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THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY
Graduate School of Media and Communications

**IMPLEMENTATION OF *NEW VISION'S* DIGITAL STRATEGY: ANALYSIS
OF THE WEBSITE, E-PAPER, AND SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS**

By

Obonyo Frank Nyanjeye
553244

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree
of Master of Arts in Digital Journalism

Nairobi, Kenya

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APPROVAL PAGE

The Aga Khan University
Graduate School of Media and Communications

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Arts in Digital Journalism

Members of the Thesis Evaluation Committee appointed to examine the thesis of
OBONYO FRANK NYANJEYE-553244, find it satisfactory and recommended that
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20/02/2023

DECLARATION

IMPLEMENTATION OF *NEW VISION'S* DIGITAL STRATEGY: ANALYSIS OF THE WEBSITE, E-PAPER AND SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

I, **OBONYO FRANK NYANJEYE-553244**, declare that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any University and that to the best of my knowledge it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text. The editorial assistance provided to me has in no way added to the substance of my thesis, which is the product of my research endeavours.

Signature

Date

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ABSTRACT

There is an increased shift from traditional to digital media operations in Africa. The general objective of this study was to analyse the adoption and implementation of the digital strategy of the *New Vision* with a focus on the challenges and opportunities to help understand the shift from traditional to digital media. This study investigated the implementation of *New Vision's* digital strategy, focusing on the website, e-paper and social media platforms. The study employed an in-depth interview guide for data collection: The collected data was transcribed and organized following the research questions. The data was reviewed and explored deductively, then grouped into themes and presented logically. The study findings were; that a number of factors cause slow progress towards total digital transformation. However, the major ones include a lack of mind shift by staff from traditional to digital ways of operation and a lack of adequate skills, especially for writers and other content creators. The study revealed that writers compile long stories meant for hardcopies and post on digital platforms, website stories are not updated in real time, and sometimes a technological breakdown hinders seamless access to the e-paper. Transformation and implementation of the *New Vision* digital strategy is a work in progress. On paper, *New Vision* has impressive plans to become a digital paper. However, digital transformation has not fully taken place. Media practitioners and managers need to appreciate the digital revolution and pragmatically walk the talk of transformation from traditional to digital at both strategic and operational levels. The study recommendations were: Staff training on digital story writing skills, the company needs to utilise the website, social media and e-paper analytics to inform them of readers' interest, the company needs to give staff the freedom to try out new things because digital transformation is about experimentation.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AR:	Augmented Reality
E-PAPER:	Electronic Paper
GNM:	Guardian Media Group
ICT:	Information Communication Technology
UCU:	Uganda Christian University
UK:	United Kingdom
UNCST:	Uganda National Council for Science and Technology
R:	Respondent

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

The topic of the study was '*Implementation of New Vision's Digital Strategy: Analysis of the Website, E-paper and Social Media Platforms*'. It was conducted to assess progress and challenges in implementing *New Vision's* digital strategy. This study explored factors leading to *New Vision's* adoption of a digital strategy, its current status of implementation, and challenges and opportunities faced in the implementation process. It will contribute knowledge in the field of digital media research, and scholars will use this information to understand factors leading to the adoption of digital strategy and the challenges and opportunities faced in its implementation. The research objectives of this study were; to determine the driving factors in the adoption of *New Vision's* digital strategy, to assess the digital strategies adopted by *New Vision* media group, and to analyse challenges faced by *New Vision* in implementing its digital strategy. This first chapter generally presented the background to the study, problem statement, objectives, justification and significance of the study, the scope of the study, limitations of the study, operational definitions of terms and summary.

1.2 Background of the Study

The operation and management of media has changed due to disruptions caused by technological advancements and the internet. Stenseen; Westlund (2021) define disruption as radical changes provoked by the affordances of digital technologies that occur at a pace and on a scale that disrupts settled understandings and traditional ways of creating value, interacting and communicating both socially and professionally.

Ogola (2015) notes that, as in other parts of the world, new media and information and communication technologies are transforming journalistic practice in Africa.

As a result, journalism has shifted from old practices to new ways of gathering and disseminating content. Onumah (2018) observes that the internet has greatly impacted media operations. In many countries, people depend less and less on traditional media (newspapers, magazines, radio, and television) for information and communication. He notes that traditional newspaper organizations and journalists in Africa and worldwide are learning to adapt and come to terms with the new technological reality. Karlsen (2021) avers that news is not only available on numerous platforms with continuous deadlines, but they are also diffused and consumed in digital networks through so-called intermediaries, such as websites, social media platforms and other online channels.

The way news is gathered, edited and distributed has all changed. Social media and online platforms have eased how information moves and increased the audience for media houses. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and blog pages have emerged as additional platforms where news media organizations can reach audiences with content and leverage advertising revenues. However, in some instances, these platforms have not been successful as revenue-generating streams for mainstream media and issues of content monetization still bedevil news media organizations that produce and distribute premium content on digital platforms. Tech giants such as Meta and Google interact with the audience directly, so they run adverts without passing through mainstream media. Internet advertising was going mainly to a few tech giants in 2015, Google received half of all digital advertising in the US and Facebook another 13%, which has clear implications for the ability of media organizations to afford to cover news of public interest adequately (Tong, 2017).

The Internet has shaped how we communicate and consume information. Friedrichsen (2017) notes that we live in a world where communication is increasingly digitalized. Digital communications are remodelling our day-to-day activities. For example, how people look for a job, a hotel or car to rent is now largely digitalized. In addition, the way we access news and entertainment is becoming more digital, personalized and interactive.

In the context of traditional journalism, new technologies have radically altered virtually every aspect of news gathering, reporting and audience loyalty. As Mabweazara (2015) notes, this has resulted in differentiated production and innovation processes and the complex interaction between technology and production. Traditional print media faces challenges of decreasing the centrality of newsrooms and over-reliance on press releases and stories from the news wires due to economic imperatives. Saltzis (2012) observes that most technical constraints in the work of journalists that placed time limitations and essentially governed news cycles have disappeared from modern newsrooms, especially online. This means that continuous reporting is possible; theoretically, it can develop like events unfold. Journalists can publish every little piece of information they collect as soon as they get it.

While these reasons were not the primary motivations for print newspapers to move online, the rise of digital journalism in South Africa, for example, is tied to global trends to move newspapers online (Bosch, 2010). Media leaders across the globe are frantically seeking solutions to the challenges of managing ambiguity and uncertainty triggered by the digital era, which threatens to decimate their profitable companies anchored in the old business school (Mdlongwa, 2009).

The media has faced a number of challenges, but the most glaring one is digital disruption and the attendant changes in audience behaviour and consumption habits. It also seems unclear how journalists have adapted to the new technological changes

driving online journalism. Atton (2011) note that while pockets of research are beginning to emerge from African journalism scholarship, research has largely lacked theoretical and empirical grounding in examining how mainstream African journalists are forging 'new' ways to practice their profession in the light of technological changes in their newsrooms. As a result, it is unclear how they deal with these changes and, more importantly, how they have adjusted their professional notions regarding which traditions have survived the impact of new technologies and which require rethinking. Friedrichsen (2017) argues that broadcasters, for example, are developing sophisticated Social TV integration tools. They aim to drive viewer tune-in, engagement and loyalty to boost ratings, live viewing and adverts revenue. In addition, social TV apps and multi-screen solutions open new avenues for usage.

Papanagnou (2021) observes mixed feelings about social media, which is part of digital journalism. He notes that this ambivalence in the ways journalists approach social media seems entwined with their attachment to newer and older values. Whilst ambivalent journalistic negotiations of social media are nothing new, he says that their investigation acquires a renewed urgency in the conditions of present-day journalism. How do journalists understand their values and identities now that social media dominate the routines and activities of fully networked newsrooms? How are they coping with online journalism? Digital media has facilitated a seamless flow of information from the news source to the audience. Today, it is not even the professionals who generate content. Anybody can develop and distribute content, and legacy media houses like Vision Group have to develop strategies for competing with the non-public interest content producers. It is also interesting that the online audience is so gullible and mobile that it can be swayed by any content so long as it is appealing. The legacy media thus has to contend with the consumption habits of audiences accustomed to access content on the digital platform.

Tong (2015) notes that news going online may result in more problems, such as facilitating free online reading, which may cannibalize paid-for publications; a falling quality of journalism as a result of the pursuit of immediacy and attempting to tailor content to the interests of online readers and attract more consumers through such unorthodox strategies as click baits. Another critical question is how journalists are adopting online journalism. The speed of change from traditional media to online journalism is extremely high (Franklin, 2014). Franklin states that the pace of change, as much as its character, is striking and leaves journalists, publishers, industry analysts and academics struggling to make their research findings and scholarly discussions relevant and timely. He describes the speed of the transformation of journalism as “dizzying”. There is a need to find out how the media in Uganda is adopting this first-paced online journalism.

In addition to speed, everybody can produce and distribute content due to the possibilities the digital platforms give everyone, i.e. interacting with a mass audience as producers or consumers. The consumption, distribution and production of news have altered fundamentally: where once news producers also tended to be its distributors, now consumers and digital platforms have also taken on the role of distributors (*Centre for Media Transition Report*, 2019). Now more than ever, it is important for reporters, editors, and everyone at every stage of the news cycle to be familiar with the technologies that are shaping online journalism (Luckie, 2012). The Internet, specifically social media, has become part of the media that cannot be ignored. As Brock (2013) argues, technological innovation, such as the World Wide Web, may have caused a permanent neurological rewiring, as made in previous technological revolutions, such as the printing press and typewriter.

When Covid-19 hit the world, the media was one of the sectors affected. According to Njuna (2021), in the early months of the pandemic, the Vision Group

affected a salary cut of 60% of staff who earned more than 19 million shillings, 45% of that earning between Sh. 8M and 19M, and 40% of those who earn below sh8m. These drastic measures, the company director said, were aimed at reducing the wage bill. The Nation Media Group, which owns NTV, Daily Monitor, KFM and Dembe FM, also announced a wage cut. In addition, the Vision Group halted production of some of their vernacular newspapers, such as Runpiny, Orumuri and Etop, while the Observer cut their production frequency from thrice a week to once.

According to Vuchuri-Alumai (2021), the Covid-19 pandemic could not have been worse for news organisations already grappling with shrinking revenue. For example, the Daily Monitor temporarily de-monetized the e-paper during the three-month lockdown, yet it was published virtually with no adverts. During that demanding period, it took sacrifices and fortitude to produce the newspaper with skeletal staff, budget cuts, redesign, and cover the 2021 General Election.

Media houses strengthened their digital operations in response to the effects of Covid 19 and technological changes. Due to the subsequent Covid 19 lockdowns, the online audience increased. *New Vision* and *Bukedde*, which adopted the digital strategy in 2015, introduced Augmented Reality, where the audience scans pictures and watches the story's video version. The videos are also uploaded on their YouTube channels. All the above-mentioned issues justified the need for this case study on the *New Vision's* digital strategy, focusing on the driving factors for its adoption, the current implementation status and the challenges and opportunities.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

New Vision launched a digital version in 2015 in adjusting to technological advancements to enable its audience, even those in the diaspora, to access good journalism at an affordable price and in real-time. Vision reporter (2015), as such, the

paper apportioned desks for specialists to handle its digital platforms: Twitter, Facebook and the website. *New Vision* also introduced an e-paper enriched by Augmented Reality Innovation. This is where the audience can scan a story on a hardcopy paper and watch a video related to the story.

However, even with these wonderful digital innovations, *New Vision* still falls short in their utilization. This is reflected in limited, continuous-the-clock update of stories on the website and social media handles. Its website is supposed to be one of the leading sites because *New Vision* is the oldest and state-funded newspaper with an extensive readership in Uganda. However, according to the 2022 IPSOS Uganda National Audience Survey, *New Vision's* website ranks 11th, and smaller media companies set up a few years ago are performing much better than *New Vision*, which has existed for thirty-seven years. Often, the paper comes up with stale stories of events already broken by social media and reports them as news events without adding context, insight, explanatory reporting and answering the so-what question. In addition, the sales team is still stuck in the traditional way of selling adverts for newspapers without pushing for more new models like paywall. Therefore, the problem investigated in this study was the slow shift of *New Vision* from traditional media practices to digital operations focusing on adoption, implementation, challenges and opportunities.

1.4 Objective of the Study

The general objective of this study was to analyse the adoption and implementation of the digital strategy of the *New Vision* with a focus on the challenges and opportunities to help understand the shift from traditional to digital media.

1.4.1 Specific Objectives

1. To determine the driving factors in the adoption of *New Vision* digital strategy.

2. To assess the current implementation status of *New Vision*'s digital strategy.
3. To establish the challenges and opportunities *New Vision* newspaper is finding in implementing its digital strategy.

1.4.2 Research Questions

1. What are the driving factors for adopting the *New Vision* digital strategy?
2. What is the current status of implementing the *New Vision*'s digital strategy?
3. What challenges and opportunities does *New Vision* face in implementing its digital strategy?

1.5 Justification of the Study

There are rapid changes in the communication space regarding the audience's digital connectivity across distance and time to which the media industry should adjust. These have led to a readership shift from traditional to digital access to information, making it easier for the audience to receive and consume news in real-time. There is also a change in revenue structure, yet newspapers have long depended on traditional advertising as a source of revenue, and there is fear that the newspapers will phase out.

In addition, there is competition from online content creators. Some so many people have been trained in modern media courses that can drive digital strategy. Content is increasingly being accessed through many websites and applications: from Facebook to video-on-demand platforms and from Twitter to websites, as stated by Friedrichsen (2019). As a result, newspapers have been affected by the digital revolution in terms of print revenue and content gathering and distribution (Nielsen, 2015).

Although *New Vision* has adopted a digital strategy, there was a need to explore its implementation, success, failures and lessons. The paper's online version still reports

stories that social media have broken without a more profound analysis. By investigating the current status, challenges and opportunities faced in implementing the New Vision digital strategy, the study contributed new knowledge in the area of digital journalism in the context of the disruption theory.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The study will help top media managers and owners to understand the challenges faced and opportunities reaped in implementing a digital newspaper strategy, focusing on improving products and services. For example, in terms of advertising, news media face fierce competition from large technology companies that provide high audience reach, data for highly targeted advertising, and low rates enabled by their economies of scale and this makes them to capture the majority of digital advertising, as well as a very large number of other less prominent websites where advertisers can advertise at meagre prices enabled by advertising exchanges (Nielsen et al., 2016).

The study contributed knowledge in the field of digital media research. Scholars will use this information to understand factors leading to the adoption of digital strategy and challenges faced in its implementation in Uganda and, most importantly African context. According to Belle (2019), many industries have been facing a market shift over the past few years driven by a better response to customer demand, forcing enterprises to undertake digital transformations or be left behind the competition. Lastly, it advanced technical knowledge in the field of digital media and informed policymakers as they discussed matters pertaining to digital media.

1.7 Scope of the Study

This study was conducted at *New Vision* Head Offices in the Industrial Area in Kampala City. It gathered ideas from *New Vision's* top management, digital content producers, and editors. The study focused on factors that caused *New Vision* to adopt a digital strategy, current status challenges and opportunities faced in its implementation.

The study adopted a qualitative approach, focusing on how newspapers have responded to disruptions caused by technological advancements. The study focused on *New Vision* because, according to Media Innovation Centre (2021), its circulation estimates for the last quarter of 2019 by the Audit Bureau of Circulations of South Africa (ABC) was at an average of 23,636 compared to *Daily Monitor*, which had an average of 16,169 print copies. This makes *New Vision* the largest English newspaper in Uganda.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

The study focused on the website, social media platforms and e-paper. The limitations came from *New Vision* digital staff being sceptical about the study. Another limitation was inadequate funds for facilitating movements to and from *New Vision*. The study set out to use document review as the second data collection tool; however, due to ethical considerations, the tool was not used because *New Vision* staff declined to provide social media analytics, algorithms and other classified information due to competition and company policy.

1.9 Operational Definition of Terms

Digital strategy: This is the application of digital technologies to business models to form new differentiating business capabilities. Digital strategy is the use of internet-based platforms and data to inform and implement online communication objectives that meet organizational goals (Morehouse; Saffer, 2019)

Augmented Reality: This means the artificial overlaying of computer graphics onto the real world. It can prove to be an interesting feature in the newspaper, taking the readers over and beyond the inked pages.

Social media engagement: This is a measure of the extent to which people interact with a social media account or content.

Website: This is a group of web pages under a name that is available for public internet viewing.

Social Media: These are interactive technologies and digital channels that facilitate creating and sharing information, ideas, interest and other forms of expression through virtual communities' networks.

E-paper: This refers electronic newspaper, a digital version of a hardcopy newspaper. It reflects an ambient-like paper and it is comfortable to read due to its appearance.

1.10 Summary

This chapter spelt out the background to the study, general and specific research objectives, research questions, problem statement, justification, the significance of the study, the scope of the study, and limitations and gave definitions of key terms. The study analysed the implementation of *New Vision's* digital strategy, focusing on the website, social media platforms and e-paper in the wake of digital disruption. It helped

media practitioners, proprietors, scholars and policymakers with the knowledge about factors leading newspapers to adopt digital practices and the challenges faced in the implementation. Thus, the next chapter presents the literature review in line with the study's objectives.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the Disruption of Innovation Theory on which this study was based. It also presents literature on digital strategy and its implementation globally, in Africa and Uganda.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Disruption of Innovation Theory

Clayton Christensen formulated this theory in 1995. It states that disruptive technology opens up an opportunity for new products. According to Christensen, disruptive innovation describes a process by which a product or service takes root initially in simple applications at the bottom of a market and then relentlessly moves up the market, eventually displacing established competitors. Disruptive innovations challenge the established companies of an industry which are relatively more structured and have massive operation capacities.

Oroszi (2020) says it allows media houses that do not have space to compete with the giants in the market. This theory was relevant to the study because it looks at how technology changes business operations. *New Vision*, for example, has changed its operation by developing an e-paper and the website and using social media for reporting and disseminating content. This theory considers how a company responds to new technology. Nagy (2014) raises three questions about disruptive innovations that have intrigued academics: What characteristics constitute a disruptive innovation? When are these characteristics disruptive, and how can organizations identify these technologies

before a disruption has occurred? These questions were of much importance in informing the research questions in this study which focus on the drivers for adopting *New Vision's* digital strategy; the current status of implementation of the digital strategy; the benefits from the shift to digital strategy; and the challenges and opportunities for *New Vision*.

It is important to note that disruptions are new, and in the modern era, they are caused mainly by technology. Technology is a significant driver of how media houses allocate their resources; define their audience and build staff capacity. Rad (2017) asserts that many disruptive innovations are based on new and disruptive technologies. Disruptive technologies are those that introduce a different performance package from mainstream technologies and are inferior to mainstream technologies along the dimensions of performance that are most important to mainstream customers.

Rad (2017) also argues that these innovations were disruptive because they did not address the next-generation needs of leading customers in existing markets. They had other attributes, of course, that enabled new market applications to emerge, and the disruptive innovations improved so rapidly that they could ultimately address customers' needs in the mainstream of the market.

With changes in the media exacerbated by the effects of Covid-19, such as a fall in revenue and audience numbers, this theory was best placed to investigate the implementation of digital strategy in newsrooms, challenges and possible solutions to improve the online presence of newspapers. Correa (2014) describes innovation and disruption as the media's mantras, the best practice to face technological killer application changes. However, these mantras are still a threat or at least a burden.

Bhalerao et al. (2019) state that the prolific use of social media, cloud and mobile has led to a democratization of technology and knowledge in the recent past.

Today, roughly half of the world's population uses social media (4.62 billion), with the most popular websites being Facebook, Tik-Tok, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube. This huge usage is further broken down that is 71% of adults are online, and 72% of these people are also on social media (Coelho et al., 2017). This has further facilitated easy start-up businesses by lowering the start-up cost to set up new businesses and further helped create new ideas leading to social change. However, they argue that disruptive innovation takes time to prove in complex market conditions, and a significant period is also consumed in penetrating the market.

Digital innovations take time to penetrate the complex market because newspapers still produce hard copies and break the news like social media. Any innovative idea or service takes a significant period to get established in the market. In addition, certain taboos are associated with the market culture, creating a gestation period for innovation to disrupt the market. It took time for *New Vision* to become a digital paper because of challenges common in African newsrooms, such as: resistance to change by staff, unstable and low internet coverage, and inadequate funds and skills. However, with all the mentioned taboos (challenges) that hinder successful digital operations, the *New Vision* had no option but to develop a digital strategy to enable them to thrive in the murky waters of digital technology.

2.3 General and Empirical Literature Review

2.3.1 *Global Drivers for Adoption of Digital Strategy in Newspapers*

For a long time, the newspaper industry has survived on sales of print hard copies and adverts as major revenue streams. However, with the advent of technology, the internet, and most recently, Covid-19, there has been a tremendous fall in the sales and sustenance of hard-copy newspapers using the mentioned revenue sources. This

does not mean that news organizations are moving away from print copies but that much of their investments now focus on digital media. This notwithstanding, the newspaper industry is left with no choice but to adapt to the digital revolution or die. Dunham (2020) states that digital media, e.g. computers and, much more commonly, tablets or smartphones, have become an essential part of the news world. Multimedia is here to stay in traditional news outlets and among the new “pure-player” digital competitors that are popping up everywhere. Dunham argues that these have resulted in the demise of printed newspapers and radically altered how people read magazines, watch television news, view network television entertainment, listen to music, watch movies, and talk on telephones. It is also important to note that news travelling instantaneously did not start with the advent of social media. President Abraham Lincoln, for example, used the telegraph to win the American Civil war, close to 150 years before social media was discovered.

This section focused on the digital strategies of two global newspapers: *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*. The Guardian Media Group (GNM) is one of the oldest and largest media companies in the UK and the publisher of *The Guardian* newspaper. According to the paper’s website in 2011, *The Guardian* revealed plans to become a digital-first organization, placing open journalism online at the heart of its strategy.

GNM would move beyond the newspaper, shifting focus, effort and investment towards digital because that is our future. GNM was embarking on a significant transformation that will see us change from a print-based organization to one that is digital-first in philosophy and practice, Alan Rusbridger, editor-in-chief of GNM.

The Guardian chose to take the digital path because its audience was becoming more online than hard copy readers. Rusbridger cited argues that the opportunities presented by the growth of digital media are immense. *The Guardian's* journalism has

never been more widely read than when it went digital. According to *The Guardian 2021 Annual Report*, digital reader revenues performed well, up from 42.6% in 2020 to 68.7% in 2021 during the Covid-19 pandemic, driven by growth in both digital subscriptions and reader contributions, which helped to offset steep declines in print, advertising and jobs revenue. This indicates that despite the spiral falls in media revenue the world over, the GNM is leveraging on its digital strategy, such as the introduction of a premium version of *The Guardian App*, podcasts, *Today in Focus*, and re-launch of the *Guardian Weekly*. They also covered investigative stories such as exposing the dishonesty of the UK Government in mishandling Covid-19 prevention etc. The interim GNM Chief Executive, Keith Underwood, noted that their digital strategy is successful because of the innovative Guardian Live Team's ongoing virtual events, a series of new digital journalism tools successfully launched by product and engineering teams.

2.3.2 *The New York Times*

This American newspaper was founded in 1851 and is based in New York City. According to *The New York Times*, the newspaper paper prints 831,000 copies and has 5,496,000 new subscribers. Despite its global growth, *The New York Times* had to respond to the effects of digital disruption and technological advancements that affected the newspaper industry. *Our Path Forward* (2015) states that sceptics still openly wonder if *The New York Times* can continue to deliver its journalistic mission, given the seeming mismatch between the economics of news media and the scale of its operations. Peruffo (2018) observes that the digital revolution carried a euphoria derived from the apparent cost cut. Initially, the hope was to continue relying on advertising revenue, as the printed press did ever since its birth. The old revenue method of the banner has also slowly lost its function. This caused many problems for

newspapers that had invested much money in this Web tool. Tong (2017) notes that more recently, it has become apparent that because the Internet has allowed potential advertisers to reach consumers directly without being bundled with editorial products, the business models of conventional journalism across much of the world are being undermined

In response to the digital revolution, *The New York Times* had to develop a digital strategy which proved to be one of the successful models of quality journalism in the smartphone era. About *The New York Times's* digital strategy, *Our Path Forward* explains strategies developed by the paper to strengthen its digital presence. They include growing digital advertising by creating compelling, integrated ad experiences that match the quality and innovation, improving customer experience for readers, carefully shifting time and energy to digital platforms, investment in equipping journalists with digital storytelling skills. As Friedrichsen (2017) rightly notes, content today is accessed through a multitude of websites and applications: from Facebook to video-on-demand platforms and from Twitter to the websites. This is what the Times planned in its digital strategy to win or lose the battle on smartphones. In addition, they are targeting to build an organization that can respond quickly to any future technological change.

In its 2020 report, the *New York Times* found digital innovation as one of the biggest strengths in its digital strategy. The *New York Times* maintains and focuses on audience engagement in its digital strategy because advertisers crave engagement: readers who linger on content and who return repeatedly. The report cited above also notes that *The New York Times* has an unparalleled reputation for excellence in visual journalism. It has defined multimedia storytelling for the news industry and established itself as the clear leader. However, despite its excellence, not enough of its report uses digital storytelling tools that allow for richer and more engaging journalism; too much

of *The New York Times* daily report remains dominated by long text strings. Like Times, *Forbes magazine* also found audience engagement as an important aspect of a digital strategy. As a result, the magazine developed a multi-platform, multi-device world to achieve a fluid branded Forbes experience with consistent and continuous engagement across all its products.

Today's content creators must be writers, editors, producers and photo and video editors, often performing all those tasks for one piece of content. That requires easy-to-use publishing tools for Web, tablet and mobile production. The trick to that: don't build them all from scratch, but customize and streamline open source tools for the desired workflow. We should continue to employ a healthy mix of newshounds, wordsmiths and analysts. We should continue to place rigorous editing at the heart of our journalism. We should continue to give journalists the time and resources to pursue work that has a real impact (*New York Times Report*, 2020).

2.3.3 Digital Strategy in Africa's Media: Challenges and Opportunities

First, it is important to understand the digital revolution in Africa's context, opportunities and challenges. Most studies about African journalism have focused on issues such as gender, health, democracy, and regulation in relation to the media. However, very few studies focus on how African journalists are embracing technological changes. Mabweazara (2011) states there is a lack of a close look at how African journalists have forged new ways of practising journalism in the context of technological changes in newsrooms and the wider context of news production. He argues that while pockets of research are beginning to emerge from African journalism scholarship, research has largely lacked theoretical and empirical grounding in examining how mainstream African journalists are forging 'new' ways to practice their profession in the light of technological changes in their newsrooms.

The African newsroom has several other setbacks to full online migration. These include management's scepticism, fear of losing what journalists know and have, inadequate revenue and lack of expertise. However, news media which will adapt to technology, a news organization that embraces the web and other forms of online information-gathering, as Garrison (2001) observed, such media house can overcome these barriers.

Even with minimal research in the digital footprints of the media sector, journalism in Africa is also embracing technology just as the rest of the world. According to Ogola (2015) African journalism has creatively and proactively appropriated a range of new media technologies so fundamentally that they have become an inalienable part of the continent's journalism. Journalists across the continent have integrated these technologies into their newsrooms and everyday practices. Despite challenges such as high illiteracy rate, media suppression, low electricity distribution, internet and other infrastructure, African journalism now has an online presence.

As observed by Mdlongwa (2009), embracing digital media by newspapers and other 'old media' might not solve all the problems faced by media managers these days, but the new platforms certainly provide opportunities that could help the media's financial bottom lines. Furthermore, he notes that working models from African newspapers' online editions and achievements in social media provide useful tips and tricks for other African media houses to triumph in the digital space.

Morales (2021) observes that many African countries have new functioning technology facilities and the goodwill to support ICT. These have accelerated the speed of digital migration. As Franklin (2011) observed, online tools such as Wiki Leaks make resources available for the previously shrinking investigative journalism in Africa's media houses, making Africa's media landscape change with the digital trend.

Regular reliance on digital sources for news has nearly doubled in just five years, with more than one-third of respondents across 18 countries reporting that they turn to the Internet or social media at least a few times a week for news (Krutz, 2020).

2.3.4 Digital Strategy in East Africa Region Media: Challenges and Opportunities

Digital strategy has become part and parcel of media operations in East Africa. This is a global trend that media in East Africa has included in their plans, budget and strategy and has presented immense opportunities. The media in East Africa is enjoying the benefit of their content reaching far and beyond their countries borders. Bida (2021) observed that in South Sudan, commenting, sharing, and following the news online has increased audience involvement with the news. For example, people, especially the young, increasingly get the most unverified and fact-checked news through social media – interactions that are habitually geared by Alternative Media. Kategekimana (2021) explained that new print technology helped reduce production costs, improve newspaper layout and design, increase speed and efficiency, and reduce news-gathering costs.

According to Booker (2013), the development of news websites, particularly by media organizations like the Nation, the Standard, Capital FM, and KBC, means that Kenyans can increasingly access digital news. Magolanga (2020) noted that the global and local growth of social media over the years has seen an increasing milestone in how news, including development news is reported and digested by journalists and the media industry in general. He explains that in Tanzania, social media platforms support using various news orientations and presentation styles in audio, video, or text formats. Journalists can use social media for entertainment or to drive interests and establish links, making the platforms the most useful tools among journalists in Tanzania and many other countries in the ‘developing world’. In Burundi, according to Nsegiyumva

(2021), digital interaction helps measure the number of visitors, making it possible to convince advertisers of the relevance of the business relationships to be formed. But no study has been done so far to assess the profitability of online media.

A retired senior editor, who worked in a number of media organisations in the country, wondered if the journalists today and media houses have exploited the opportunities brought by the new media or if they were just mere spectators. In as much as opportunities are harvested from digital transformation, the strategy still has a number of challenges. For example, media outlets, according to (Citizen Newspaper, 2021), would like to integrate their news gathering, processing and dissemination with the new media. However, they find the going tough because of a number of factors, including a lack of competent people to utilize the advantages of the new media.

Poor internet connectivity, adequate skills, and mind shifts by media managers and reporters also hinder the journey to realizing media digitization in East Africa. Furthermore, according to Media Viability Report (2021), there are also factors such as skills gaps, low internet penetration in rural areas, limited access to digital devices and low awareness regarding the benefits of technology use. Barore (2021) explains that most of these challenges are limited skills, equipment and financial constraints; lack of an established infrastructure for a countrywide distribution of newspapers. Few produced copies are only available in offices and on the streets of the capital, Kigali.

2.3.5 The New Vision's Digital Strategy

The media has adopted digital operations in Uganda to catch up with global trends. According to a Media Viability in East Africa Report (2021), the country has a fast-growing online media driven by rapid technological developments that have seen greater use of smartphones. However, print circulation numbers for Ugandan

newspapers continue to plummet, while print advertising spending has steadily declined over the last years. The above report notes that several organisations offer training that provides journalists with digital safety skills, which is critical in building capacity to handle inherent risks such as fake online sources, malware, and fake websites.

New Vision newspaper, one of the largest in Uganda, introduced digital operations in 2015 to serve its audience with quality journalism and increase revenue. “We are looking at distributing the newspaper online for Ugandans with tablets, smartphones and other gadgets. We have developed a payment system that will accept payments through mobile money and a master card for Ugandans in the diaspora. In addition, we are working on an app to enable readers to buy the digital version through deductions on their bank account. You can read the paper in the comfort of your home using the digital version,” noted *New Vision's* former CEO, Robert Kabushenga.

<https://www.newvision.co.ug/news/1410162/vision-launch-digital-version>

In response to the disruptive wave of the digital revolution, *New Vision* set up a one-stop digital centre, a media convergence point of all its outlets such as radios, television and apps. Kabushenga noted that they are now streaming the signals from all our radio stations in the digital platform. As a result, their audience can now comfortably listen to and switch on their phones to XFM, Bukedde FM, Etop FM, Radio West, Rupiny FM, and Arua One FM. The *New Vision's* head of I.T., Paul Ikanza, also explained that the audience can find *New Vision's* content in one digital platform.

Online platforms represent a fundamental instrument of innovation for editors and citizens. Given the important role these new platforms are covering in this crucial period, particularly social networks, generally, the “mobile fruition” of information is radically modifying its distribution and consumption methods (Peruffo & Pirolo, 2019).

For example, *New Vision* launched an Augmented Reality (AR) to allow its audiences to interact with real-time content in one place in a multimedia form. With this technology, it is possible to improve the presentation of product information, replacing single static images with interactive models that allow users to manipulate the product just as they would in real life (Nuseir, 2016).

AR allows *New Vision*'s audience to scan features of stories and watch a video of the same story, allowing them to stay connected regardless of the location. Gone are the days when hard copies were physically transported to specific locations. Instead, augmented Reality connects the physical environment to the virtual one.

By superimposing digital information directly on real objects or environments, Porter (2017) explains that AR allows people to simultaneously process the physical and digital, eliminating the need to bridge the two. That improves our ability to rapidly and accurately absorb information, make decisions, and execute required tasks quickly and efficiently. Kan (2021) notes that ARs bring publication content to life by adding digital elements to the printed material. He argues that this newspaper technology will shape the future of the publishing sector. Vision Group IT Manager Paul Ikinza explains that the company has put much emphasis on analytics because it is the key. They want to know who consumes their content and what the audience wants.

2.3.6 Social Media as a Game Changer

Klass (2012) explains that more than a hundred years ago, when the telephone was introduced, there was some hand-wringing over the social dangers that this new technology posed, such as increased sexual aggression and damaged human relationships. This is how journalists also received social media in the newsroom. They first received it thinking that it would make their work simpler. As time went on, they feared the loss of jobs. As a result, the audience began shifting from traditional print

media to mobile phones. This forced media houses to appreciate that these digital platforms, systematically introduced into newsrooms roughly a decade ago, are part of their operations. Their uptake by the journalists has been mostly justified as a long overdue participatory invitation to news audiences now turned news producers (Papanagnou, 2021). Most people no longer need to go and look for the news; the news comes looking for them, flowing down their Twitter and Facebook news feeds (<https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/magazines/people-power/the-good-and-bad-of-social-media-1679534>).

Any media house that ignores social media is left behind because the audience is found on platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. For this study, the researcher will focus on Facebook and Twitter, which came much earlier than others like Tik Tok, Instagram and snap chat.

Social media has its merits and demerits over print media. It has combined journalistic news values, such as objectivity, fairness and proximity, with the audience's participation. No matter how journalists criticize this forum, it has promoted unprofessionalism in the trade because anyone is a reporter on the internet, and these digital platforms have given freedom of speech in real-time. Today, newspapers no longer have a monopoly on breaking news. Furthermore, digital technologies have a profound impact on the behaviour of consumers who have ubiquitous access to information and communication capabilities (e.g., using social media on a mobile device). Using these technologies, they actively dialogue between the newspaper and its stakeholders (Vial, 2019).

As Papanagnou (2021) explains, there was a risk of losing relevance and revenue in a rapidly changing news industry where social media and the new 'digital native' news sites were gaining ground. At the same time, there was the opportunity to use the technologies of our competitors in order to capitalize on the considerable

prestige, loyal readership, and business connections that we had accumulated as a legacy publisher. As a result, social media became a necessary evil that newspapers had to live with. An article in *The Daily Monitor* notes that social media has made it possible by giving the news, entertainment and discussion a greater reach and lifespan than would usually have happened. Retrospectively, the lifespan of a newspaper was the - four hours it was published; now, because of the many discussion groups on Whatsapp and Facebook and the general sharing on these and other social platforms like Twitter, stories can be discussed for a longer time.

<https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/magazines/people-power/the-good-and-bad-of-social-media-1679534>

In addition, Veglis et al. (2020) identified three main purposes for using social media in newsrooms: monitoring news from other sources, interactivity, content delivery, and promotion. Social media has allowed the audience to be content creators instead of consumers. Dimitrov (2021) notes that this has shifted traditional media's role from a watchdog to a guide dog. Journalists, for example, adopted Twitter as an ideal platform to gather and disseminate news quickly, but the audience also engages them on the same platform. Media publications can easily request information from eyewitnesses of an event and reach potential sources using relevant hashtags (Dickson, 2013).

Studies suggest that social media has become popular, if not indispensable, a tool for newsgathering in various domains, ranging from politics and foreign news to sports and celebrity news (Paulussen, 2014). They argue that for journalists, social media can fulfil different functions at the same time. For example, Canter (2013) found that individual journalists engage with their readers in an informal, personal and reciprocal manner via social media platforms. In addition, he notes that whereas news organizations are particularly interested in social media as a platform to market their

news content, increase traffic to their websites and strengthen customer relationships, individual journalists take a more informal and personal approach: rather than promoting links to their published articles, they primarily use social media to talk about what they are working on, share opinions and ideas or for live-blogging.

In the recent past, social media has become more resourceful, and users are now using this platform as a way to practice citizen journalism. Thus, you do not have to wait for the newspapers, radio stations or even television stations for news beats because uploads of events are made as and when they unfold (*Daily Monitor*, 2021). Sourcing in *New Vision*, *Daily Monitor* and *The Observer*, as Namasinga (2018) explains, takes place in converged and networked spaces via social media. Facebook and Twitter are commonly deployed in newsgathering because they enable journalists and sources to connect they can diversify journalistic sources and increase alternative voices in news coverage.

This study focused on two social media platforms, i.e. Facebook and Twitter, because of the following justification. Among 11 social media sites contacted as a regular news source, Facebook is at the top, with about a third (36%) of Americans getting news there regularly. YouTube comes next, with 23% of U.S. adults regularly getting news there. Twitter is a regular news source for 15% of US adults (Mitchel, 2020). However, Facebook still leads in audience engagement compared to other platforms. Although the percentage of audiences getting news from other social media platforms is declining, Pain (2019) argues that Facebook and Twitter still lead other social media platforms as a source of news for users because of their big number of users.

2.4 Summary

This chapter focused on an overview of Uganda's journey towards realizing media digitalization. In this context, the case study was *New Vision* newspaper in Uganda. The company was chosen because it is one of the media groups which continue to dominate the digital media space in Uganda and East Africa. The section reviewed scholarly work on media digitalisation, and a comparative analysis was made in view of the *New Vision* newspaper. The reviews highlight the gaps that the study captioned and covered. Thus, the next chapter discusses the methodology employed in the study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology used to collect, analyse and interpret data. The chapter covered the research approach and design, population, study site, sampling and sample size, research method, data collection tools and procedures, validity and reliability of research tools, data analysis and presentation plan and ethical considerations.

3.2 Research Approach and Research Design

The study followed a qualitative approach to examine the implementation of *New Vision's* digital strategy, focusing on the website, social media platforms and e-paper. This approach was relevant because the study generally relied on non-numerical data from first-hand interviews. The exploratory research design was employed in the study because it helped investigate research questions that had not previously been studied in-depth such as factors which led *New Vision* to adopt a digital strategy, the current implementation status, challenges and opportunities faced in its implementation. This research design was applicable because it was used to investigate a subject that had not been studied or thoroughly investigated. As much as *New Vision's* digital strategy was discussed, its current implementation status was fairly known.

3.3 Population

Shukla (2020) defines population as a set or group of all the units on which the research findings are applied. The population of this study was print media in Uganda, specifically *New Vision*. This media house was selected as a fair representation of other

media houses, where the study findings were generalised to all print media in Uganda. *New Vision's* audience is varied, i.e., the youth and the elderly. *New Vision* was selected for this study because it is the largest media house in Uganda, owned by state and private shareholders. It also has a mix of staff, including those who have worked in the company for a long time and young ones with varying levels of digital skills.

3.4 Target Population

The study population included: top management, online editors, social media staff and website content managers. These categories of employees were targeted because they are responsible for the digital services and decision-making at *New Vision*. The 12 staff who were interviewed included: Features Editor, (1) Digital Editor, Digital Optimisation officer, Head audience engagement, Senior Multi Media Producer, (2) Multi-Media Writers, Head of Creative Hub, Editor International News, (2) online engagement staff, Social Media Producer.

3.5 Study Site

The research site of this study was *New Vision's* head office located on Plot 19/21, First Street Industrial Area in Kampala.

3.6 Sample Size

It included two top editors, seven multimedia content creators, the Editor of International News, the Head of Creative Hub, and the Head of Audience Engagement, adding up to 12 respondents.

Taherdoost (2017) defines the sample size as a significant feature of any empirical study whose goal is to make inferences about a population. In order to generalize from a random sample and avoid sampling errors or biases, a random sample

needed to be of adequate size. The participants were chosen based on their involvement in the digital operation, level of decision-making at *New Vision*, experience, expertise, and access to information.

3.7 Sampling Procedures

This study employed a purposive sampling procedure to select respondents, selecting staff with knowledge and roles related to research objectives. Tongco (2007) defines purposive sampling as a type of non-probability sampling most effective when one needs to study a certain cultural domain with experts.

Taherdoost (2017) states that the sample size has to be bigger to minimise error. He also says diminishing returns can sometimes set in if the size is too big. Similar studies, such as Wanyama (2006), used this method. According to Wanyama, subjects are handpicked because they are informative or possess the required characteristics. In this sampling procedure, the participants were selected by virtue of their job roles, knowledge and experience.

3.8 Research Method

An in-depth interview was used in this study to collect data on implementing *New Vision* digital strategy, but with a focus on the website, social media platforms and the e-paper. This method was selected because of the qualitative nature of the topic.

3.9 Data/General Collection Tool

3.9.1 In-Depth Interview Guide

In-depth interviewing is a qualitative research technique involving intensive individual interviews with a few respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation (Boyce, 2016). In-depth interviews with *New*

Vision online staff who manage digital platforms and create content and management helped to provide information on why *New Vision* chose to go digital, how far with the implementation of the digital strategy and the challenges and opportunities faced during its implementation.

3.10 Data Collection Procedure

The researcher sought permission to collect data from *New Vision* Management by presenting the Aga Khan Graduate School of Media and Communication introductory letter, seeking clearance from the National and Uganda Christian University Research Ethics Committees. The researcher also got consent from respondents.

3.11 Pre-Testing of Data Collection Tool

The data collection instrument, namely the interview schedule, was pre-tested at another media house and refined before data collection. Pre-testing meant testing the tool's validity, reliability, practicability and sensitivity before being used for data collection. The only way to gain assurance that questions were not ambiguous, according to Palys (2008), was to try them on a selected small group of prospective respondents. For this study, six respondents were given an interview schedule and gave feedback on whether the questions were simple, understandable and clear enough to provide intended responses.

3.12 Validity and Reliability of Research Tools

Reliability and validity are ways of establishing the authenticity of a research tool if it produced correct results. The interview guide was shared with the research supervisor, colleagues in the same cohort and a few staff at *New Vision* to establish if

the questions addressed the objectives and were easily comprehensible. The research tools were written in simple English. Their comments helped improve the research tools.

3.13 Data Analysis and Presentation Plan

Data Analysis systematically applies statistical and logical techniques to describe, illustrate, condense, recap, and evaluate data. Researchers analyse for observation patterns throughout data collection (Robinson, 2004). This study entailed the analysis of qualitative data. Qualitative data is non-numerical information which includes in-depth interviews and audio recordings. The data from in-depth interviews were analysed through a five-step inductive analysis process. It was first prepared and organized. Next, it was reviewed and explored. Then, the initial codes were created. After that, the codes were reviewed and combined into themes. Lastly, the themes were refined, and the findings from the themes were presented coherently and cohesively.

3.14 Ethical Considerations

The researcher sought permission from the Aga Khan Graduate School of Media and Communication Ethical Research Board to carry out the study. Data was collected in Uganda, so the researcher sought clearance from Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST). This clearance was done by Uganda Christian University's Research Ethics Committee, which UNCST authorized to approve research exercises in Uganda.

The researcher introduced himself to *New Vision* Management, stating the purpose of the study in writing and clearly stating it was for study purposes only. The researcher also got written consent from respondents.

3.15 Summary

This chapter presented the research methodology which was used in this study. The research approach used was qualitative, and the research design was exploratory. The sample comprised twelve *New Vision* staff members, including top management, online news editors, social media staff, and website content managers, all selected through purposive sampling. There was one data collection tool; an in-depth interview guide. This was pre-tested to ensure reliability and validity. The researcher sought ethical approval from the relevant authorities.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION, AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explored the implementation of the digital strategy of *New Vision* with a focus on factors for adoption, challenges and opportunities to help understand the shift from traditional to digital media. The study answered three research questions derived from the specific objectives; RQ1: What are the driving factors for adopting the *New Vision* digital strategy? RQ2: What is the current status of implementing the *New Vision's* digital strategy? RQ3: What are the challenges faced and opportunities reaped by the *New Vision* in implementing its digital strategy?

Retrospective of the research questions, necessary data was collected from in-depth interviews on implementing *New Vision* digital strategy, emphasising the website, social media platforms and the e-paper. Therefore, this chapter highlights the presentation, analysis and interpretations of the findings.

4.2 Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretation

The researcher sampled 12 respondents but reached a point of saturation upon interviewing 10 of the interviewees.

4.2.1 Findings

4.2.2.1 Driving Factors for the Adoption of New Vision Digital Strategy

All interviewees demonstrated a positive attitude toward adopting digital transformation, highlighting common technologies that could assist in adopting digital transformation within *New Vision*. The majority of interviewees highlighted common factors that influenced the adoption of digital transformation, challenges and

opportunities of digital implementation of the *New Vision's strategy*. Most interviewees indicated that implementing digital technologies is beneficial for *New Vision*, increasing profit and reducing time of generation and distribution of content, ultimately leading to increased customer satisfaction.

In this context, one of the interviewees expressed that newspaper sales are plummeting and increasing, and audiences are migrating to digital platforms. So, the company felt it important to pursue the audiences on platforms where they are found to sell news products in real-time. *New Vision* website was redesigned and promoted to reach audiences globally because its use transcends geographical boundaries. The introduction of e-paper was for reaching audiences that may not be within the geographical confines of where the hard copy sales are distributed and to the audience who are on digital platforms. Social media platforms were adopted to serve audiences on social media platforms in order to increase the reach of the company's brand products, as R1 pointed out that over the last decade, news business has become increasingly competitive, especially with the emergence of social media, and that news – whether factual or fake – now travels much faster. More news websites have also joined the fray and as a result, *New Vision* had to move with the times to remain relevant to its audiences and become competitive in the business for our survival. To keep up, they had to adopt a holistic digital strategy.

R1 noted that the news business has been evolving with advancements in technology. Therefore, *New Vision* had to adopt new technologies such as creating an interactive app to keep its brands visible in the market and engage more with the audiences. Turning to a digital strategy was also another way to meet *New Vision's* long-desired goal of becoming Africa's news hub of media technology.

Participants raised several concerns about how adopting digital technologies, specifically cloud technology adoption, would impact their organisation's

infrastructure and thus positively impact digital transformation adoption. Most participants mentioned that the enterprise is currently busy with multiple projects to facilitate cloud adoption and that this will most certainly have a major impact on the existing infrastructure and data centres.

All participants were of the opinion that adopting cloud technologies will result in saving for the enterprise as maintenance of the on-premise hardware will reduce significantly. Another infrastructural concern was the need for high-speed, low-latency connectivity. R6 highlighted that *New Vision's* cloud deployment connectivity is an important infrastructure which needs investment.

The changing times were also a factor identified by interviewees. The company could not remain static in old methods of operation, yet the rest of its competitors were adopting the digital revolution. R2 observed that digital makes work move faster and easy to monitor. He explained that if staff still believed in the old newspaper operations, that particular staff would wonder how a newspaper is published today with a click of a button. Secondly, he noted that the consumers went digital and they needed instant news, as a result, *New Vision* had to improve on the necessary digital infrastructure.

R3 explained that *New Vision* adopted a digital strategy to manage costs. The paper chose to change staff hiring strategy by looking out for tech-savvy candidates with digital skills. She said during recruitment, *New Vision* looks out for candidates who have multimedia skills such as photography, graphic design, video and text.

The essence of starting a website at *New Vision*, according to R1 was to match the digital trend. He noted that the best asset to have in the online era for any brand is the website, which is the only channel the newspaper can own. Different entities own other sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn and the paper has no absolute rights over them. He argued that *New Vision* owns its website, which helps the company control

its information, which is different from Facebook and can change how users access information. The website is the only anchor *New Vision* has regarding information safety and dissemination. R2 added that the website has become *New Vision's* one-stop centre. It is a touch point of understanding consumption because the audience now searches for information from the website, especially for authenticity. The paper adopted the website because it provides highlights. R1 explained that in a hardcopy paper, the reader wants, for example, to know the entire story of a particular football game. On the website, they provide only scores and other briefs for the mobile phone audience.

New Vision adopted the e-paper because it produced a unique feel during Covid-19. R5 noted that if the print copies were declining due to economic hardships and technological advancements, the biggest puzzle for them was how to give stories a longer shelf life. The other challenge with hardcopy is that people cannot read while performing other activities. R5 elucidated that the e-paper was one way of giving the consumers everlasting value, where they can read a story on their phones as they perform other tasks. This is one of the reasons that led *New Vision* to adopt the e-paper. The purpose was to meet the interest of the ever-changing audience who want to consume when, how, where, and what.

R6 argued that the trend of consumption of news content and journalism pattern caused them to adopt the e-paper, for example, being an all-round journalist and the availability of free content has changed media landscape. The e-paper is easily accessible and easy to use, so they adopted it to compete with the ever-increasing number of bloggers. He added that there was long process and delay when *New Vision* was producing only print copies and this caused the company to lag behind in terms of serving the mobile and unpredictable audience who are already consuming content from bloggers. He noted that the transformation from hardcopy to e-paper happened because

of changing journalism practices like audience shift from traditional media to digital space. *New Vision's* audience needs instant news, and the news suppliers are digital so *New Vision* had to step up the e-paper and social media handles.

4.2.2.2 The Current Implementation Status of New Vision's Digital Strategy

It was important to identify the different digital technologies available because one of the objectives of this study was to determine the implementation status of the digital strategy in the *New Vision*. R3 indicated that a redesigned website was launched about two years ago, and it has been merged with the company's application so that the audience are able to consume products on the website and be able to make use of other services within the Vision Digital Experience app, the name of the company's application, which is a one-stop centre for all its print and digital products. This also followed with the establishment of a fast news desk which produces breaking news and short news stories about events of the day, in hundreds of stories. He said that some of these stories are later followed up with deeper analysis and investigation in the print paper the following day or days.

With adopting the e-paper, interviewees, specifically R2 stated that two years ago, the company started charging readers who want to access e-paper after a one-year free trial. In addition to the whole e-version of the print newspaper, there is an extra 16 pages of content exclusive only to people who access the e-paper. Similarly, *New Vision* also developed an e-paper portal for readers to access the electronic copy of a given day's paper. This subscription-based service has been embraced as a convenient alternative for reading the news daily digitally. R4 further noted that as an additional revenue stream, *New Vision* also turned to digital archiving of its past editions – right from the early editions in the late 1980s. On this portal, one can purchase a specific page, page, or entire edition from a desired point back in time.

Regarding adopting social media platforms, R9 said that all stories uploaded on the company's website are promoted on its social media platforms. In general, interviewees expressed that the first move under the digital strategy was organizational re-organization, where the original silos (independent departmental operations) were broken down and an integrated approach was taken on. Roles were revised across the board to accommodate this integration. For instance, a reporter became a multimedia journalist, while an editor or deputy editor became a senior producer or producer of content.

R1 added that another action was to adopt a 'Digital First' policy, where *New Vision's* digital platforms – websites, app and social platforms were given priority in terms of news service over the print, which now had to enhance a day-two journalism approach. To encourage this, a 'Fast News' team of reporters was created to gather tough news as it happens and have it published online. Analysis from these stories would then be preserved for print. For over two years now, this plan has seen the volume of news articles published on digital platforms increase as compared to the time before the inception of the 'Fast News' strategy. R1 explained that Vision Group has since invested in various forms of technology to keep up with the digital times. One of them is an interactive app i.e. Augmented Reality, a one-stop centre for text, photo, video and audio content. It is a cross-promotional app with TV, radio and podcast sections. It also has a citizen journalism section to enhance audience engagement and an education portal that carries primary and secondary school study material (this came in handy, especially during the lockdown when schools were closed). In the app, one can also pay for utility bills, buy airtime and do e-commerce. The app is also fitted with augmented reality functionality, allowing readers of the *New Vision* print edition to watch videos related to published articles in hard copy.

R3 noted that *New Vision* shifted to a digital strategy because of the effects of Covid-19. The paper predominantly relied on print, but when the pandemic hit, it had to rethink how it packaged its content to suit both online and hard copy readers. It was to match the trend that came with the effects of Covid-19. People were consuming more online content as opposed to hard copy. She stated that when it comes to online strategy, the paper wanted to attract young people as well because the mode of writing online stories is different from the hard copy style of writing. The online stories are shorter, punchy and focus more on entertainment. In addition, a journalist must collect pictures, audio, text, and video for every story. She explained this innovation is for ensuring that a reader's user experience is enhanced by pictures, photos, text or video accessed through augmented reality. So, Covid-19 played a very big role in speeding up the implementation of *New Vision* digital strategy.

4.2.2.3 Challenges faced and Opportunities reaped by *New Vision* in the Implementation of Digital Strategy

The most cited challenge under the implementation of *New Vision* digital strategy was resistance to change. Many of the employees have worked within the traditional news generation and dissemination setup. Getting them to shift their attitudes and embrace digital operations remains a work in progress. Hopefully, the scepticism and the 'fear of change culture will slowly fade off. The signs are good; the 'converts' are increasing.

Most participants highlighted that some employees have been working at the organisation for many years and are used to doing things using old methods: R6 stated that the paper has employees who are resistant to change so it might be leaving people behind if it does not put in much effort to bring them on board. He noted that people

often say it's always been done in the same way so there is no need for change. R10 observed that before *New Vision* addresses resistance to change, the paper must clearly define the project's scope. This means that the company needs first to communicate clear definition of what is involved in digital transformation.

Communication challenges can be addressed by a clear and well-defined scope which is clearly communicated to all employees. R5 highlighted that as part of addressing resistance to change within the organisation, the paper needs to pay attention to challenges with the current processes. R2 also mentioned that change management is a very important factor. If *New Vision* management doesn't handle it correctly, employees won't adopt it.

Interviewees expounded that the website is supposed to be populated with breaking news daily, but many writers and editors are yet to appreciate the advent of the fast-paced digital world. Stories that are not exclusive are kept for the hard copy newspaper and then repurposed for the website after publication, yet they are supposed to go to the website before appearing in the hard copy newspaper. Also, every journalist is required to submit two website stories per day, but according to R2, that figure is still very low considering the contribution of journalists for the hard copy. The reporters write very long stories meant for hardcopy versions, yet online stories are supposed to be short and analytical and should provide space for related developments.

R6 noted that people have not yet understood and appreciated how to run digital content. He added that an online story has to be short, engaging and attractive but most writers simply pick hardcopy stories and submit to digital team for posting. He explained that instead of paying attention to what the market wants, most reporters think for the audience for example, writers do not follow analytics to inform their angling and interest of readers. They are more interested in the views of the story but not the engagement yet the engagement gives an opportunity of knowing what people want to

consume. He observed that most writers do not know where to focus their energies. Digital strategy is just a word people throw around but not something that is being invested in.

This brings another challenge: involvement and buy-in by top management in digital transformation. R8 said that he has not seen a moment when writers are trained in digital content generation. He stated that writers have not been trained in areas like podcasting yet they are supposed to know about search engine optimization where by a word is goggled and what comes up is a *New Vision* story which has the goggled word. He also observed that he has not encountered any *New Vision* reporter specifically trained in digital journalism.

R1 added that the other challenge of the website is to keep it data-friendly. Internet is expensive and sometimes connectivity is a challenge. This implies that *New Vision* has to find a way of ensuring that its website is fast and user-friendly. He noted that ten years ago, having a website without videos was no problem but today, it is a must to have a video, audio, and infographics so that someone can still work and consume content in whichever way they desire. However, this means the reader must part with huge bundles, which is beyond *New Vision's* control. The paper's main challenge is how to keep the website data-friendly and yet consumer needs information in a digitalised manner.

Social media is also a big threat to the website. By the time the *New Vision* posts information on the website, the news is no longer news because social media will have broken it already. *New Vision* staff needs to understand how to provide more value on the website beyond breaking news. Reporters need to research, investigate, and give more details, which means more space the company needs to have at the back end of the website to accommodate all these different formats. R1 noted that this points to costly internet. Ogola (2015) also agrees that African newsrooms face challenges such

as high illiteracy rate, media suppression, low electricity distribution, internet and other infrastructure. R9 stated that people are yet to appreciate the convenience of consuming the e-paper, so not many people are willing to subscribe to receive e-copies. Also, reporters have not yet mastered the skill of online writing. They write very long stories without much detail.

Using technology also remains a huge obstacle. Many people are not tech-savvy, so even the simplest actions to access news and other information on their gadgets become a hurdle. Some do not update their app regularly yet the developers continuously fix bugs and add new functionalities to the app to improve the user experience. Those who do not update their app get frustrated – and some even uninstall it.

The e-paper also faces security as a challenge. The more internet open up, the more vulnerable the system becomes. R9 noted that they have resorted to tighter means of securing their systems such as copyright and constantly changing passwords to make it difficult for hackers to access the system. He identified competition from bloggers and other media houses as another challenge and that today, one can start his or her own media house from home. If he or she has a very well-developed app, the audience can choose whether to continue reading our product or read one of the blogger. He explained that there is ease of penetration to the market. It is unlike many years ago when a few companies dominated the media industry. More micro websites can come and copy *New Vision's* information.

The e-paper is facing a challenge in adoption because it is an early product ahead of its time. R5 noted that *New Vision* is singing the 'roses' that it is reaping much money from the e-paper but the company had to invest in restructuring of staff, infrastructure, and app developers. This is still work in progress which the company has financially not yet benefited from. He stated that to get the e-paper running, the

company has done so many changes at the background like repositioning staff, remodelling the product etc. He explained that the Ugandan economy also does not support e-paper's sustenance. It is different from developed countries that have stronger economies. R5 observed that *New Vision* has to keep investing and it shall reap at a certain time but can't sit and wait for that moment. R2 explained that another challenge is to give the audience a user-friendly app because data is still expensive, and some parts of the country have no internet connectivity.

R3 highlighted that the closure of Facebook in Uganda has greatly affected traffic on Facebook, so the company's activity on the platform does not reach as many people as it would have and writers have not yet mastered the skill of effective reporting on Facebook and other platforms. She said that as a government paper, *New Vision* is not so active on Facebook yet this is where some of the audience is found. The other challenge which she noted is mind-set change. People think that social media is for jokes. Many of the employees have long worked within the traditional setup of news dissemination, yet social media is also a very important news source. She also noted that writers still compile stories like they're writing for hard copy paper instead of being analytical and giving in-depth reporting. Getting them to shift their attitudes and embrace digital operations remains work in progress. Hopefully, she added that the scepticism and the 'fear of change' culture will slowly fade and that the signs are good because the 'converts' are increasing.

New Vision content creators have a challenge in packaging stories for social media. If social media have already broken a story, the biggest question remains how to package the story to keep it interesting. R2 noted that they break a story like any other lay person who leaves out a lot of details. He explained that a reader should visit *New Vision* Facebook or Twitter page and find the story more interesting and full of details. He added that they should also update their readers on a daily basis about what

is happening. Reporters only post papers of the day like *Orumuri*, *Bukedde*, *New Vision* and some key stories and that is it for the day yet the audience is active and want to read more. Social media engagement is lacking. R7 revealed that when there is a controversial story with online interaction from the audience, there is usually no comment from an administrator, yet this is the essence of engagement!

Use of advanced and sophisticated technology also remains a huge obstacle. R1 highlighted that people are slow at learning or adapting to new technology. The simplest thing, logging onto the system, can just push someone away from consuming content. He noted that it is about simple life and that if anything is a challenge, the audience leaves it and moves on.

The digital strategy requires a lot of human and technology investment, which may not be readily available due to budgetary constraints. It also calls for commitment which one won't get from each and every member of the team. This has strained efforts in achieving some of the short-term goals of the digital strategy.

The lack of internet connectivity throughout the country was raised as a factor that negatively impacts effective adoption of social media. This was sufficed when R3 stated she thinks connectivity is a massive issue given *New Vision's* big footprint and widespread brick-and-mortar stores' connectivity is not consistently available everywhere. In addition, sometimes the slow internet throws a spanner in the works, considering that digital news operations and the internet work hand-in-hand.

The other challenge that *New Vision* faces on social media operations is the huge number of bloggers. *New Vision* works under a strict and slow editorial system that must be followed, yet social media is supposed to be instant. R8 noted that they need to operate at the same pace with bloggers because they all serve the same audience. He said that they handle the same story of a similar magnitude with the blogger but as reporters they fast need to check for so many editorial standards before posting online

and yet a blogger just puts up the story straight away and the consumers consider who has posted first. This means that *New Vision* does not post on social media at a faster pace as required.

Another challenge for *New Vision's* social media content creators is competition. They are no longer the only content creators and it is no longer about how big the media house is. The audience picks what they consume. R6 noted that some years back, the audience would wait for the government to read the budget and receive news in print copies. Today, anybody can tweet the whole budget and by the time *New Vision* posts, it is usually too late and no one is interested in stale news. It means more work for content creators. For example, he explained that reporters should ask questions such as: what does reading of the budget mean for the local person in the community? How is it affecting fuel supply? What does it mean for farming? This implies that the reporter has to source for more information. He or she should look for what people are interested in and give context.

He added that established media houses lag behind in terms of instant and frequent social media updates because they do not have the advantage of publishing content without it going through the editorial checks. This is different from the bloggers or competitors who majorly post entertainment news, sports etc. R6 highlighted that entertainment is easy for people to accept but topics such as farming are harder to sell to the general audience yet bloggers concentrate on entertainment to grow their audience. He noted that *New Vision* does not give more attention on content which pays more. It needs to focus on where the monetisation is and reporters have to ask questions such as what is trending. The reporters have to put in more effort.

R8 noted that their social media handlers are overwhelmed because they receive news every time but since *New Vision* is dependable, it cannot afford to make a mistake. So, they have to double check, which delays the timely dissemination of news. He said

the speed at which the news should move viz-viz the speed at which the handler is supposed to confirm delays the process. So, they need to speed up the process between news coming in and news going out. Secondly, fraudsters are using *New Vision*'s logos. This produces more work for social media handlers to check if someone has faked *New Vision*'s stories.

R8 noted that *New Vision* is trying to build numbers online and use it to attract advertisers. However, he notes that the strategy of pay wall for both website and social media cannot work in *New Vision* in this present time because the paper's main revenue hub is traditional advertisements. Also, for every campaign or special project that the paper has, he noted that the website is not fully utilized to promote those campaigns as it is done in the print copy. He was optimistic that opportunities might open in future but innovations like pay wall are far from realisation in *New Vision*. He also added that content on the website should have been good but reporters do not run stories which are trending in the market but simply touch the surface.

In as much as there are challenges, *New Vision* has a website developed over 10 years ago and redesigned two years ago. It uses a content management system so everyone in management, editors and reporters can see how specific stories are performing. Editors and reporters can see which story is relevant and why it is trending. This provides story angling and gives them information about which story to emphasise. There is also registered growth in traffic as a result of publishing more breaking news as it happens and the merging of the website to the company's application has also helped cement the growth trajectory.

R10 added that the website has made their stories more popular compared to when they were published in the print copy. This is because the story gains more views through hits. After getting huge number of followers, we should make the product commercial and the next task is to maintain the huge numbers and convert them into

revenue streams. This has made them to gain public trust. He noted that the credibility has helped them maintain the commercial value because so many readers and advertisers trust *New Vision* for being authentic, which is seen through the website analytics.

Some people have appreciated the fact that it is possible to consume a product digitally. That is why the implementation of Augmented Reality (AR) features many photos, video, text just to give the audience a new experience. With AR, a reader is able to watch short clips of videos, photos and text. R1 said that the e-paper is relatively cheaper than hard copy, which means they can get more readers. It lowered cost and is convenient for people basing on their personal device. The e-paper is a revenue stream and a way for *New Vision* to learn what people want to consume because there is opportunity for interaction with the reader and according to R1, Augmented Reality has contributed to acceptance of the e-paper by the audience.

The e-paper has provided information for reporters to write stories from an informed point of view because data is generated by the digital optimisation team, giving them (reporters) analytics of the most read stories in the e-paper. In this way, R3 noted that reporters can even write for example, about tips on writing a CV. This is information that is provided through analytics of the e-paper. He added that reporters used to write about what they think and gave very little attention on what the audience thinks. With the e-paper, this has changed. Reporters now care about what the audience wants to consume. All they are interested in is the story's relevance to the reader.

The e-paper has promoted collaboration in *New Vision* newsroom. In the analogue operations, people used to work in silos but now the e-paper requires inter-departmental collaboration. A reporter, for example, uploads stories in consultation with the digital technical team. At the point of production, a reporter liaises with the

graphics team to visually represent the story. R7 explains that reporters now consult the digital tech team about a niche story and they has appreciated that it is no longer enough for them to be amazing writers. It is about getting data from the e-paper generated by the tech team to inform them about what people want. They write about something which the niche audience in that space wants.

R2 added that on the e-paper, they can explain a story and related development more. Consequently, readers get updates of online stories but this is not the case with the hardcopy version. The e-paper has also offered an opportunity to publish many stories compared to hard copies where they would only publish 50 stories. He explained that if the Pope falls sick, for example, after writing the story and it has gone to print, then the Pope dies so the person who will read the hardcopy paper at 8am will have outdated information. This has been solved by the e-paper and social media which give the opportunity for updating of stories.

There has been growth of audience due to constant interaction on social media and the company can view feedback from the comments on social media and gauge trending news items to determine where the editors can channel their energies. R4 noted that *New Vision's* social media platforms have increased the number of readers of the entire company products. For example, a hardcopy previously served five readers but with the e-paper, half a million people can read a single story. He highlighted that social media handles enable them to reach more people than the e-paper. This attracts advertisers and other revenue streams.

Social media has created two way communications. It is no longer about feeding the audience with content but they also determine what to consume. R4 observed that it is creating a two way communication. The audience talks back and can choose to ignore the media house. He says his work is to generate top-level data from social media

analytics to inform management about New Vision's ranking against competitors. This helps management make strategic decisions, for example; where to improve in digital operation.

The above opportunities are in tandem with the Disruption of Innovation Theory which was used in this study. The theory says that technology opens up an opportunity for new products. Therefore, because of technological changes, *New Vision* has developed new products like the Augmented Reality app, e-paper and redesign of the website. Disruption of Innovation Theory according to Christensen, is a process by which a product or service takes root initially in simple applications at the bottom of a market and then relentlessly moves up market, eventually displacing established competitors. *The New Vision's* e-paper, website and social media platforms are equally taking over hardcopy newspapers. This can be equated to Christensen's theory which says that a new product overtakes an existing product in the market.

4.3 Summary of Key Findings

A number of factors cause the slow progress towards total digital transformation but the major ones include: lack of mind shift by staff from traditional to digital ways of operation and lack of adequate skills, especially on the part of writers and other content creators. The study revealed that writers compile long stories which are meant for hardcopies and post on digital platforms. Moreover, the website stories are not updated in real time and sometimes, there is technological breakdown which hinders seamless access of the e-paper. The next chapter therefore presents the discussions, conclusions and recommendations to the study.

4.4 Summary

This chapter provided findings on analysis of *New Vision*'s digital strategy with focus on the website, e-paper and social media, drawing deep insights on factors which led to the adoption of the strategy, its implementation status, opportunities reaped and challenges faced as a result of the implementation of the strategy. In as much as the concept of digital transformation is common in the newsroom, the actual implementation is still lacking. For example, reporters have not yet mastered the art of online story writing; there are challenges of high internet costs and poor connectivity.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the key findings of the analysis of *New Vision*'s digital strategy, focusing on the website, e-paper and social media platforms. This chapter also presents conclusions from the study's findings, recommendations and potential areas for future research.

5.2 Discussion of Key Findings

The key findings were discussed within the research objectives and guided by the research questions.

5.2.1 Discussions on Factors which led to the Adoption of Digital Strategy by New Vision

Digital transformation is one of the critical challenges facing businesses today and *New Vision* is not spared either. From the data collected, some of the major factors which led *New Vision* to adopt a digital strategy are: coping up with the trend of the digital revolution, journalism dynamics, and audience mobility. The onset of Covid-19 exacerbated all these. Relatedly, in response to the digital revolution, *The New York Times* had to develop a digital strategy which proved to be one of the successful models of quality journalism in the smartphone era.

Miniaturization and the commercialization of mobile computing have made the essential building blocks smaller, cheaper, and more capable than ever (Saarikko, Westergren, & Blomquist, 2017). Indeed, one of the salient aspects of digital transformation is that access to technology itself is a problem. *New Vision* adopted the

e-paper, which has proved to be cheaper and easier to distribute than the hard copy. However, *New Vision* still has a challenge in distributing the e-paper because of poor connectivity and costly internet. People would like to access the paper online, but most parts of the country still have electricity and internet distribution challenges.

In Kane, Palmer, Phillips, Kiron, and Buckley (2015)'s words, "Strategy, not technology, drives digital transformation." This indicates that firms need to develop competencies in leveraging digital technology for business purposes. This is in line with the findings of the study. *For example, new Vision* developed a digital strategy to drive its digital transformation by improving its website, creating the e-paper and investing in social media interactions.

The rate at which digital technology can spawn new "smart" products and services is matched only by its ability to extend the reach and range of social interactions via ubiquitous infrastructure and malleable platforms (Nambisan, Wright, & Feldman, 2019). This caused *New Vision* to alter their existing business models and operate a portfolio of different business models to cope with increasingly mobile customers who demand both flexibility and personalization of products and services (Li, 2018). But, radically altering one's business model(s) and organization to leverage new technology is neither simple nor straightforward. It involves stepping out of one's comfort zone and possibly eliminating practices which employees and customers have come to expect or even take for granted. *New Vision*, for example, stepped out of its comfort zone by employing digital optimisation staff, and setting up the Augmented Reality app which gives consumers a unique experience.

Although the study findings portray the implementation of *New Vision* digital strategy as one which is still work in progress, according to (Armenakis and Bedeian, 2019), it is essential to change directions concerning the content of organizational digital change. Global newspapers such as *Guardian* had to scale up their digital

operations during the onset of Covid-19. *Guardian's* digital strategy is successful because of the innovative Guardian Live Team's ongoing virtual events, a series of new digital journalism tools successfully launched by product and engineering teams. Just like the Guardian, *New Vision* adopted a digital strategy to serve its ever-increasing digital audience. From synthesising what is known about digitalization, the study derived one distinct yet interrelated thematic patterns that help us better understand the peculiarities of digital transformation. In particular, the researcher observed the need for media houses to invest and move towards pragmatic organizational designs that are embedded in and driven by digital business ecosystems. There should be practicality in processes and systems in digital transformation.

Relatedly, the news business has been evolving with advancements in technology. *New Vision* had to adopt some of these new technologies for instance, creating an interactive app to keep its brands visible in the market and also engage more with our audiences. Turning to a digital strategy was also another way of addressing *New Vision's* long-desired goal to become Africa's news hub of choice.

5.2.2 Discussions on Implementation Status of New Vision's Digital Strategy

New Vision adopted digital operations in 2015 to serve its ever-growing audience and over the last decade, the news business has become increasingly competitive, especially with the emergence of social media. News – whether factual or fake – now travels much faster. More news websites have joined the fray. So, being a traditional news outlet, *New Vision* had to move with the times to remain relevant to its audiences and be competitive in the business for its survival. Therefore, it had to adopt a holistic digital strategy to keep up.

The study identified innovation and integration as mechanisms *New Vision* employs to bring about digital transformation, consistent with Henfridsson (2013). They noted that mechanisms of innovation involve the application of resources, processes and capabilities that are new to the organization, for example, *New Vision* invested resources in redesigning the website and hiring of social media staff. On the other hand, integration includes the alignment of these with existing resources, processes and capabilities (Ranganathan et al., 2013). *New Vision* has changed some of its staff roles. The staffs that were called by job title of Sub-Editor are now referred to as Multi Media Production Journalists. There has also been fusion of all different sections of the media house into one entity like TV, Radio and vernacular newspapers are now integrated with *New Vision* paper. The app is fitted with augmented reality functionality, allowing readers of print edition to watch videos related to published articles in the hard copy. *New Vision* established an e-paper portal for readers to access the electronic copy of a given day's paper. This subscription-based e-paper has been embraced as a convenient alternative for the hard copy.

Mobilization for and acceleration of digital transformation by *New vision* is a critical activity at the strategic level. It is used, among other things to attract a new generation of workers as stated by Matzler et al. (2018) and to establish digital mind-sets as pointed out by Hansen et al. (2021). With a more operational focus embedded in the organisation's strategic orientation, the exploitation and leveraging of digital capabilities is important for organizations like *New Vision*. According to (Barua et al., 2014), this is mainly about online informational capabilities and big data analytics capabilities. In addition, Hausladen (2018) adds that digital platform capabilities such as audience engagements are vital.

It is important to build and invest in internal and external technologies to create digital innovation and seamless experience. There should also be the development of novel products, processes or business models as Hinings et al. (2018) assert. This includes merging human-machine interaction as a core activity to establish value-addition and sustainable synergies between technology and humans in the newsroom (Bajer, 2017). To implement its digital strategy, *New Vision* has employed staff who follow up readers to learn about their experience with the e-paper. Customers are called on the phone or emailed for their opinion and experience. This has made the audience appreciate that it is possible to consume a product digitally. Implementing the Augmented Reality features on many of the photos published means that when someone is opening the digital pages, they can watch short video clips to put the story and photo more into context.

There has been the growth of audience due to constant interaction on social media and the company can pick feedback from the comments on social media, as well as gauge the trending news items, to determine where the editorial and marketing team can channel their energies on what is of interest to the public.

New Vision did not achieve interaction with the audience without the integration of digital operations which is termed: physical-digital harmonization. For example; the promotions of cross-functional sections like renaming of roles in news room to reflect appreciation of digital mind-set. This helped in re-orienting staff to embrace digital operations. Larkin (2017) asserts that the use of coordination mechanisms to assimilate digital technologies within the organization is important and this is what *New Vision* did to achieve staff buy-in of digital transformation. The online newspaper is cheaper, it can be accessed from anywhere and readers do not have to look for specific sections like sports, health, education etc. The reader clicks on the section and gets what interests

them. This kind of integration of digital experience has enabled *New Vision* take a stride in achieving digital transformation.

As an additional revenue stream, *New Vision* also turned to digital archiving of its past editions – right from the early editions in the late 1980s. On this portal, one can purchase a specific page, page, or entire edition from a desired point back in time. *New Vision* is also adopting subscriptions to the e-paper as a move away from the heavy dependence on advertisement revenue.

5.2.3 Discussion on Opportunities and Challenges of New Vision Digital Strategy

There are a number of opportunities and challenges reaped from implementing *New Vision* digital strategy. First and foremost, the newspaper currently has a mix of hard and soft copy. The hard copy has its opportunities which include: the older generation, who buy copies, some advertisers still use this platform for marketing their business because the paper is still trusted. It has a credibility for news sources that when a story is broken on social media; people will wait for what *New Vision* especially hard copy has published to prove its authenticity. The *New Vision* comes to either confirm or dismiss a news item.

However, it has its own challenges, including late delivery of copies and timeliness of breaking stories. Most cases, the hard copy are overtaken by events, especially with competition from social media which breaks the news instantly.

Due to the above challenge, *New Vision* had to develop an e-paper, which is not a new trend in African journalism. Ogola (2015) asserts that even with minimal research in the digital footprints of media sector, journalism in Africa is also embracing technology just as the rest of the world. He argues that African journalism has creatively and proactively appropriated a range of new media technologies so fundamentally that they have become an inalienable part of the continent's journalism. *New Vision's* has

appropriated new media technology by breaking news on the e-paper and social media. Studies suggest that social media has become a popular, if not indispensable, tool for newsgathering in various domains, ranging from politics and foreign news to sports and celebrity news (Paulussen, 2014).

The African newsroom has several other setbacks to full online migration which include but not limited to: management's scepticism, fear of losing what journalists know and have, inadequate revenue and lack of expertise. *New Vision* also has a challenge of inadequate data bundles on the part of their audience to be able to read e-paper, access the website and social media pages. People still do not know that the paper exists. However, news media which will adapt to technology that embraces the web and other forms of online information-gathering, as Garrison (2021) observed, such media house can overcome these barriers. Despite Garrison's observation, *New Vision* still delays the speed at which news comes in and goes out. There is also a challenge of fraudsters who are sending fake news. They are always scanning true copies of *New Vision* and editing the content to suit their objectives.

The merger of the company's print, digital and broadcast products into one home — the Vision Digital Experience application has enabled the consumers to have a one-stop centre for all the company's products, so that they do not have to move from one website to another. The *New Vision* has a functional website however, the challenge is lack of timely update. Most staffs still consider publishing stories on the website a 'taboo'. They consider important stories to go to the hardcopy and 'insignificant' stories are posted on the website. In addition, its website is not dynamic for example a story of two days ago can still appear on the website. This agrees with Garrison (2001) argument that one of the setbacks of embracing digital operation in African newsrooms is the fear of losing what journalists already know. It is difficult for reporters to easily appreciate the website because of the prior methods of operations which they still hold onto.

Finally, this study was anchored on the Disruption of Innovation Theory which Clayton Christensen discovered. The theory states that disruptive technology opens up an opportunity for new products. *For example, new Vision's* analogue method of operation was disrupted by digital revolution. Consequently, the company had to adopt and develop a digital strategy which led to the innovation of new products such as the Augmented Reality App, the e-paper and enhancing interaction on social media.

However, like other global media houses, *New Vision* faces challenges in implementing its digital strategy. One overarching challenge is the lack of mind shift from traditional to digital operation. According to (*New York Times* Report, 2020) today's content creators must be writers, editors, producers and both photo and video editors, often performing all those tasks for one piece of content. That requires easy-to-use publishing tools for Web, tablet and mobile production. *New Vision* staff still lack necessary skills for writing online stories. The social media handlers are also overwhelmed by constant developing stories which ought to be posted immediately and yet the internal processes require stories to be subjected to editorial judgments. The audience has no time to wait for the editorial processes because they can get similar content from other news sources especially bloggers.

Finally, according to Christensen, disruptive innovation theory describes a process by which a product or service takes root initially in simple applications at the bottom of a market and then relentlessly moves up market, eventually displacing what was in the market. The e-paper was developed as a trial but when Covid-19 hit the world, the e-paper took root and is becoming a bigger product.

This theory was relevant to the study because it looks at how technology changes business operations. At the implementation stage, *New Vision* changed the way it gathers news. Reporters and editors now work in close collaboration with the digital team, staff job titles were changed to suit digital transformation language for

example chief sub-editor is now called Senior Multi Media Producer. In addition to hard copy sales and advertisements, *New Vision* has adopted e-paper subscriptions. This has not only increased revenue but it also eased distribution of copies. In addition, the audience can now read a specific section of their choice.

5.3 Conclusion and Implication for Practice

The study established that *New Vision* adopted a digital strategy in place and some of the factors which led to the adoption include the digital revolution, changing dynamics in journalism, fluid audience, and the onset of Covid-19 and its effects. The study also established that there is the implementation of *New Vision* digital strategy. For example, the e-paper is up and running though it is still developing, the website is also operational and regarded as a one-stop centre for the paper's products. Finally, the study also discovered that social media, the e-paper and website have increased workload of staff. Reporters, for example, have more work to do when they visit the platform's analytics to inform them about audience needs. It is no longer about thinking for them; the audiences also dictate what they want to consume. The social media team has to be always on alert for developing stories, fraudsters, and striking a balance between postings of content on the platforms in real-time against the long editorial requirements.

In conclusion, *New Vision* has demonstrated willingness and determination to follow the path leading to digital transformation, for example, they have invested in digital infrastructure, renaming of roles and repositioning of staff etc. However, transformation and implementation of *New Vision* digital strategy is still work in progress because of high cost of internet and poor connectivity, media practitioners have not yet had total mind shift from traditional to digital methods of operations, *New*

Vision mainly relies on advertisements and copy sales as sources of revenue. This implies that media houses still have a long way to achieve full digital transformation.

5.4 Recommendations

Digital transformation is a complex phenomenon encompassing different types of technologies, mind shift, and management strategies. Based on the findings, this section presents possible recommendations for *New Vision's* total digital transformation and implementation, focusing on the website, e-paper and social media channels.

5.4.1 Recommendations on Factors Leading to Adoption of New Vision Digital Strategy

The *New Vision* embraced digital transformation due to several factors, including changing times regarding media operations, effects of Covid-19 and the digital revolution/wave. Embracing digital transformation requires the *New Vision* to identify what technologies are relevant and how they will be enacted in business operations for example; *New Vision* still heavily relies on traditional methods of advertisement and copy sales as their main sources of revenue. Digital transformation requires holistic shift in mind set and operations of the newsroom. *New Vision* needs to think about more digital revenue generation channels like paywall.

5.4.2 Recommendations on Status of Implementation of New Vision Digital Strategy

The company set up digital platforms to meet needs of the current digital revolution and this means that no transformation can be successful without communication and buy in from staff. Employees tend to be resistant to change when it is forced upon them. With this in mind, creating dialogue between employees and management and keeping the floor open to discussion is important because technology

is all about something new coming onto the scene. One of the challenges identified was writers prioritising stories for the hard copy paper as opposed to the e-paper. There should be staff training on how to write effective online stories and ensure that they appreciate the importance of e-paper, social media and the website in implementing *New Vision's* digital strategy.

There is need to understand the “why” behind digital change. The staffs need to understand for example the reasons for updating the website on regular and timely manner, and make sure they have a clear picture of what will improve when they do this. Organisations that are winning digital transformation race put a lot of effort into fostering a culture of change. This should target at improving the way online staff interact with online audience. The *New Vision* should further invest in new capabilities and make sure employees develop skills to keep up with a fast paced and dynamic environment. Social media, for example, breaks stories in a timely manner, sometimes without accuracy. *The New Vision* can leverage on its strength of credibility to win public trust on their social media handles. It is critical to implement a thorough training program for employees managing social media, content creators and management to pay attention to online audience engagement. The staff categories mentioned need to respond to questions and interactions on social media and listen to what the audience actually wants other than paying attention to traditional editorial story tips.

For many employees, digital transformation involves moving out of the comfort zone. A culture where experimentation is allowed and even encouraged comforts those new to digital operations. *New Vision* needs to allow their staff to cite stories which are liked by the audience on social media and the website. A strict editorial policy is a good thing, but there needs to be freedom within the framework if *New Vision* is to compete effectively with other ever-increasing online content creators on social media and the website. Staffs need to write stories which audiences want.

5.4.3 Recommendations on Challenges faced and Opportunities reaped from *New Vision Digital Strategy*

Digital connections often help break down generational gaps and unite employees of different ages. *New Vision* has a mix of older and relatively younger generation. There is need for the younger employees to tap into the experience of older staff and the more experienced personnel also need to learn from the tech-savvy youthful staff. This will lead to digital professional effectiveness. The older generations for example need to double-check the professionalism of stories written and young staff need to employ the energy and skill to post them quickly and on the e-paper, website and social media.

Embracing digital transformation is more easily achieved through increased employee engagement. With digital advances, employees can reach consumers easily and know the taste of *New Vision's* audience. Teams should draw lessons from the audience, for example, website interactions, social media analytics to help them know what the audience is interested in. There is need for *New Vision* to fully embrace digital transformation in a practical sense. Writers and other staff still operate with traditional methods as discussed earlier. They post stories which have been broken by social media and do not give the analytical angle.

5.5 Areas for Further Research

Finally, a limited number of academic studies have focused on digital transformation strategies, which could affect the generalisation of the conceptual model. Therefore, further research should be conducted in order to analyse the key elements of digital transformation strategies and their overall impact on practical digital shift.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: In-depth Interview Guide

Topic: Implementation of *New Vision's* Digital Strategy: Analysis of the Website, E-Paper and Social Media Platforms

Can you please tell me about yourself and your work here at the *New Vision*?

What were the driving factors for adoption of a digital strategy by the *New Vision*?

Website:

E-paper:

Social media platforms

Can you please tell me about the status of implementation of the digital strategy at the *New Vision*?

Website:

E-paper:

Social media platforms:

What are the challenges faced by the *New Vision* in the implementation of the digital strategy?

Website:

E-paper:

Social media platforms

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Describe the opportunities reaped from the implementation of the digital strategy of the *New Vision*.

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Website:

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E-paper:

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Social media platforms

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Kindly tell me any additional information that can help enrich this study.

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Appendix B: AKU Ethics Review Committee Approval Letter



THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY
Graduate School of Media and Communications

REF: AKU-GSMC/ERC/2022/023

Date: December 23, 2022.

Dear Frank Obonyo (Student No. 553244)

**RE: IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW VISION'S DIGITAL STRATEGY: ANALYSIS OF
THE WEBSITE, E-PAPER AND SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS**

This is to inform you that Aga Khan University – Graduate School of Media and Communications Ethics Review Committee has reviewed and approved your above research proposal. Your approval period is December 23, 2022, to December 22, 2023, and your application's approval number is AKU-GSMC/ERC/2022/023.

This approval is subject to compliance with the following, under the supervision of your two supervisors:

1. Only the approved documents including the informed consent form and the data collection instruments will be used.
2. Any changes, made on the approved documents that may increase the risks or affect the welfare or safety of the participants or compromise the integrity of the study must be reported to GSMC within the shortest time possible. The amended documents will be taken through a fresh review and the due process of approval.
3. In the event that the research cannot be completed within the one-year approved period, the researcher will request for renewal of approval 30 days prior to the end of the approved period.
4. The researcher will be required to submit a comprehensive progress report when applying for renewal of approval.
5. Submission of an executive summary report to the GSMC's Ethics Review Committee within 90 days of completion of the study.
6. Produce all the data collected using the approved tools as and when required by the Ethics Review Committee within the 90 days of completion of your study.

Prior to commencing your study, you will be required to obtain a research permit from National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). You can access the application portal from the website on <https://www.nacosti.go.ke/>.

Please feel free to contact me should you require any further information.

Yours sincerely

Prof Nancy Booker
Interim Dean

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Appendix C: Introductory Letter from AKU



THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY
Graduate School of Media and Communications

The Uganda National Council for Science and Technology

P. O. Box 6884
Kampala

December 23, 2022

Dear Sir/Madam.

FRANK OBONYO (STUDENT NO. 553244)

Frank Obonyo is a registered student at the Aga Khan University, Graduate School of Media and Communications. He is enrolled in the Master of Arts in Digital Journalism Programme and has completed his course work. He is now working on his Master's thesis. Mr. Obonyo's topic is "**Implementation of New Vision's Digital Strategy: Analysis of the Website, E-Paper and Social Media Platforms.**"

The purpose of my writing is to request you to assist Mr. Obonyo complete this important academic exercise. Any information collected will be used solely for academic purposes. Upon completion of the research, Mr. Obonyo's thesis will be available at our library. He will also submit two hard copies and one soft copy in pdf of his completed work to your department.

We appreciate your support to our student towards his successful completion of his thesis research.

Please feel free to contact me should you require any further information.

Yours sincerely.

Prof Nancy Booker
Interim Dean

Appendix D: UCU Approval



UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

A Centre of Excellence in the Heart of Africa

UG-REC-026 Approval Version 4.0

06th February, 2023

Frank Obonyo
Aga Khan University
C/o, Nairobi, Kenya
P.O. Box 30270
Tel. +256702183865.
Email: frankobonyo5@gmail.com

06th February, 2023

UG-REC-026 APPROVAL NOTICE

To: Frank Obonyo, Principal Investigator
Re: UCU-REC Application titled; Implementation of New Vision's digital strategy: Analysis of the website, E-paper and social media platforms.
Application Number: UCUREC-2023-447

Version: 4.0

Type: Initial Review
 Protocol Amendment
 Letter of Amendment (LOA)
 Continuing Review
 Material Transfer Agreement
 Other, Specify:



I am please to inform you that the UG-REC-026; UCUREC approved the above referenced application.

Approval of the research is for the period from 06th February 2023, to 06th February, 2024.

This research is considered minimal risk category.

As Principal Investigator of the research, you are responsible for fulfilling the following requirements of approval:

1. All co-investigators must be kept informed of the status of the research.
2. Changes, amendments, and additions to the protocol or the consent form must be submitted to the REC for re-review and approval prior to the activation of the changes.

1 of 2

A Centre of Excellence in the Heart of Africa

P.O. Box 4, Mukono, Uganda (East Africa), Plot 67-173, Bishop Tucker Road, Mukono Hill, Tel: +256 (0) 31 235 0800, www.ucu.ac.ug
[Ugandachristianuniversity](#) [@UCUniversity](#), Founded by the Province of Church of Uganda. Chartered by the Government of Uganda.



The REC application number assigned to the research should be cited in any correspondence.

3. Reports of unanticipated problems involving risks to participants or other must be submitted to the REC. New information that becomes available which could change the risk: benefit ratio must be submitted promptly for REC review.
4. Only approved consent forms are to be used in the enrollment of participants. All consent forms signed by subjects and/or witnesses should be retained on file. The REC may conduct audits of all study records, and consent documentation may be part of such audits.
5. Regulations require review of an approved study not less than once per 12-month period. Therefore, a continuing review application must be submitted to the REC eight weeks prior to the above expiration date of 06th February, 2024 in order to continue the study beyond the approved period. Failure to submit a continuing review application in a timely fashion may result in suspension or termination of the study, at which point new participants may not be enrolled and currently enrolled participants must be taken off the study.
6. The REC application number assigned to the research should be cited in any correspondence with the REC of record.
7. Your research details have been shared with the Executive secretary of Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) and you are not required to get clearance since you are a Masters degree research. Refer to UNCST Research registration and clearance Policy and guidelines (July 2016) in Uganda section 6(e).

The following is the list of all documents approved in this application by UG-REC _026:

	Document Title	Language	Version	Version Date
1.	Research Proposal	English	1.0	2022-01-31
2.	Informed Consent Form	English	2.0	2022-01-31
3.	Data Collection Tools	English	1.0	2022-01-31

Signed and Stamped


 Prof. Peter Waiswa.
 UCUREC Chairperson,
pwaiswa@musph.ac.ug

