaper houses, what is to be said about the amount of money being used to buy newsprint? Sourcing newsprint, which is a very essential input of newspaper production, has been a big problem for the industry. In a population of 170million, where adult literacy is about 52% according to World Bank figures, and where an estimated average of 100 tons of newsprint is consumed in a day, it is shocking that there is no single newsprint production plant in the country that produces raw materials for local newspapers. Every operator buys at exorbitant prices from abroad.

When, sometimes during the President Obasanjo regime, he invited members of the Newspaper Proprietor Association of Nigeria (NPAN) for a dinner at the presidential villa which I attended, Obasanjo had sarcastically offered to sell 50% of the Federal government shares at Oku Iboku Pulp and Paper Mill in Akwa Ibom to NPAN if the Akwa Ibom State Government was ready to pay for the other 50% new capitalization.

That was before Negriz Group bought the company in a Privatization process that seems to have nailed the coffin shut for the company since then.

In a *Punch* Newspaper report, published on June 22, 2016, the host community of Oku Iboku protested the asset stripping that was going on at the company. The newspaper reported and I quote hereunder:

“Indigenes of Oku Iboku community in Akwa Ibom State have protested against what they perceive as asset-stripping of Oku Iboku Pulp and Paper Mill by Negriz

Group, an indigenous engineering company servicing the energy and industrial sectors.

"The people, who took the protest to Itu Paramount Ruler palace, claimed that since the Negriz Group took over the mill, the firm had resorted to asset-stripping instead of adding value to the mill.

"One of the protesters and community leader, Dr. Demson Ekong, on Monday, listed the items that had been sold out as 22 Isuzu logging trucks, caterpillar, D7, D8, grader, bucket loader, mountain loggers

"Other items, according to the aggrieved community member, are central air-conditioner, tower crane, mobile welding machines and a 500KVA Cummins generator.

Ekong said, "The company that bought the Oku Iboku Pulp and Paper Mill for many years has not done anything about the company other than resort to asset-stripping.

"Negriz has sold out dozens of equipment and it keeps on promising us that the following month, the mill will be reactivated for operation. This keeps going on like that and nothing has happened.

"Many families and workers that depended on the paper mill have died. The government is insensitive; insensitive in the sense that liquidation does not imply asset-stripping, insensitive in the sense that the FG gave Negriz Group order to reactivate and operate the mill within five years."

"He said the community had given Negriz or the FG two months to reactivate the mill or face the risk of a shutdown of the mill while the entire estate would be turned to a farmland by the community.

"The engineering consultant to the organisation, Mr. Imo Ekaette, said the community had a right to protest following the delay in reactivating the mill.

"He, however, denied the asset-stripping allegation, adding that he had an inventory of the entire equipment of the company.

"Ekaette explained that some assets were already obsolete; adding that assets replacement by the group should not be seen as stripping.

"I have told the community that there is no asset-stripping in the company. Some of the assets Negriz acquired are obsolete. Some manufacturers of these assets have folded up and spare parts are not even available for them.

"If replacement is the asset-stripping, I don't understand it. I have inventory of all the assets in the mill. The community has a right to protest because of the delay in reactivating the mill, even I, myself; I am affected.

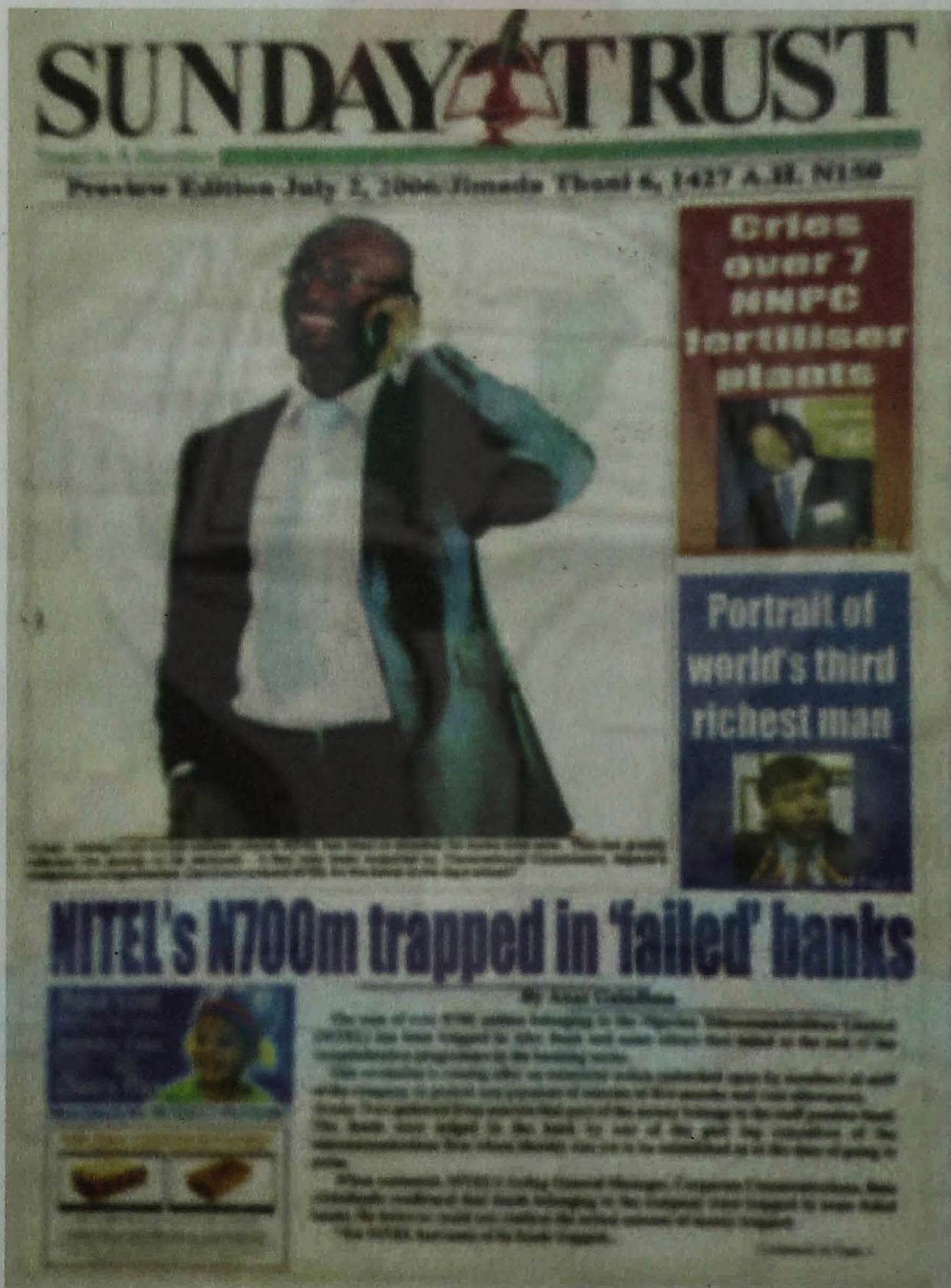
"The mill was supposed to generate employment for the teeming youths in the area, I sympathise with them," the

engineering consultant to Negris added".

This extensive quotation is necessary to drive home the point that the single largest essential input of production in newspaper industry today is newsprint and is not produced here in Nigeria. No entrepreneur has been able to make the required investment in this potentially profitable area overtime.

According to another newspaper reports, there is capital flight in the printing sector due to the inability of the three integrated pulp and paper mills, the Nigerian Paper Mill (NPM), the Nigeria Newsprint Manufacturing Company (NNMC) and Nigerian National Paper Manufacturing Company (NNPMC) established by the Federal Government in the 1960s and 1970s to maintain and sustain optimal capacity. Indeed, it is estimated that a total of about N50 billion is being spent annually to import different types of papers into Nigeria on an annual basis. This is apart from other associated costs of non-performance of the mills.

Therefore, as the industry grapple with problems of newsgathering, production and distribution it leaves a big window of opportunity for new investments.



Preview edition of *Sunday Trust* July 3, 2006.



The author standing as 3rd from right with other African Journalists at the G8 summit in Kananaskis, Calgary, Canada 2001.



The author walking behind the Former President of Ghana, Jerry John Rawlings and his wife when they arrived at Abuja International Airport to attend the Annual *Trust* Dialogue Event of 2008

Monday, August 16, 2010 No. 46

朝日新聞
グローブ 第46号

The Asahi Shimbun
GLOBE

globe.asahi.com

G-1

Africa & Japan: Made for each other

アフリカの夢

本社から
1万3000キロ。
ナイジェリアに
「日本」売り込む

朝

「朝日新聞」が、アフリカ大陸に目を向けた。1万3000キロ離れたナイジェリアに、日本の存在感をアピールする。...

ナイジェリアは、石油や天然ガスなどの資源が豊富で、アフリカ最大の人口を抱えている。日本は、この国に投資し、経済発展を促すことで、自国の利益を確保しようとしている。

朝日新聞は、この機会に、日本の技術やノウハウをナイジェリアに紹介し、両国間の友好関係を深めたいと考えている。

朝日新聞は、この機会に、日本の技術やノウハウをナイジェリアに紹介し、両国間の友好関係を深めたいと考えている。



日本の選択

密林を拓く
建機やトラック。
「ここは将来、
香港になる」

沼

ナイジェリアの密林には、多くの資源が眠っている。日本は、この国に投資し、経済発展を促すことで、自国の利益を確保しようとしている。

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サッカーのワールドカップに挑んだ2010年のアフリカ。熱気が増えた
みれば、日本でアフリカの出来事が報道される機会が少ない。
だが、その可能性の大きさに、世界がアフリカを見る日は確実に
変わりつつある。ナイジェリア、ケニア、タンザニアを記者が多いた。




The Author standing at ground zero level of Media Trust Headquarters' building, August 2010. Pictured by Minoru Tsukishima, a Japanese journalist with the Globe newspaper, Japan after an interview with the author as the Managing Director of Media Trust Limited The caption in Japanese language reads "Isiaq Ajibola, 46, managing director of Famous newspaper Company told me that revenue from advertisement, publication and profit are all increasing, and new building is under construction."



L-R Former President of Nigeria, Alh. Umaru Musa Yar'dua being received by the author at Media Trust Head office during his campaign for presidential election that he won in 2007.



Courtesy visit to the Governor of Ekiti State (2011-2015), Dr. Kayode Fayemi (3rd from left) by Isiaq Ajibola (4th from left) and other colleagues at the *Daily Trust* Newspaper



CHAPTER 6

**SYNERGY BETWEEN
EDITORIAL AND
BUSINESS**

The synergy between Editorial and Business operations is very fundamental in any newspaper. While the editorial role is to produce content, some of which usually run against interests of governments, powerful individuals and advertisers in the society, the Advert department is to maintain good clientele with organizations and individuals that can add value to the business by way of advertisement.

Such contradictions were the bane of running an editorial cum business interest and balancing them in the appropriate manner. While some newspapers usually draw a thin line between these seemingly conflicting interests, a few have erected strong walls in between them. Those that maintain the thin lines, which include newspapers in advanced societies, now device means to woo advertisers to bring in business.

This synergy became clearer to me after attending a World Association of Newspapers (WAN-IFRA) conference on Digital Innovation in Berlin in 2011.

The idea was to prepare newspaper houses for continuous innovation in the face of declining revenue in print vis-à-vis the online version or the new media. Interestingly, newspapers in emerging economies like India and Brazil, which were not as badly hurt by declining circulation figures compared with newspapers in western countries, have also devised new ways of achieving cooperation between editorial and business.

On the editorial side, more and more newspapers are trying to inspire readers and enhance brand loyalty by deepening reports and coverage on target groups. Such groups, for example, include Business Associations, Technocrats, Lawmakers, Judiciary, Women, Students, Media and other professionals. There are also attempts to deepen online reporting and prepare for tablet PC (iPad), smartphones and other more friendly means of accessing content.

How can newspapers redesign at regular intervals, to improve appeal? How can they reduce offensive pictures like a child carrying a snake and instead, portray the good side of life in human-interest stories? How can they organize competitions like Quizzes and Essays in the paper to inspire young children?

On the business side, newspapers are also exploring opportunities like event management, collaboration and sponsorships.

The idea of promoting Editorial and Business synergy in a newspaper must have been borne out of my personal experience in dealing with issues relating to strict separation of the two most important departments of a newspaper in my career. Taking a historical view at this delicate balance, I found out that it has been deeply rooted in American journalism since the early nineteenth century.

Wealthy American publishers who drove their newspapers' fortunes through high circulation figures of

post-world war era erected big walls between the newsroom and the business department. This was when only few companies existed and advertisement revenue was way below 25% of total revenue compared to circulation income of over 70% in the American newspapers. At the *Chicago Tribune* building for example, there were even separate sets of elevators for editorial department staff and staff of the business department while the General Manager, who oversaw the business operations, spoke only to the Editor among the other newsroom staff in order to maintain physical separation between the two. Most American publishers adopted the separation approach in various degrees depending on personal philosophies of the publisher up until 1970s.

If a newspaper was seen as a business concern and was to make money, the wall began to constitute an impediment; the newspaper could possibly increase its finances if the wall had punctured holes where editorial could talk to business on the other side of the wall. Breaking down the wall and making more money was not difficult if there

were no concerns about public interest, intellectual honesty and credibility. Write only stories that are pushed by advertisers; deploy newsroom resources to the subjects that market research and surveys tell you people say they want to read; be partisan in editorial policy; fear government in power or even be their Public Relations organ.

Some notable Nigerian newspapers have not only punctured the wall between the two departments in order to make money, they have literally called in the bulldozer to completely take them down. Some have made efforts to turn editors to advertisement canvassers rather than leave them in the position of newsmen, dealing a rude shock to the journalism profession and thereby compromising the editorial integrity of their newspapers.

The impenetrable wall takes care of both editorial and business considerations. A newspaper's credibility is what it is worth. If its editorial reporting cannot be trusted, in the case of news, and convincing in the case of opinion, if readers suspect that the judgment behind the

information and opinions are influenced by other than journalistic standards, the newspaper will soon be in trouble. Conflicts of interest between journalism and business interest, as well as the appearance of conflicts, must therefore be avoided.

Similarly, the challenge of most newspapers in Nigeria is the pressure of running advertorial as if they were not paid for. You will easily see advertisement materials signed off as editorial content without warning readers that such is an advertorial, or a newspaper providing more to the advertiser than the space they have actually purchased. Because circulation and or readership figures are not vetted by any organ like the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC), advertising cost is controversial and some might even say, overpriced. Erecting the wall therefore is important. It protects the integrity of both the journalistic content and the advertising content while allowing both departments to pursue their separate goals.

However, there must be cooperation between the two key departments; editorial and business. The bottom line

must be watched every time. Synergy must encourage the reluctant editorial divide to meet the business interest of the paper in a structured manner.

Some practitioners have frowned at the presence of Editors and other editorial staff at regular business committee meetings with advertising and circulation managers. But this has become imperative because they share a common interest - survival of the paper. There must be reasonable pressure on journalists to weigh their judgment alongside the business judgments of the Advert Manager. If this is not done, it may cause some financial harm to the organization in the world of competition.

The generous use of pictures and stories of Annual General Meetings of companies and even personal lives of corporate executives like the picture of the Managing Director of a company should be explored by the paper as a form of Public Relations, instead of the scary picture of a child carrying a snake in his hands. This is likely to interest more readers, enhance empathy and clientele and in turn engender synergy.

Another advantage of such synergy is that it can pinpoint areas of new interests for the people like school activities, property, dieting, motorbike racing, lottery, clubbing etc. that the marketing team might find out in their feedback activities. The marketing managers are also expected to attend editorial meetings to give story ideas that can be useful for the paper.

By and large, just as business people can direct attention of editors to content development, editors can also direct the Advert manager to potential areas and sources of advert generation.

In the contemporary world of publishing, it has become increasingly difficult not to encourage synergy between editorial and business. Indeed, it has become increasingly difficult not to weigh the cost - benefit of introducing new content without looking at the potential advertisement revenue it would generate.

However, editorial collaboration should not be done in such a way that it compromises the editorial integrity of

the paper or having the business department going behind to ask for payments for editorial services. The hallmark of Editorial and Business Synergy is in the transparency between the two departments.

QUICK GUIDE TO INTER-DEPARTMENTAL RELATIONS

EDITORIAL

1. The editorial department must separate 'News' from 'Opinion'.
2. Opinion Pages must be marked as 'Features' or Op-ed.
3. Photo news must vary to include social diary, corporate events and human interest. News must meet journalistic standards; balanced, fair, unbiased etc.
4. Editorial sections must innovate to include all aspects of life; Politics, Economy, Sports, etc.
5. Editors must respect business department inputs on use of stories.
6. The newspaper must redesign from time to time.
7. There should be constant innovation with both print and online edition.

ADVERT

1. There must be production deadline for advert dummy and inputs for production. A 5 p.m. deadline everyday is ideal.
2. Total numbers of advert pagination per day should determine the number of pages to be printed. A ratio of 65:35 between editorial and advert pages is appropriate.
3. Adverts should rarely encumber news pages; where they do, a special position charge must apply.
4. Guidelines for placements should be developed and circulated internally and externally.
5. Management approval of credit ads must be copied to Audit and Finance departments.
6. There should be market segmentation, using 'Geography' or 'Sectors' e.g Maitama, Wuse, Garki markets or Banking and Finance, Telecommunication etc
7. There should be a data base of all potential institutions, banks, parastatals etc
8. There should be the 'Big Data' on readership for both the print and online versions for regular presentation to companies.

9. There should be an overall Annual Budget within which advert budgets must be shared to Advert personnel.
10. The annual Budget must be based on concrete parameters such as previous performances in revenue, expansion plan, acquisition of new technology or assets and trend in industry and overall performance of the national economy.
11. The budget process must start from inputs from managers. A budget committee is necessary and should sit three months before the end of the financial year.
12. There should be 'Reward' for those who attain targets and 'caution' for those who don't - it's a carrot- and- stick thing.
13. Advert Revenue must be constantly captured with accounting software that integrates with other departments.
14. Advert Manager should sit in at the weekly editorial meetings.

CREDIT CONTROL UNIT

1. A Credit Policy should be developed and known to all.
2. Generally, credit transactions must be discouraged. Reward cash payments.
3. An approved list of your credit customers based on 4cs of credit: (i) Character (ii) Capacity (iii) Capability (iv) Collateral must be developed.
4. A monthly/ quarterly credit advisory to staff who bring adverts would be necessary.
5. Cash transactions should be generally discouraged in this modern day of e-banking.
6. Reinvigorate your marketing strategies on online advertisement.

THE DON'TS IN ADVERT

1. Don't deceive your readers by publishing adverts as if they are editorial materials.
2. Don't ignore advertisers when they ask for a make good on their productions.
3. Don't undercut yourself by giving too much discounts.

4. Don't allow the editorial department to take advert responsibility by tasking them to look for ads.
5. Don't encourage the editorial department to publish articles that could be better placed as adverts.

MARKETING DEPARTMENT

1. Get printed copies endorsed by the Head of Production and an Audit staff at the press.
2. The master list must be reported by email to top management immediately after production.
3. The list must also be keyed into accounting software immediately.
4. Weekly reports must be submitted to top management immediately.
5. A market policy on pricing, payments, credit, unsold collections etc must be developed. Such policy must be known to all stake holders.
6. Spread out your circulation as widely as possible; I don't believe in hard policy of pre-payment by distributors/vendors. It shrinks your circulation.
7. Identify your key markets and satisfy them first.

8. Never be late to your key markets.
9. Carry out readership surveys from time to time.
10. Outsource your distribution as much as possible.
Don't do what transporters can do for you.
11. Arrange regular familiarization/reward events with vendors and distributors.
12. Keep close watch on quantity circulated and copies printed.
13. Try specialized marketing like special spot sales and subscription.
14. Target influential people within your reach.
15. Scrutinize unsold copies. Audit tear-sheets of master head.
16. Discourage credits to distributors, except a few.
17. Manage your press production in terms of numbers of copies printed and sold and review them monthly/ Quarterly.
18. Subscription of hard copy is a failure in Nigeria; try that with your PDF version online.
19. Marketing manager must sit in at weekly editorial meetings.

FINANCE

1. Organize the Finance department into: Revenue section, Payment Section, Salaries & Remunerations section, Material Management section, Credit Control section (Advert and Marketing), Purchases etc
2. Pay monthly cash handing allowance to staff of the department.
3. Use Accounting software to drive the whole operations and monitor their linkages to other departments.
4. The Finance department must be the organic link to all other departments.

OWNER-MANAGER CONUNDRUM

Because the proprietors run most Nigerian newspapers, there is always the problem of the owner-manager overestimating their contributions, roles and remuneration. In as much as it is good to get a good reward for a job well done, it is better for owners to exercise restraint till the end of every financial year when they can earn dividends from profits. Some owners in this

respect puncture the circle and create cash flow problems for the organization.

It is very critical to avoid collecting any money as owner manager that are not part of owners emolument. Pay yourself very good remuneration but don't collect anything outside that. The company can take care of your domestic needs like house repairs and maintenance. When traveling, collect only what is due to you as funding for transport, hotel and accommodation and so on in a limit that has been approved. You can introduce the payment of interim dividend every quarter when the Quarterly Management Account is ready and profit is declared. That way, everyone will be afraid to touch company money in an unauthorized manner.

Managing for success is not about creating a sharp division between editorial and other departments as most newspapers tend to do. The tendency is for publishers who usually have editorial background to give more recognition to editorial than other departments.

Overall, all staff must be trained and retrained in their various areas for maximum impact on the bottom line.





CHAPTER 7

**INTERNATIONAL
MEDIA LANDSCAPE**

COVERING THE G8 SUMMIT

As soon as the company stabilized and the weekly became more authoritative, a floodgate of opportunities for international reportorial assignments, professional engagements and trainings came. It was such that the Canadian embassy in Nigeria provided for me to cover the G8 summit in Kananaski, Canada, in 2001, along with 12 other African journalists.

The G8 Summit coverage was particularly interesting. At the preparatory stage, the excitement of visiting Canada for the first time was overwhelming, notwithstanding the much talked about Canadian cold weather which was below 5 degree centigrade at the time. As soon as we arrived in Ottawa, there were both English and French instructors who took us on along the two-language divides through the two-week-long programme.

The intercontinental convergence of most powerful leaders in the world led by Presidents George Bush of United States of America and Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria as arrow head of G8 countries and the observers group respectively was very instructive to me and indeed made an impact on my future leadership experience.

Heads of States made comical jests at each other or so it seemed, as President Obasanjo loudly and repeatedly called, with his deep Yoruba accent - certainly far from the correct pronunciation - the name of President of Algeria, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who was in the same hotel with him from afar to come to his suite, to the amusement of other leaders and world journalists! It was Obasanjo in his elements, as he practically shouted at the top of his voice until the president of Algeria came over to join him.

The common problem of underdevelopment in Africa was a burning issue on the agenda of the G8 Summit that year. However, the most powerful countries seemed to perceive Africa as the parasite of the new world order that must be helped or they would continue to create problems

for the world. African journalists were miffed at such a despicable stance of world leaders, but the critical stance of some groups like The Group of Six Billion People (G6B) against the G8 Summit, played a fundamental role in expressing doubts and genuine concern of G8's support for Africa's development. Could this be the reason why Obasanjo was building consensus to rally other African leaders? This was the question on the minds of most of the 12 African journalists that covered the summit.

On the sidelines of the summit was the attention given to the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), which was very focused on Africa and it was amazing to discover that CIDA was involved in many projects in the continent at the time.

The zero tolerance stance of the Canadian government towards corruption was manifest in the running of government affairs. Despite the fact that the government sponsored our trip, expenses were curtailed. I remember "starving" for missing my in-flight meal aboard the

Canadian airline that took us from Ottawa to Calgary. I had slept off during the four hours' flight when lunch was being served. I was not paid my usual per diem allowance when we arrived in Calgary to enable me arrange for my own meal. Our tour guide had politely informed me that since I missed lunch on board, it was against the Canadian government policy to pay me any other allowance as it was assumed that lunch fees were already paid with the flight tickets. Luckily, it was getting to dinnertime when we arrived in Calgary and I didn't have to starve for longer than I could bear!

Similarly, it was arranged that we have lunch with the Mayor of Calgary at the city centre. Few minutes to lunchtime, the Mayor strolled in from across the street, to the venue without fanfare.

Lessons learnt at the G8 Summit were remarkable especially for those of us who covered it from the perspective of political and economic imbalance between the most powerful countries of the world and Africa. While most of us were struggling with sending stories

through our Yahoo and Google emails, others from developed countries were showing off the robust websites of the media houses where they worked, with events at the G8 summit trending simultaneously with Kananaski.

The summit hosted by Canadian Prime minister, Jean Chretien, was held in a remote resort in Alberta, which made the summit different in some ways for me. It was necessary to make the summit not easily accessible for protesters and members of the civil society. Kananaski was the first to take place after 9/11. Mass mobilization to the venue was impaired as Summit venue was about 150 kilometers from Calgary with more than about 13 checkpoints.

Pockets of protests only took place around Calgary with a diversity of tactics and strategies to get noticed. E.g. Street parties outside an official summit function hosted by the Mayor, a street soccer game that challenged the police to join (which they turned down) etc.

In support of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), which was then recently launched, the Kananaski Summit produced an African Action Plan which contained commitments on promoting peace and security; strengthening institutions and governance; fostering trade, economic growth and sustainable development; implementing debt relief; expanding knowledge; improving health and confronting HIV/AIDS; increasing agricultural productivity; and improving water resource management in Africa.

Furthermore, the G8 Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction was adopted at the summit, with members committing \$20 billion toward the security of some weapons of mass destruction in the former Soviet Republic.

Ironically, the conflict in Libya in subsequent years made nonsense of this agreement. During our breakfast meeting with President Umar Musa Yar'dua facilitated by Olusegun Adeniyi in 2007, the President's spokesman, confided shortly after he became president, that he was

worried about how to deal with the proliferation of weapons in Sahara Africa emanating from the crisis in Libya - which was largely fueled by the desire to control the political economy of Libya by key members of the G8 Summit.

AT NATION, NAIROBI

The burning desire to succeed made us to learn fast from successful and well-run newspapers. In Nigeria, *Punch* Newspaper became our national reference while *The Daily Nation* of Nairobi was our continental reference. The Editor-in-Chief had arranged for me to attend a two weeks Internship with them in Nairobi, Kenya, in June 2005. For me, it was an opportunity to learn how a newspaper is run in other places.

The business mogul, Aga Khan, a Swiss immigrant, established the *Nation* of Nairobi in March 1960. The newspaper was founded at a time of deep political and economic uncertainty in Kenya. The aim was to provide a voice for the majority African population who has just gotten independence from Britain.

The similarity in the history of the formation of *The Nation* is therefore hereby remarkable. The *Trust* was also founded at a time when opposition views in Nigeria grew against the military regime and clamoring for democracy was at its height.

Within a short time, *The Nation* continued to grow at a fast rate and began to buy off other newspapers in East and Central Africa, such as *The Monitor* in Uganda.

It also published the weeklies, the vernacular (*Taifa Leio*) and specialized titles in Uganda and Tanzania. With its formidable titles, the media group was unarguably the biggest in the African continent then, outside South Africa

This was at a time the Kenyan population was about 40m and Nigeria was about 140m. Adult literacy in Kenya was about 83% while that of Nigeria was 65.5%. GDP per head was \$350 in Nigeria compared to Kenya, which was \$260.

Operationally, the *Nation* media group was poles apart from what we were doing at the *Trust*. While there were about 180 staff in their editorial department, with a very senior journalist with about 16 years experience as Editorial Administrator, the *Trust* had just about 30 full time reporters with no such editorial administrator that we call Managing Editor. The Advert department of the *Nation* newspaper had about 50 staff divided into; Advertising Centre, Advert Agency, Advert Administration, Graphic Unit, Direct Sales, Supplement and New Business, while *Trust* had about five advert staff at the time.

Also, the giant media group had a robust Information Technology Department divided into IT services, Business Systems, Network Services Unit and Web and Internet, all of which were not available in *Trust* then. They also had a giant KBG printing machine valued at about N1billion while *Trust* had no printing press and still outsourced its printing to Heritage Press, Abuja.

Because of the seemingly huge gap between the Human and Technology capital investments in both papers, *Trust* had a rate of return on investment that was even higher than the *Nation*. In the latter, profit ratio was only about 20% of annual turnover while that of *Trust* was about 50%. The huge gap in returns could largely be attributed to underutilization of technology and inadequate staffing among other factors at the *Trust* newspaper.

The lessons I learnt during the internship paid off at work back home. The simple lesson was simply that, if we wanted to record growth and increase the share value of the company, we needed to increase investments in Human and Technology resources of the company, which was too low at the time.

The heavy investments in technology and human capital, which I noticed during my first visit to the newspaper in 2005, were still visible when I visited the paper again ten years after in November 2015. Our board had gone on a retreat in Kenya about one year after I left my day-to-day job at *Trust* as Managing Director.

We decided to visit the *Nation* on a business familiarization visit. We were amazed to know that the company had downsized its work force and a leaner structure with about half of the staff of our newspaper. Their circulation still remained relatively high and possibly the figure of about four leading newspapers in Nigeria. The broadcast arm, comprising radio and television were thriving and the company making steady profits. Most of our directors, especially Alhaji Hussani Abdulrahman, were very keen to understand why they were able to run such a lean structure compared to ours and especially the concept of engaging a global manager as Chief Executive Officer and not a journalist, which the *Nation* has practiced at some time.

As at 2005 when I visited the company, the market value of the *Nation* was about \$117 million and the group ranked 6th on the Nairobi Stock Exchange. Now, the market capitalization has grown to about \$257m. The website has become a must visit for most Kenyans and hit 5.4m during a national referendum.

The Nation Media Group runs 12 print titles, radio and television stations and have employed more than a thousand people.

VISIT TO THE *NEW YORK TIMES*

The knowledge and experience I acquired at the *The Nation*, Kenya, propelled me to visit established newspapers wherever I travelled to. In October 2010 when I wanted to attend a leadership training programme at Georgetown University in Washington DC, USA, I had approached Adams Nositer, who was the West African Correspondent of the *New York Times* based in Senegal, and whom I had just met at Maiduguri where he was covering the relatively new Boko Haram insurgency for his paper, to facilitate my visit to their head office in New York. Adam happily arranged this and I was received at the *New York Times* on a day's excursion.

The legendary *New York Times*, located in the heart of the business district of New York City, was established in 1867. Since then, it has changed ownership several times and diluted its shares with about 20% equity being held

by the public. The paper is an authoritative newspaper not only in the US, but to consummate readers all over the world. It was gratifying to visit the headquarters of the paper to see the wide gap in the running of the legendary institution compared to a relatively new organisation like *Daily Trust*.

The *New York Times* has such lofty ideas as celebrating wartime journalists. They also have a special place for presidents who visit them. This, they do, by placing visiting guests' pictures on their office walls. They do the same with directors of companies and other people they hold in high esteem. They also have a transparent office setting, which allows editors, reporters, and other staff in the newsroom to mingle freely. People on the upper floor can well see those below and adjacent to them. The building's architectural design gives occupiers a friendly, open and transparent view of one another's office space. The idea is to imbibe the culture of transparency in its staff. At the end of the day, the lessons learnt were as legendary in my mind as the institution itself.

Realizing the impact of the digital revolution in America, the *New York Times* focused attention on growing its digital content in the last ten years or so. The heavy investments in this direction has started yielding results, whereby the company has noticed advertising migration to the online, even though it is not yet enough to augment its falling revenue from print advertisement.

Leading newspapers in America and Europe are experiencing the same trend while Asia and Africa are slowly coming to terms with the reality.





CHAPTER 8

DEFYING
THE MYTHS

The *Trust* as a group defied some myths surrounding the success of a newspaper in northern Nigeria.

The three common myths that: (1) newspaper business needs huge financial outlay at inception (2) the northern market could not sustain a newspaper either from the readership or business point of view; and (3) editorial direction of private newspapers are always controlled by political interest of the owner(s). The *Trust* stable defied these myths.

The trajectory in growth and editorial influence of the paper did not support any of the above. Rather, decisions were made based on business opportunities and possibilities at every stage. There was no business blueprint, manual of operations or codified rules that

guided operations at the beginning. Instead, sheer determination of the directors and effective control at the managerial level made success possible.

When later, I read the celebrated book titled '*Built to Last - Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*, written by Jim Collins and Jerry Porras, I saw the relationship in most American visionary companies with our operations at *Trust*.

The book debunked the received wisdom and a dozen myths surrounding business success. This points to the fact that instincts, rather than set rules, are the major drivers of growth for a company that sets out in a small way. In the book, the Collins and Porras studied 18 truly exceptional and long lasting American companies and compared them to some of their direct competitors. The outcome of their research showed that some myths held as being responsible for business growth were not true. But of the twelve myths debunked in corporate America, seven proved to be very true of the *Trust newspaper* in some way.

MYTH 1: *It takes a great idea to start a great company.*

Collins and Poras debunked this as a myth and concluded that indeed, most American giants started with no specific idea, and a few started with outright failures, but what is important is to start at all and begin a journey that may take a long walk, hence, starting with a great idea has its own implication on costs and organic growth. Starting without a specific idea has similarities with how we started our Media Communications Company for two years doing all sorts of things before the newspaper publishing proper. In the operations of a company, there are decisions that must be taken immediately in direct response to external influences or even taking up opportunities at all. The best option therefore, is to start to explore many opportunities that come along the way.

MYTH 2: *Visionary companies require great and charismatic visionary leaders.*

This myth was debunked by Collins and Porras where they concluded that charisma is not necessarily required in a business venture and can actually be detrimental to its long-term prospects. They opined that like the founders

of the United States at the Constitutional Convention, the founders of long lasting companies concentrated more on building enduring institutions than on being individual leaders.

Best corporate practices that promote good governance plays a major role here. However, it is true to say that charismatic leaders command great attention to themselves and to their businesses but more often than not, that doesn't have tremendous impact on running a long lasting corporate concern. The *Trust* stable for instance, has a very conservative idea of not publishing the pictures of members of their Executive Management too often as the primary focus was only on the readers.

MYTH 3: *The most successful companies exist first and foremost to maximize profits.*

This is a basic business rule and widely taught in business schools. The maxim is "maximize shareholders wealth" at all times. The American authors found out in their study that visionary companies pursue many objectives among which money making is one. They found out that

'Yes, while companies seek profits, they are equally guided by a core ideology - core values and a sense of purpose beyond just making money'.

Comparing this to our *Trust* experience, this concept of social and community responsibility was one of the reasons why Trust first existed. Yes, profit making was important; the idea of fulfilling a yawning gap in media information dissemination in Nigeria was more paramount. Most of the initial investors did so out of sense of responsibility and not because of expected returns.

MYTH 4: *Visionary companies are great places to work for everyone.*

Contrary to this assertion, it was found that among the long lasting companies in America; only the staff that fit extremely well with the core ideology will find it a great place to work. Visionary companies are usually cult-like in ideological posturing and accommodate the set of people that would work for a long time in the company.

In this regard, some staff of Trust were relieved of their duties in their first few months in the company. I remember one pioneer staff that pilfered copies of the newspaper after the *Weekly Trust* started printing in 1998. This earned him an outright sack after only three months with the company. I also remember the disengagement of five staff at the same time from our Lagos office when a fraud was detected and they were implicated. Yet, there are staff that have spent almost the same time as the years of existence of the company working there.

MYTH 5: *Highly successful companies make their best moves by brilliant and complex strategic planning.*

Contrary to the above, Porras and Collins found out that "visionary companies make some of their best moves by experimentation, trial and error, opportunism and quite literally, accident". They continued, "What looks in retrospect like brilliant foresight and preplanning was often the result of "let's just try a lot of stuff and keep what works".

Although the adventure of *Trust* was limited to related print media expansion, the strategy has never been based on an ambiguous business blueprint. Instinct and what made sense formed basic rules of business. In truth, the company never had a strategic plan from the beginning.

In 2001, when *DailyTrust* debuted as a paper, we designed what was considered to be a good masthead for the paper. The pre-press messed up the colours and it came out as what was completely different from the original design the company had paid for. However, after consultations with few stakeholders, it was agreed that the wrongly printed masthead was better. Similarly, the company had to stop the publication of an insert in the weekend edition on a glossy paper because of the cost. We realized we were to spend about N120m per annum if we continued with the printing in colour. Consequently, a telephone conversation between the Chairman and I stopped that hemorrhage from that week.

MYTH 6: *The most successful companies focus primarily on beating the competition.*

Contrary to this, the most successful companies focus on beating itself. In the study cited, the authors found out that some companies, which have operated for over 150 years in America still found the need to continually improve themselves and not necessarily focus on beating the competition.

Even though competition performances are an important thing to watch, the *Trust* newspaper never set itself on competition in style and strategies for winning the market above any competition. The principle was that no matter how much was achieved, the company needed to do more to improve its standard from time to time.

MYTH 7: *Companies become visionary primarily through vision statements.*

It was found out that visionary companies attained their status not so much because of vision statements. Porras and Collins submitted that, "visionary companies attained their greatness not so much because they wrote

down vision, mission, values, purpose, or aspirational statements from day one. Writing such statements can be a helpful step, but not limited to that - as there are more steps to be taken to achieve goals".

Actually, *DailyTrust* had operated for more than a decade before we made clear Mission and Vision Statements that largely comprised of jottings of past records and strategies for future ambition of the company. These statements are regarded as obstacles down the staff ladder.

Looking at the above stated myths, it is safe to conclude that emerging companies must constantly reinvent and allow innovation to lead their path. Myths are inimical to business success and what really works is the courage and conviction to continue to experiment with new things over time.

THE QUANTUM LEAP

Advertising is the life wire of any media organization. It is like the oxygen that gives it life every moment of its

existence, especially at the initial stage of operations, when expenses on production, circulation and personnel out-weigh incoming revenue.

In Nigeria, big advertisers and advertising agencies are domiciled in Lagos. Banks were the kings of advertisements and promotions in those days when the telecom industry reform had not taken place. Later, the privatization of telecoms broke the monopoly of the national carrier, NITEL, which had tried its best to do what resembled a quarterly allocation of adverts to the numerous media houses.

Public sector adverts were few particularly under a fragile economy that was just transiting from military to civilian rule in 1999. Most companies were indeed not keen to advertise in a relatively new newspaper like *Trust* at the time.

However, critical and discerning minds in the South, CEO of companies, politicians etc wanted to read the paper every day and by all means. Christian clerics like

Reverend Father Mathew Kukah and Cardinal John Onaiyekan were regularly featured in our publications. Such critical minds found the need to balance their story or at least, offered 'empathetic' advertisement slots. So strong was the empathy that the first published edition of *Weekly Trust* had a paid advert in it. The character of the titles rapidly increased circulation to all parts of the North and to certain extent, few in the South.

Salisu Ibrahim spent at least one week at the end of every month in Lagos, visiting advertising agencies and corporate advertisers to compliment the efforts of management in winning them to the side of the company.

The consistency in the publication of a credible daily, the unprecedented increase in readership in the North, the economic boom of 2007 and democracy of 2009 all culminated into the eventual breakthrough we had in advertisement patronage.

As the deregulation of the economy under President Obasanjo evolved, new sectors like telecommunication

and banking became strong enough to join manufacturing conglomerates as members of the commanding heights of the Nigeria economy. These new economic giants became more competitive and aggressive in their trading game and advertising promotions.

At the turn of the new decade, the general world economic boom and increasing growth in the Nigeria economy enhanced advertisement budget for the print media in Nigeria tremendously. According to *Media Facts*, a report by a Lagos-based market research company, *Media Reach*, advertisement budget rose from about N4 billion in 2000 to about N16.5 billion in 2010, while total advertisement budget of the print, TV, radio and outdoor media at the end of the decade was about N97.6 billion.

In the category of most read newspapers in Nigeria, *Daily Trust* was the fourth most widely read daily nationally, and second most read in North Central and North Western states as at 2012. In the 2014 edition of *MediaFacts*, *Daily Trust* was specifically second most

read newspaper nationally and first in northern states.

Naturally, the now authoritative newspaper of the North became the hub of all companies willing to reach their target audiences in the region. The problem then shifted from lack of adverts in the paper to how to ensure prompt payments and effective collections of overdue accounts, as less than 50% of the advertisements were paid for before publication.



File photo of Senior Staff of Media *Trust* at a Management retreat in Accra, Ghana.



R-L: Former Governor of Kogi State, Captain Idris Wada (2012-2016), attending Daily Trust African of the year Event (2013), Isiaq Ajibola and Aliyu Akoshile Associate Director (Business).



The author, 2nd from right, with other participants attending a senior executive management programme at the Georgetown University Washington, D.C., 2010



Newly Completed Media Trust 6-story Headquarters Building, Utako, Abuja. 2013



CHAPTER 9

**CORPORATE
GOVERNANCE**

Corporate governance practice usually exists in an active board which must be balanced in length and breadth; meaning that it must compose of men and women of different age brackets of varied experiences in all aspects of life. The Media Trust board was like that. It comprised business people with ample experience in critical aspects of business operations. Members are sophisticated and upwardly mobile and they regularly attend meetings and board strategic sessions to make their valuable contributions.

The board started its regular quarterly meetings from day one with an Annual General Meeting (AGM) at the end of each financial year. It also holds one regular annual retreat, usually chaired by Mallam Wada Maida at inception, where key issues of editorial policy, strategic intent, and future plans were extensively discussed. The

board also functions with active board committees that look into various areas like Human Capital, Finance, Editorial, Corporate Social Responsibility etc. Big ideas bordering on editorial policy, strategic intent, succession plans were regularly discussed at such retreats.

Initially, a member of the board sponsored the accommodation of members on a retreat abroad. It was later that the company itself could afford to pay for everyone. I recall one of the earlier retreats in Cambridge University, London that I found particularly very interesting. External directors were asked to provide accommodation for themselves except the two executive directors then. Unfortunately the provision made for accommodation for each director could barely get a decent accommodation in Cambridge. We had to eventually lodge in the students' hostels, with the assistance of a Nigerian Professor who was teaching in the university then. At all the meetings, strategic intents and purposes were well developed and articulated. Without divulging any strategy map for the paper here, I would like to mention that appropriate strategy for the

company was identified and worked upon to achieve growth.

In this regard, owners of businesses as well as those that run them must, on a regular basis, generate insights that will make significant impact on the business. The ideas of adopting colour printing from black and white, moving shop from Kaduna to Abuja, and publishing daily, in addition to the weekly, were such strategic moves that had great impact on the growth of the paper. The master strategy must in this regard, be to have insights, understand current situation, create distinct value for customers and know what to really focus on at all times.

At the management level, corporate governance was taken seriously at various meetings and retreats. The first management retreat outside office was held in a small resort along the NNPC road in Kaduna in 1998. Subsequent management retreats outside town were held at Lokoja, Obudu cattle ranch, Lagos and later moved to neighboring countries like Cotonou in Benin Republic and Accra in Ghana. Management retreats

provided opportunities for key staff to generate new ideas that helped the company grow. The retreat is also to promote the practice of management concepts like Management by Objective (MBO) and Total Quality Management (TQM). Considering that the company did not begin with any manual of operations, editorial policy or any blue print whatsoever, the retreats were ideal places to exchange ideas that later formed the Company's Core Values, Mission and Vision Statements, Conditions of Service, Advertising Policy, Marketing Policy, Manual of Accounts, Manual of Audits and Organogram which literally turned the company into an auto pilot business.

THE FIRST CHAIRMAN

After the inauguration of the board, Alhaji Abdulmumin Bello became the pioneer chairman of the company. He was active, effective, very humane and caring. He empathized and identified with any staff or director even in times of challenges. He personally led my wife and I to a specialist doctor in Kaduna for surgery over a life-threatening health challenge. He did not only stay with us during the prolonged surgery, but gave substantial

amount of money that was enough to offset the hospital bills. He offered similar assistance to many other staff of the company at various times.

Alhaji Abdulmumin was the rallying point of all stakeholders, the board and staff of the company. He never failed to compliment where necessary. I remember he introduced me as '*Mr. Fix-It of Media Trust*' at one of the annual dinners organized by the company on the eve of the occasion of an annual Trust dialogue.

The pioneer chairman was fondly described as a humane and kindhearted team player that prefers to solve other people's problem at the expense of his comfort. He was a quintessential motivator and mentor, an incredible captain that willfully steered the ship of the company through the teething period.

THE PRESENT CHAIRMAN

Mallam Kabiru Yusuf was Managing Director/Editor-in-Chief for about ten years before he became the Chairman

in 2007. His goodwill, editorial prowess, commitment and dedication as an accomplished journalist provided the springboard on which the company thrived and became editorially successful. He had worked for *Triumph* Newspaper, *Today's Newspaper*, *Citizen Magazine* and *BBC* at various times as a reporter, editor and at managerial levels. A vastly travelled individual, his wealth of experience helped to chart a course for the 'no big money newspaper' venture that we embarked upon as an offshoot of the media and marketing consultancy outfit that we both managed. By 1998, we had written some new promoters to join us in a media venture proposal titled 'The Newspaper of the Future'. Those who responded were simply idealists rather than adventurous capitalists who were not looking for any quick gain from their investments.

Overall, the phenomenal growth of the company and the newspaper became a regular subject of discussion and comments at individual and public forums. Starting in a one-room Boys' Quarter office in Kaduna in 1996, the company now has a modern six-storey edifice in Utako,

Abuja, which serves as its head quarters. The company has also built other printing press in Kano, Maiduguri and Lagos apart from the head office plant in Abuja. The staff strength has equally multiplied from under 10 in 1998 to about 500 in 2014. More importantly, it has influenced major government decisions and become one of the most widely read newspapers in Nigeria.



CHAPTER 10

**THE POLITICAL
CHALLENGE OF
NEWSPAPER
PUBLISHING**

One of the key challenges of newspaper publishing is how to balance individual interest and public interest. Since individual interests aggregate into public interest, there is always an overrated ego of politicians and elites in society for newspapers to contend with most of the time. Some publishers who have set the course of their newspaper towards individual influence sometimes help to fester that opportunistic objective. However, the professional journalists will not waiver and will always navigate the murky waters.

That was why when Chief MKO Abiola, the publisher of the defunct *Concord Newspaper*, asked Bayo Onanuga, the then Editor of the paper, publisher of *TheNews* and now Managing Director of News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), to apologize to the government of General

Ibrahim Babangida over a story of misconduct of some air force officers in Lagos, he opted to resign his job. In his words, "Journalism is not meant to make the environment cozy for leaders of nations, but rather, to probe them to act in the interest of the larger society." It is this simple posturing that makes politicians and powerful individuals want to control the media by all means and often get recourse in some media professionals who are too gullible, greedy or unprofessional to care about the integrity of the profession.

I remember that in the run-up to the presidential election of 2003, the two main political parties in Nigeria, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP), under which former President Olusegun Obasanjo and General Muhammadu Buhari were presidential candidates respectively, complained that the papers were not supporting them. While Mallam Buba Galadima, an associate of General Muhammadu Buhari complained of over reporting the PDP, Mr. John Odey, who was at the Secretariat of the PDP, had come to the office to also complain about what, in his view, was

the over reporting of the ANPP, simply because the *Trust* had published General Buhari's campaign in Kano with a mammoth crowd of supporters on our cover that week.

Similarly, we had many complaints from political office holders over 'unfavourable' editorial reportage, even when the facts were clear.

As Managing Director of the paper, I often read the daily newspapers after the morning prayers. The dispatch rider would always tuck the paper through the entrance gate of my residence shortly after printing. Most of my politician friends found it difficult to believe that at *Trust*, directors gave the editors such level of freedom to publish whatever they considered newsworthy in the public interest. Not a few politicians have wondered aloud to me why unfavourable stories about them could not be 'killed' by the powerful top management whom they considered as friends. I often had to diplomatically explain to them that we do not interfere in what an editor publishes unless it bordered on national security.

After about half the first term of President Olusegun Obasanjo's regime as civilian President in 2001, our paper had become very critical of his government policies mainly due to public concern about wastes and corruption. Then, our Monday Columnist, Sam Nda-Isaiah, had written tons of articles on this issue and in one of those, had alleged that Gbenga Obasanjo, the son of the President, was involved in some multimillion naira deals with the Nigeria Minting and Printing Company, Abuja. Obviously infuriated by the article, Gbenga instituted a N50billion libel case against our company at an Ibadan High court. The case was eventually thrown out due to lack of diligence prosecution. This posed a challenge to our new publication and soon, we were labelled as an "opposition paper" by the ruling party. In fact, at a point, we learnt that the federal government had issued instruction that our titles should be denied adverts emanating from the Villa to serve as punishment for our critical stance.

The same challenge was posed at the state government level, where some governors also become regular

complainants on not just our editorials but even on the news content.

Yet, we needed to do business with government and had to make them comfortable to do so. This called for occasional courtesy visits to them to ask for their point of view and mend fences. Similarly, we visited individuals and corporate organizations in a deliberate move to carry everyone along. I specifically led my colleagues on an official tour to the then Governors of Jigawa State, Alhaji Sule Lamido; Kwara State, Senator Bukola Saraki(1999-2007); and Ahmed Abdulfatah (2007-date); Kogi State, Alh. Ibrahim Idris (2003-2011); and Captain Idris Wada (2011-2016); Benue State, Gabriel Suswam (2007-2015); Nassarawa State, Umar Tanko Almakura (2011- date); Governor of Rivers State who is now Minister of Aviation, Mr.Rotimi Amechi; Ekiti State, Dr.Kayode Fayemi (2011-2015); Minister of Federal Capital Territory, FCT, Adamu Aliero; Sokoto State, Dr Aliyu Wamakko (2007-2015); Kebbi State, Alh. Saidu Dakingari (2007-2015); Governor of Central Bank of Nigeria and now Emir of Kano, HRH Muhammadu

Sanusi II. We also visited many Chief Executives of Federal Parastatals. The interactive visits with these important segments of our readers afforded me first-hand information on their perceptions about our newspaper. Most gave glowing remarks about our professionalism and how they thought it had fared in the country.

Expectedly, some of them also had issues with us as they felt we only published the negative sides of their activities. Few must be singled out here though.

During the visit to the then Governor Bukola Saraki of Kwara in Ilorin, we had a private conversation to which he sought my opinion about who I thought would be acceptable to the north to succeed President Olusegun Obasanjo in 2007. I didn't give him a definite answer. Of course, I asked him too if he would be interested in the position, to which he also didn't give me a confirmation to his rumoured ambition. However, I knew with the benefit of hindsight, that Saraki wasn't the favoured candidate. As at then, there were equally ambitious personalities like the then Vice President, Alhaji Atiku

Abubakar, Mallam Nasir el-Rufai and the then Head of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Mallam Nuhu Ribadu, all trying to outsmart one another in the corridors of power.

The most engaging discussion of the visits was the one I had with the then Governor of Jigawa State, Alhaji Sule Lamido. Prior to writing to the governor indicating our interest for the visit, he had directed that our reporter in Dutse be disallowed from covering any government event at the government house due to what he perceived as our critical stance on his regime. As soon as we settled down for discussion, the governor started to vigorously express his displeasure about our paper. Speaking forcefully, he accused us of derailing from the intention of the founders of one north of Nigeria by redefining it in a narrow perspective contrary to his understanding of what the North stands for. According to him, the true meaning of north as defined by Ahmadu Bello and Mallam Aminu Kano to which school of thought he belongs, was the monolithic north without ethnic or religious barriers. He asserted that his understanding of our own definition of

north, from our editorial posturing, was that of Muslims and Hausa-Fulani only and therefore not acceptable to him.

My clarification on the differences between news and editorial position of the paper fell flat on him. I told him that we have reporters all over the northern states and we merely reported what they sent as stories from their various places. I implored him to understand that the major participants in our news pages are apparently mostly Muslims, perhaps due to obvious excitement the paper brought from inception among the northern population. Although he didn't appear to be very convinced, we parted on a good note with assurance that his advice had been noted and much appreciated.

More radical northern bureaucrats like Nasir el-Rufai disagreed with us even more on account of our news coverage and other contributions in our titles. He criticized our coverage of the mass demolition of houses done under his administration as the minister of the FCT. After our assignment with him as Media and Public

Enlightenment consultants, one of the lucrative consultancy jobs we did in year 2000 while serving as Director General of Bureau of Public Enterprises (BPE), he could not understand our reason for 'writing against' his policy of demolishing illegal houses that violated the Abuja Master plan.

recall that one day, he had called to say he was coming to attend our editorial meeting to explain why he had to do what he was doing but never turned up. He later sued us for libel when we reported the senate indictment on him as FCT Minister. The case was eventually settled out of court and we once again enjoyed a cordial relationship.

Essentially, the conflict between politicians and the media is largely caused by clashes between personal interest on their part and concern for public good on ours.



CHAPTER 11

THE NEW MEDIA

After my retirement as Managing Director from *Trust*, I felt I should stick to the media industry, since that is where my passion has been in the past twenty-six years. I decided to float another Media and Marketing Communications company called 'CBD Media Edge Communications Ltd' with special focus on Opinion Poll Survey, Corporate Communications and Branding. It's like starting all over again, but this time, armed with more experience and with better appreciation of the corporate world. With the new government in Nigeria clamouring for change, there is hope for better economic growth and development. Hence, the company will explore the great potential the country has in the light of new opportunities reeled out by pundits in recent years.

In a previous analysis, especially before the drastic drop in oil revenue, *The Economist* of London which focused on Africa, judged Nigeria the next investment destination in Africa - more than South Africa, with higher per capital income in many more years to come. Some of the reasons advanced being that growth rate in the economy was about 6.5% and there was an increased confidence by international investors in Nigeria bond markets.

Hitherto, there had been few international assessments on Africa and Nigeria in particular which included J.P Morgan's listing of Nigeria in the international bond market along with other emerging economies in late 2013 before the 2016 economic recession that removed the Nigeria's name from the list. Also, the Fitch rating suggested good fundamentals in the economy despite the insurgency in North Eastern States of Nigeria. All these combine to suggest good fundamentals for corporate growth for businesses in Nigeria when we overcome the present recession.

Even though all of those rosy pictures have been proved wrong by the sudden decline in the price of crude oil in the international market from the last quarter of 2015, the fact remains that there is still hope for Nigeria and the media particularly. This is true because in the history of economic recession in the world, a boom usually follows the cycle. Consumer interest might be shifting increasingly shift to the digital media space but there will always be room for a media platform that delivers good content.

The over dependence on foreign goods in Nigeria and the Marginal Propensity to Import(MPI), has pitched against dwindling foreign exchange to discourage frivolous spending like in the past. The media, just like any business, must therefore continue to look inwards to survive.

I found it expedient to revisit our cradle-media communications and keep my eyes on what really works. In this light, the new media has been of particular interest to me.

Recently, CBD MediaEdge conducted an opinion poll survey to assess the impact of online media on print copy sales.

Access to news through multiple platforms has become widespread. *Google* and *Yahoo*, easily two of the world's largest search engines, deliver more news than we can cope with at the click of a button. The rapid growth of news aggregators, bloggers and the tenacity of their posts have also grown. The increasing addiction of Internet users to *Facebook*, *YouTube*, *Twitter*, *Whatsapp* etc has produced an unprecedented competition for newspapers in Nigeria. And this is both in editorial and circulation. In essence, the competition is leading to a rapid decline in newspaper copy sales and advertising revenue.

The activities of news aggregators are such that they gather materials from newspaper websites and simply provide links to stories on their own sites or blogs. Even though it can be argued that such an act drives web traffic to newspaper websites, the fact remains that this approach has led to major losses in revenue for

traditional media. Readers are having a field day because they don't have to pay to consume the news. It's available, free of charge, on the laptops and mobile devices.

There is also now the e-vendor platform where one could read the PDF version of all the major newspapers in Nigeria as early as 7am. That way, even advertisement pages could be read online by paying just a token to the online vendor. This platform is rapidly gaining patronage by elites and high net worth individuals in the society. Infact, it was a former minister that drew my attention to it recently and said it was his latest method of reading news. Since then, few other friends of mine have subscribed to the platform.

The popular aggregators in Nigeria are eroding the revenue base of the traditional media. Platforms, such as *NigeriaNews*, *All Nigeria Newspapers*, *Nigeria Daily News*, *NairaRain* and other social media websites have also contributed to pull readership from the mainstream media. This is due to the fact that their news feeds are timely and spontaneous. Some of the sites are indeed

interactive, where readers spend time to make contributions and become entrenched. Making remarkable impact in this feat are online newspapers like *Sahara Reporters*, *Premium Times*, *The Cable*, *News Diary*, *Greenbarg Reporters*, *Citizen* etc. Their stories are often incisive and based on investigations that further attract readers to the online platform.

The New media, as it is called, has almost become the nemesis of the traditional media as it impedes on to the growth and circulation of newspapers. While some of these online websites get between 50,000 – 390,000 hits in a day, most Nigerian newspapers get much less in circulation. Their websites are now claiming larger circulation than the traditional websites.

To this end, few events in the last few years have begun to shape the thinking that online media is fast encroaching on the traditional media, especially print copy. Bayo Onanuga, The Editor -in -Chief of *The News Magazine*, in following the footsteps of *The Independent newspaper* of the UK, which became the first national newspaper to

move to digital publication, announced in mid-2015, that its print editions and respected weekly magazine *The News* will henceforth publish online.

However, most newspapers are coping well with the competition. The latent effects of insurgency in the North East and South-South Nigeria have gotten newspaper owners to have a rethink. The huge nightmare of logistics in the distribution of newspapers calls for a rethink of the existing business model. In the North, Yola market particularly gave the first warning when the Boko Haram insurgency disgruntled newspaper circulation in that part of the country. The market responded by relying on the Internet to get their news since print copies were difficult to obtain. This awareness has led many newspapers to redesign their websites and invite traffic to it.

Sadly, just like most newspapers elsewhere, making money online has remained difficult in Nigeria. But the symbolic relationship between print and online should be encouraged because there are chances for news, information and advert sharing

As it turned out to be in our survey report, it is not only online competition that is contributing to the decline in circulation figures. Many industry players have argued that prices of newspapers in Nigeria have become so high and going beyond the reach of many workers who make up the reading Public. For example, the current price of four national dailies in one month is higher than the minimum wage of an average Nigerian worker. Most readers have therefore resorted to reading their news online and buying one or two newspapers sparingly.





CHAPTER 12

ONLINE NEWS DIMINISHING PRINT COPY SALES

- Survey Report

MediaEdge Polls, an Opinion Poll Survey unit of CBD MediaEdge Communications Limited, Abuja conducted a survey to understand newspaper readership and behavioral patterns in Nigeria. With particular reference to online incursion, the survey shows a stiff competition between the two media in the last five years.

The original aim of the survey was to understand the pattern of migration to the online platform and the impact it has had on information dissemination since 2010 till date. The survey was based on online and direct questionnaire, approach and administered to a fairly large population. The survey was conducted between September 2 and October 12, 2016 and about 3000 respondents were sent the questionnaire, using both the online and field survey method. The survey targeted two

main respondents – the general public, and media professionals like publishers, editors, and commercial managers etc amongst Nigerian adults (18+). The instrument of data collection was online and field questionnaire, while specific platforms like *Facebook*, *Email*, *Twitter*, *Linkedin*, *WhatsApp*, etc., were used to reach respondents.

Media Professionals were specifically asked to assess the possible impact of online on print copy sales. 78% of them admitted that sales have gone down significantly, while 22% said the sale have been upward for the period polled.

When asked what could be the reasons for the decline, 89% believe that the proliferation of online news is a major factor that has affected the sale of hardcopy significantly, while only 11% felt the effect of online content is insignificant to hardcopy sales.

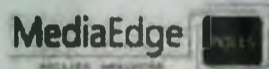
On the different parameters used in the study, 87% of media professionals believed economic factor is largely

affecting the purchasing power of readers and is the major factor for downward sales. 62% said incursion of social media is the major factor. 47% said competition from other newspapers is responsible, while 39% said logistic constraint is the major factor.

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Respondents who picked Newspapers as one of their major sources of news consumption were further asked which version of the newspaper they prefer in terms of richness in content. The result shows that 61% respondents prefer Online Platform of their favourite newspaper, 32% prefer Hard Copy, while the remaining seven percent has no preference for any version.



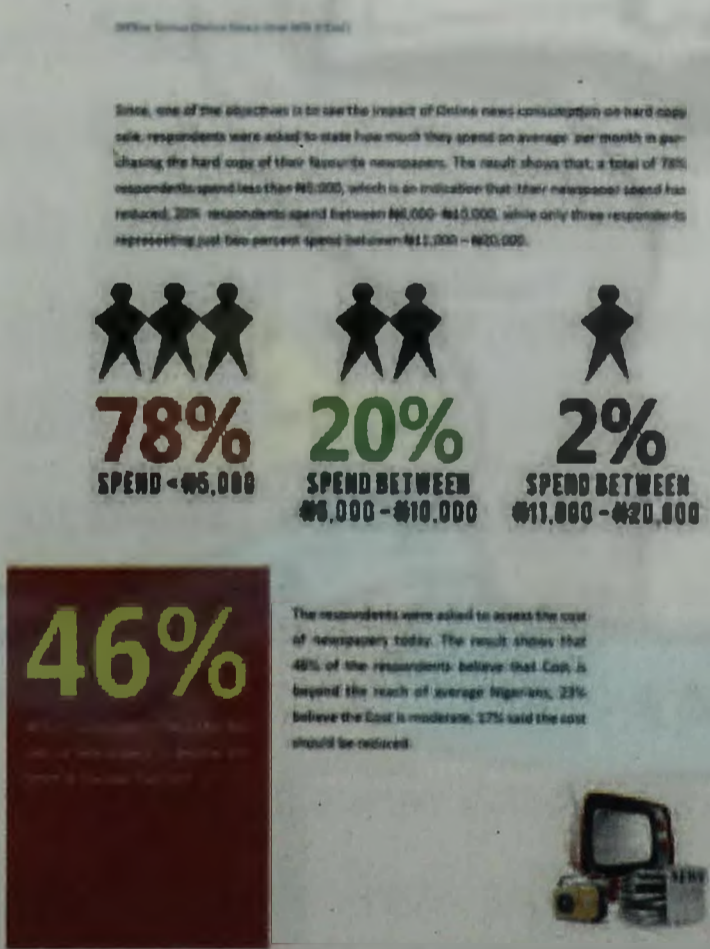
Specifically on the future of the two, 79% of media professionals believe that the future of online news media is bright and might edge out the traditional media in the future. 11% said the future is not as rosy for the online news media, as they believe that the hard copy still has hope of dominating the media landscape for a long time. The other 10% were undecided on this question.

Assessing the opinion of editors on how news aggregators affect the traffic to their websites as well as the news content, 62% of editors said news aggregators affect

traffic to their site 'very significantly', while 38% of them said 'Significant'. This means that cumulatively, 100% of them admitted to the significant effect of news aggregators on their websites significantly.

On rating the credibility of news the results show that 42% of the respondents think that blogs are credible, 58% also stated that online newspapers like *TheCable*, *Sahara Reporters*, *Premium Times* are very credible likewise *Twitter*, *Goggle* and *Yahoo News* sources.

Media Owners and practitioners on whether it makes sense or not to put their entire editorial content online; 78% agreed that putting all editorial content online does not make any economic sense, 12% said it makes economic sense, while 10% couldn't give their opinion on the matter.



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On the general public indicating their multiply preferences for different sources of news consumption, print copies was rated 75%, social media was rated 65%, 52% online newspapers rated 52%.

Similarly, the section of the general public that preferred accessing news online were asked to state the different reasons for going online for news rather than buying the print copy of their favourite newspaper. In their ratings, cost consideration and easy of mobility got 69%, accessibility got 68%, regular updates got 53%, interactive feedback got 36%.

More instructive is the fact that the survey discovered that 78% of the respondents spent less than N5,000 monthly from an average of N9,500 in purchasing hard copy of their favourite newspapers compared to about N11,700 that they used to spend. This means their preference for online content has reduced their purchase of print copy. The economic factor, which affected their income, is also a consideration, as majority of Nigerian readers are low-income earners. This assertion was proven when they

were asked to assess the cost of sale of newspapers in Nigeria today, as 46% of them believe the cost is beyond the reach of the average Nigerian, while 23% said the cost is moderate.

In conclusion, there is a general trend of migration to online news, of which economic factor is a major determinant followed by the social media influence. The incursion of various news media, news aggregators, social media, etc, is largely responsible for the downward trend in the sale of print editions of newspapers, coupled with distribution problems, competition among newspapers and the current economic recession. This makes the future look bright for online news content and it will continue to grow as asserted by many respondents.



**AFTERWORD:
PUBLISHING IS
BUSINESS**

In drawing a conclusion on this book, I would say that the newspaper business in Nigeria has evolved overtime. The industry has played an active role in the political economy of the country starting with the time the first newspaper, '*IweIroyin*' was set up by the missionaries in 1859.

Since then, many titles have emerged on the newsstands. In the early days, government-owned newspapers like *Daily Times and New Nigerian* newspapers located in Lagos and Kaduna respectively were said to have individually printed about 500,000 copies daily.

Afterwards, the print boom period witnessed the birth of weekly news magazines like *Newbreed, African Concord, African Guardian, Newswatch, TELL* and *The News*. They immediately followed by exerting their strengths in core news and investigative stories during a period when readers relied on them to understand the

intrigues at the corridors of power during the military government.

However, since the return to democratic government and the boom in the national economy, private newspapers have grown tremendously in terms of advertisements revenue albeit with lower circulation than the hitherto dominant government monopoly newspapers. It was the period when newspaper started publishing in colour in Nigeria, and increased their editorial sections to attract different segments of the society. It was the period when columnists became more engaging and boosted circulation figures among readers. It was the period when newspapers traded their advertisement pages, through trade-by-barter for cars, television, furniture etc. This was a trade policy that transformed the status of journalists and other personnel in the media industry in terms of providing them with incentives. It was a period of boom and economic prosperity for all stakeholders.

Right now, the competition among the countless newspaper titles in Nigeria is increasing and the theatre of war includes aesthetics, production quality, and content. Due to this competition, newspaper print quality has

improved and advertising copy has also become more creative.

On the downside, Internet news and other factors are having negative effects on circulation and readership. Recently, I had to confirm the picture of someone I thought I know in a printed copy of a newspaper by zooming in on the same picture in the PDF version on the Internet. This implies that online copies are more reader-friendly except that it might not be available to majority of readers for now.

In retrospect, having witnessed a bit of these developments in the industry, it is with somewhat mixed feelings that a stakeholder like myself see the signal of declining circulation in the face of Internet competition but it is also consoling with the conviction that content will, to a large extent, continue to drive circulation figures.

When Amazon started selling its books on the Internet, many people in the West believed that online book market would make hardcopy books extinct in a short time. But the book industry eventually had a rebound as consumer

habits were difficult to change and the rush for online books declined. This is not to suggest that newspapers in Nigeria will experience the same thing with the book market. The fact is, it most certainly may not. While the Internet may have driven print copy down, it may not sound the death knell.

On the whole, newspapers must continue to innovate and constantly promote best practices; good governance at the board level and effective management that cascade down the system. These were some of the initial characteristics of Trust where I worked for most part of my media career. The model suggests for a classic example of a business start-up that succeeded not based on heavy capital investments, but on account of its novel idea, resilience, credibility, innovation and relatively good systems, the Trust is an ideal business model especially in this part of the world where doing business and succeeding is not for the faint-hearted.

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ABOUT THE
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Isiaq Ajibola attended Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, where he obtained the Bachelor of Science Degree in Economics . He later obtained Masters of Business Administration (MBA) from the same University.

He started his media career with the Lagos-based weekly magazine, *Just Politics*, before joining the defunct Citizen Magazine, where he worked at the publication's regional office in Lagos, and later at the head office in Kaduna. He joined the Sentinel magazine, founded by late *Tafida of Katsina*, Shehu Musa Yar'dua, as Controller of Business Operations from 1994-95.

Ajibola thereafter co- founded Media Trust Limited (Publishers of *DailyTrust* Newspaper) in 1996. He was the pioneer General Manager of the company (1996-2003), later became Executive Director (Operations), (2003-2007) and Managing Director/ Chief Operating Officer, (2007-2014). He retired in December, 2014.

During his media career, he undertook many cross boarder working experiences among which include; Nigeria media representative to the G8 Summit in Calgary, Canada (2001); attachment to The Nation in Nairobi, Kenya (2005) and working visits to *New York Times*, New York, USA (2010).

Ajibola is an Alumni of Lagos Business School (LBS), Lagos; University of Stellenbosch, Cape Town, South Africa and Georgetown University, Washington DC, USA.

He is a member of the World Association of Newspapers (WAN), a member of the Institute of Directors (IoD) worldwide, a member of Nigerian Institute of Management (NIM) and Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON).

He loves playing golf and married with children