

# INFLUENCE OF DIGITAL ERA ON THE ROLES OF NEWSPAPER EDITORS IN EBONYI STATE, NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

Digital technology has made it possible to support Nigerian editors in their day-to-day activities, but as the saying goes, starting to cry is difficult, but once the tears begin, everything changes. However, the rationale behind the study was to assess how the digital era has reshaped the roles, duties, and editorial approaches of newspapers editors in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. It investigated influence of digital technologies on editorial decision-making, news production processes, and newsroom operations, while also highlighting the challenges and opportunities brought by the evolving digital media landscape. The study was carried out between January to June, 2025 using survey research design with data gathered from a purposively selected sample size of 60 editors drawn from seven active newspaper chapel under the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Ebonyi State Council, Nigeria. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaires and analysis was conducted using SPSS and chi-square test. Findings show that editors have moved their traditional gatekeeping roles to more dynamic, multi-platform facilitators of contents. Also, their influences now stretch across social media, websites, and mobile channels, requiring them to master digital tools like SEO plugins, CMS analytics, and content scheduling platforms. The findings also established that this shift has not been without challenges such as speed-vs-accuracy pressures, misinformation, job threats, poor funding, infrastructural constraints, poor digital training. The study concluded that these editors have demonstrated adaptability by integrating digital tools, and managing content across multiple platforms despite working in an environment with infrastructural limitations. It was recommended that institutional support for training, policy reform, infrastructural upgrade, and editorial policies should be restructured to clearly define digital roles, encourage responsible engagement with audience feedback, and ensure that platform strategies do not comprise the ethics of journalism.

**KEYWORDS:** Influence, Digital Era , Role, Newspaper Editors , Ebonyi State

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

The development of newspaper editing in Nigeria shows the broader progression of Nigeria's media landscape, transitioning from colonial beginnings to this present digital era. Biagi, (2012) avers that the media have played potential roles within the past and present society. Newspaper editing, an epi-centre in journalism, has been instrumental in informing public opinion, shaping societal narratives, and fostering democratic engagement. Additionally, the role of newspaper editors has also historically been foundational to the practice of journalism. As gatekeepers, editors have traditionally wielded substantial influence over what the public sees, reads, and ultimately believes. Conversely, before the internet, news flowed in one direction, that is, from newsrooms to the public. Editors sat at the control centre, deciding what entered the public domain. Also, with limited space in print newspaper, they had the final say on which stories were published, granting them undisputed authority over news content. According to Shoemaker & Vos, (2009); McQuail, (2010); Kovach & Rosentiel (2014), editors played the role of gatekeepers, exercising control over which information reached the audience.

In reverse, Digital platforms have, however, created an open loop where readers can respond instantly, share their own perspectives, or even correct errors. Editors no longer have the final word; instead, they now engage in a continuous dialogue with audiences, responding to feedback, adjusting stories in real time, and even using crowd-sourced information. The audience is no longer observing; rather, they are participating. Editors now facilitate these interactions, guiding conversations and maintaining editorial integrity amidst a flood of voices. However, with these evolutions of digital media, the influence of editors has also been redefined, both challenged and transformed by technology, audience behaviour, and the democratisation of content creation. Asadu (2012:98) described the disruptions as such that have transformed human activity, especially in newspaper production, which even revolutionised in terms of page planning, design, printing, distribution and even consumption. Moreso, the shift from print to digital journalism has upended long-established editorial routines globally. Today, news is no longer consumed primarily through physical newspapers but through websites, social media feeds, podcasts, and mobile apps. Audiences no longer passively consume media but actively engage, contribute, and reshape content across multiple platforms like mobile applications, social media, TV, etc., due to old and new media collision (Jenkins; 2006). This transition has been accompanied by a change in how news is produced, distributed, and engaged with. Newspaper editors now operate in a multimedia environment that demands real-time responsiveness, cross-platform publishing, and continuous audience interaction. The newsroom, once defined by linear workflows and delayed publication cycles, now functions in a 24/7, multi-format, user-driven space. These platforms enable distributed conversations and accountability through user-led storytelling. According to Uche & Ngwu (2019), participatory communication through social media like Twitter (X), WhatsApp, and blogs has empowered citizens to influence public discourse, particularly during social movements such as #EndSARS protests, EndBAD GOVERNANCE protests and elections.

In Nigeria, these changes are particularly evident as newspapers across the country move to digital-first models. This transformation is not just technical; rather, it is structural and cultural. Editors adapt to tools such as Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) plugins, Algorithms, Search Engines such as Google's algorithms, social media, analytics dashboards, and even artificial intelligence platforms like ChatGPT, audio mining, meta artificial intelligence tools, and media innovation lab to keep them moving. Their responsibilities now extend beyond traditional content refinement to include headline testing, data visualisation, user engagement strategies, and misinformation management. As noted by an editor from The Voice Newspaper during the study, "I am not just editing anymore; I am monitoring reactions on social media networks, scheduling posts, and sometimes rewriting stories based on audience feedback. The transformation is awesome amidst some challenges" (Editors, Personal Communication, May 4, 2025). Hermida (2014) observed that social network platforms such as Blogs, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter (X), as well as forums have allowed users to contribute to news framing, often in real-time, leading to a more dynamic and decentralised news ecosystem. This supports the model of participatory journalism, where the audience helps shape the news narratives. These technologies have also empowered freelance writers, bloggers, and content creators to thrive outside traditional newsroom structures. Additionally, partnerships with International organisations, donor agencies, government and NGOs, training workshops, grant programs, and global collaborations have enhanced investigative, fact-checking skills and raised professional standards across the sectors.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

The emergence of digital media has significantly disrupted the traditional operations of newspaper editing, both globally and in Nigeria. Editors, who once served as the final arbiters of newsworthiness and narrative framing, now operate in a constantly shifting media environment where speed, audience engagement, and platform visibility often take precedence over journalistic depth and rigour. This disruption has blurred the editorial boundaries that once clearly separated professional journalism from citizen content, forcing editors to adopt roles far beyond conventional editing.

In Nigeria, particularly in Ebonyi State, newspaper editors now contend with the realities of multi-media platforms publishing, misinformation, and shrinking newsroom budgets, often with limited digital training and inadequate technological support. While editors are increasingly turning to digital tools such as SEO plugins, social media metrics, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) assisted applications like ChatGPT, algorithms to streamline their workflows, the extent to which these tools enhance or diminish editorial influence remains unclear. Corroborating this, Skjerdal (2010) looked at African media and pointed out that many editors face covert censorship through funding, mechanisms or overt pressure from state agents and media owners. Thus, limits the watchdog role of the press and weakens democratic accountability. Furthermore, little is known about how editors in relatively less urbanised regions of Nigeria adapt to these changes in comparison to their counterparts in major media hubs. Despite the growing body of literature on digital journalism, there is a noticeable gap in research focusing on how Nigerian newspaper editors, especially those in states like Ebonyi State, adapt to the evolving demands of the digital age while striving to maintain ethical standards and professional relevance. This study filled that gap by analysing the influence, challenges, and adaptive strategies of newspaper editors in the digital era. Though this transition is not happening in isolation. It is shaped by broader societal shifts, including the rise of citizen journalism, the declining trust in traditional media, and the growing influence of social media influencers and content aggregators. These factors complicate the editor's ability to assert influence, maintain credibility, and uphold editorial standards. The editor's voice, once authoritative and unchallenged, is now part of a noisy and fast-moving information ecosystem where anyone with a smartphone can publish news. Editors often engage in self-censorship to avoid job insecurity or intimidation, particularly during national controversies and elections. The digital era has created new spaces for editorial freedom and also presents new threats. The rise of click-driven journalism, misinformation, and digital surveillance means that editorial independence must now contend with algorithmic bias, data manipulations, and audience polarisation (Tambini, 2015). Therefore, this study explored how newspaper editors in Ebonyi State, specifically those in seven newspaper chapels under the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Ebonyi State Council, are navigating these changes. By focusing on editors' live experiences, challenges, and strategic adaptations, the research offered a grounded understanding of editorial influence in Nigeria's evolving media landscape. The study is timely, as it fills a critical gap in existing literature by documenting how editors outside major metropolitan centres are engaging with digital transformation in real time.

## 1.3 Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to analyse how the digital era has influenced the roles and professional influence of newspaper editors, with a focus on selected Newspaper editors in the NUJ, Ebonyi State Council. The specific objectives are to:

1. examine how the roles and editorial responsibilities of newspaper editors have evolved in response to digital media transformation.
2. identify the major challenges faced by newspaper editors in adapting to digital platforms and sustaining editorial influence.
3. evaluate the strategies adopted by newspaper editors to maintain relevance, credibility, and ethical standards in the digital news environment.

## 1.4 Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How have the roles and editorial responsibilities of newspaper editors evolved in response to digital media transformation ?
2. What are the major challenges faced by newspaper editors in adapting to digital platforms and sustaining editorial influence?
3. What strategies have newspaper editors adopted to maintain relevance, credibility , and ethical standards in the digital news environment?

### 1.5 Statement of Hypotheses:

1. H<sub>1</sub>: The roles and editorial responsibilities of newspaper editors in Ebonyi State have significantly evolved as a result of digital media transformation.
2. H<sub>2</sub>: Newspaper editors in Ebonyi State face significant challenges in adapting to digital platforms and sustaining their editorial influence.
3. H<sub>3</sub>: Newspaper editors in Ebonyi State have adopted specific strategies that effectively help them maintain relevance, credibility, and ethical standards in the digital news environment.

The formulated hypotheses are examples of Alternative hypotheses because they suggest that a relationship or effect exists between the variables.

### 1.6 Significance of the Study

This study holds practical and academic significance for a range of stakeholders like newspaper editors, newsroom managers and media owners. The study reveals the digital capacities and limitations of their editorial staff, thereby emphasising the need for regular training, investment in digital tools, and organisational policy reviews to support innovation and ethical standards. The study is also useful to media scholars and communication students, particularly those studying in institutions within South-East Nigeria. It contributes local empirical knowledge to the growing global literature on digital journalism, editorial influence, and convergence culture. For regulators and professional bodies, such as the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), the findings can inform policy development on digital literacy, editorial ethics, and journalistic accountability. Finally, the study contributes to academic literature by filling a research gap regarding how editors in non-metropolitan areas, like Ebonyi State, are adapting to digital disruption. Most prior studies have focused on larger cities, leaving voices from smaller, under-resourced media ecosystems underrepresented. The beneficiaries of the study include: Media practitioners; Media scholars and communication students ; Policy makers ; Government Agencies, and The general public.

### 1.7 Scope of the Study

This study is structured to assess the evolving influence of newspaper editors within the context of digital journalism in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. Its scope is outlined as follows:

1. **Unit Scope:** The study is titled “*Analysis on the Influence of Newspaper Editors in the Digital Era*”. It focuses exclusively on how editorial roles, influence, and responsibilities have been reshaped by the rise of digital media technologies.
2. **Content Scope:** The study covers the interaction between two variables:
  - a. **Dependent variable:** Influence of newspaper editors (including editorial decisions, gatekeeping roles, credibility, and ethical standards), which may evolve due to digital transformations.
  - b. **Independent variable:** Digital era (comprising social media, online platforms, audience analytics, AI tools, etc.) It shapes and influences what editors do and how they perform their roles.
3. **Geographical Scope:** The study is restricted to Ebonyi State, Nigeria and targets editors who are active members of seven registered newspaper chapels under the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Ebonyi State Council. These include: The Ebonyi Newspaper *Patriot*, *People’s Leader*

Newspaper, *The Voice Newspaper*, *The Sun Newspaper*, *The Eagle Online Newspaper*, *The Tribune Newspaper*, and *The Authority Newspaper*.

By narrowing the study to this group, the research aims to provide a manageable and focused analysis of how digital platforms influence editorial roles within a defined media environment. The selection of seven chapels in Ebonyi State, Nigeria, Union of Journalists (NUJ) Council is strategic as it offers a representative case study of regional media operations in Nigeria where traditional journalism practices are increasingly intersecting with digital technologies. The Scope covered editors' experiences, perceptions, and adaptations in response to the challenges and opportunities posed by digital media.

- **Unit of Analysis:** The unit of analysis is individual newspaper editors, particularly those engaged in editorial decision-making, content vetting, platform management, and ethical oversight across digital and print formats. This choice is as a result of examining how editors' roles, responsibilities, and decision-making processes are influenced by the rise of digital platforms.
- **Time Scope:** The study utilises a cross-sectional survey approach through structured questionnaires. The research captures current editorial practices and experiences of newspaper editors in Ebonyi State from January to June, 2025.

## 1.8 Limitations of the Study

While this study offers relevant findings on the influence of newspaper editors in the digital era, it is limited in several ways. First, it geographically focused on Ebonyi State. This means that the results may not be generalizable to editors operating in larger or more technologically advanced media environments like Lagos or Abuja. Secondly, the study relies on self-reported data from editors, which, although valuable, may be subject to bias, especially where responses touch on professional competence or digital literacy. In addition, time and resource constraints limited the sample size to 60 editors drawn from seven newspaper chapels, excluding perspectives from editors working outside NUJ-affiliated organisations or in broadcast journalism. Lastly, while the study captures current practices, it does not track changes over time, which would have offered more robust insights into long-term adaptation trends in editorial practice.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### 2.1 Conceptual Review

The related Literature of the study was reviewed on the following major concepts of this study titled "Influence of the Digital Era on the role of Newspaper Editors in Ebonyi State". It also empirically reviewed related works in addition to the theoretical framework of the study.

#### 2.1.2 Newspaper Editors

Traditionally, newspaper editors were responsible for overseeing the selection, editing, and presentation of news content. As gatekeepers, they ensured accuracy, balance, and adherence to journalistic ethics (White, 1950). They decided what stories were newsworthy and managed newsroom operations. Moreover, the role of the newspaper editor has long been regarded as one of the most vital functions within the journalistic profession. Conventionally, editors have served as the intellectual and ethical compass of the newsroom, tasked with determining newsworthiness, maintaining professional standards, and ensuring the overall coherence of the publication's voice and mission. Editors were the last line of defence against misinformation and biased reporting, exercising what McQuail (2010) described as a "centralised editorial authority" where decisions about what constituted news rested primarily on the judgment of a few experienced professionals. Shoemaker and Vos (2009), in their foundational work on gatekeeping theory, conceptualised editors as the primary filters of information entering the public domain. In the pre-digital era, gatekeeping was about selection and rejection—choosing which stories were important, relevant, and timely enough to make the front page. However, the digital transformation has evolved this role from gatekeeping to what many scholars now describe as "facilitation." Editors are no longer just choosing stories; they are also curating, optimising, and often repackaging them for different platforms and audiences. They are expected to ensure that stories align with audience interests, platform norms, and engagement metrics.

In the context of Nigerian journalism, this transformation is particularly visible because Editors in Nigerian newsrooms today curate not just the traditional newspaper but also oversee content published on Facebook, Twitter ( X), WhatsApp, YouTube, and the organisation's website, as well as use artificial intelligence apps. The transition to these platforms has introduced new roles for editors, such as managing real-time comments, handling crisis communication during breaking news, and responding to public sentiment. During the field work, an editor from The Voice Newspaper observed that while editors still play a leading role in shaping public discourse, they are no longer the sole voices in the conversation, as the digital space now accommodates multiple contributors (Editor, Personal Communication, May 4, 2025).

### **2.1. 3 Digital Era**

The digital era denotes the widespread integration of internet-based technologies into everyday communication and media production. It involves the use of digital technologies and platforms like the internet, algorithms, artificial intelligence tools, mobile devices, social media network platforms, and content management in the production and distribution of information. Within this purview, newspaper editors are traditionally seen as gatekeepers of news, now face expectations and obstacles in executing their responsibilities. Thus, the global shift toward digital media has significantly altered the context in which editors operate. No longer confined to the print medium, editors now oversee a more complex, fast-paced, and interactive publishing environment ( Shoemaker & Vos, 2009; Tandoc & Vos, 2016). Digital media has not only changed the form and speed of news delivery but also the process of editorial decision-making. Today, news must compete for visibility in crowded social feeds, search engine rankings, and among trending hashtags (Pavlik, 2013, Thurman et al, 2024)..

As McQuail (2010) rightly observed, editorial power has moved from a tightly controlled newsroom hierarchy to a more decentralised and audience-responsive ecosystem. The advent of digital technology has significantly transformed these responsibilities. Pavlik (2013) argues that editors must now adapt to multi-media storytelling, manage digital newsrooms, and make editorial decisions in real-time. The immediacy of online journalism has also shortened deadlines and expanded editors' responsibilities to include website management, social media coordination, and audience engagement.

This evolution also comes with the need for a broader digital skill set. Unlike before, when editors needed only a strong command of language and editorial instinct, modern editors must understand the technical backend of digital publishing. This includes familiarity with content management systems (CMS), social media management tools, audience engagement analytics, and search engine optimisation (SEO) ( Carlson & Lewis, 2015; Bradshaw & Rohumaa, 2017). Editors are now required to analyse real-time data on story performance, bounce rates, and reader demographics, and make editorial adjustments accordingly ( Anderso, 2011, Appelgren & Linden, 2020).

### **2.1.4 Editorial Autonomy in the Digital Age:**

McNair (2009) observes that digital media, while offering new freedoms, have also brought about limitations on editorial autonomy. Editors increasingly face pressure from audience analytics, advertising considerations, and trending algorithms, which can influence content decisions. This raises concern about the level to which editors retain control over editorial direction in the face of digital commercialisation.

Emma-Okoroafor (2016) argues that editors are increasingly being redefined as digital managers. They must not only understand news values but also how to make those values translate into clicks, shares, comments, and impressions. This redefinition is particularly demanding in developing contexts like Nigeria, where newsrooms are often under-resourced and the editors are expected to wear multiple hats. An editor may be responsible not only for content quality but also for staff supervision, social media engagement, online crisis management, and digital training for junior reporters.

### **2.1.5 Participatory Journalism and Audience Engagement :**

Axel Bruns (2008) introduced the concept of “produsage “, where users are both producers and consumers of content. Newspaper editors must now manage audience interactions, comments, feedback, and user-generated content. These participatory models advance the editor's responsibilities from content controller to community moderator, challenging traditional notions of editorial authority. Furthermore, the

participatory nature of digital media means editors must now interact directly with audiences. This is a sharp departure from the traditional model, where editors operated behind the scenes. Today, editors moderate comment sections, respond to reader complaints on social media, and even adjust headlines based on user feedback. This audience-centric approach creates new editorial pressures. While it fosters responsiveness and transparency, it also exposes editors to abuse, misinformation, and polarised public opinion.

### **2.1.6 Digital tools and Newsroom workflow**

According to Domingo et al. (2008), the integration of digital tools like Search Engine Optimisation (SEO), Content Management System (CMS), and analytics dashboards has reshaped newsroom workflows. Editors must now work alongside digital producers and information technology crews, requiring a hybrid skill that combines editorial judgement with technical proficiency.

Another critical aspect of digital editorial influence is algorithmic visibility. News is now often distributed via platforms like Facebook and Google, whose algorithms decide what users see (Napoli, 2014, Caplan & Boyd, 2018). Editors must understand how to frame and structure stories in ways that align with these algorithms to maintain reach. This can sometimes lead to editorial compromises, where stories are shaped more by predicted engagement than by public interest (Lewis & Westlund, 2015); Petre, 2012). As a result, editors walk a fine line between editorial integrity and platform performance in developing a news story (Myllylahti & Taffel, 2021).

Additionally, with the rise of smartphones, the integration of artificial intelligence and automation learning machine technology has continued to play a crucial role in content generation, personalisation, and advertising, which has shaped the editorial task in Nigeria. According to Sundae and Ness (2001), the internet's participatory and spontaneous nature has resulted in the establishment of a diverse range of independent news and information providers. They affirmed that the advent of computer-based technology or the World Wide Web (www) with its related influence on media convergence and mediated communication has created new ways for news production and dissemination.

### **2.1.7 Negative and positive influence of digital transformation on editorial practices in**

#### **Nigeria**

The influence of digital transformation on editorial practices in Nigeria is complex in nature as a result of infrastructure and socio-political activities (Akinfemisoye, 2014; Ojebuyi & Salawu, 2021). Okon and Friday (2020) enumerated inconsistent internet access, limited training opportunities, funding and government interference as one of the obstacles facing editors in Nigeria. Editors in Nigerian newsrooms most times struggle to balance professional standards with the realities of working in under resourced and politically changed environment.

Digital transformation has also introduced ethical dilemmas. The demand for instant news publishing can lead to errors, unverified reports, or poorly sourced content. Editors must constantly balance speed with accuracy, and virility with credibility ( Uche, 2017; Ojebuyi & Salawu, 2021). The pressure to break news first is immense, especially in the Nigerian media ecosystem where competition is fierce and audience loyalty is fragile (Akinfemisoye, 2014; Ibelema, 2008).

### **2.1.8 The role of Newspaper editors in the digital era in Nigeria**

The role of newspaper editors in Nigeria has advanced significantly as a result of technology and the ever-increasing influence of digital media. Traditionally, editors functioned as gatekeepers, selecting, shaping, and approving news content for print publication, but this days, the rise of online journalism, social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and real-time news dissemination has altered both the nature and pace of editorial tasks. According to Shoemaker & Vos (2009), Nigerian Newspaper editors are, however, adapting to a media environment where audience participation, real-time feedback, and content virality shape editorial decision-making more than ever before. Perhaps one of the most profound changes is the emergence of the audience as a central player in the editorial process. Comments, likes, shares, retweets, and analytics now provide editors with a constant stream of feedback. While editors

used to make decisions based on professional instinct or newsroom consensus, today they must be attuned to what their audience finds valuable, engaging, or problematic.

This audience-centric model does not mean pandering to popular taste but instead recognising the reciprocal relationship between publisher and reader. Smart editors use audience data to understand reader needs and enhance their editorial strategies not just to chase clicks but to foster trust and relevance. Furthermore, one of the biggest shifts in editorial responsibility is the expectation of immediacy. In the digital age, news breaks and spreads in seconds (Nelson, 2021, Cherubini & Nielsen, 2016). Editors now make rapid decisions, often in real time, about whether a story is publishable, how it should be framed, and whether it could be potentially harmful or misleading. This fast-paced reality places immense pressure on editors to maintain accuracy without sacrificing speed (Carlson, 2017; Tandoc & Maitra 2018, Ojebuyi & Salawu , 2021).

The digital newsroom is a collaborative multimedia space. Editors now oversee not only text but also photos, videos, charts, audio, and user-generated content (Palvik 2013; Deuze & Witsche, 2018). This requires a new set of competencies understanding visual storytelling, basic data visualisation, and sometimes even basic coding or CMS (Content Management System) skills (Bradshaw & Rohumaa, 2017; Splendore & Colombo, 2019).

Search engine optimisation (SEO), social media algorithms, and click-through rates are now part of the editor's vocabulary. While editorial judgment still guides story selection, digital editors must also consider how headlines rank on Google, how stories trend on Facebook, or how they might be pushed to users through recommendation engines (Anderson, 2011; Tandoc & Maitra, 2018). This data-driven environment introduces a new tension: the desire to serve the public interest versus the pressure to serve the algorithm (Petre, 2015; Napoli, 2019). This change does not necessarily undermine editorial standards, but it does require editors to balance editorial values with strategic visibility. Editors are not just choosing what the audience should know; rather, they are also figuring out how to get them to care (Cherubini & Nielsen, 2016).

In summary, the conceptual understanding of the newspaper editor's role has expanded significantly in the digital era. Editors have transitioned from static gatekeepers to dynamic content facilitators, from behind-the-scenes managers to public-facing digital strategists. They must now integrate traditional editorial judgment with digital fluency, ethical reasoning with audience awareness, and content curation with platform optimisation. This expanded role reflects both the challenges and opportunities that define journalism in the digital age, especially within emerging media systems like Nigeria's. The conceptual review thus underscores the evolving complexity of editorial influence and sets the stage for deeper empirical inquiry into how these changes play out in practice (Ojebuyi & Salawu , 2021).

### 2.2.1 Conceptual framework

Below is the conceptual framework of this study titled "Influence of the Digital Era on the Roles, Responsibilities, and professional influence as Newspaper Editors in Ebonyi State. This framework outlines the independent and dependent variables central to the investigation.

**Title of framework:** The Digital Era and its influence on the editorial practices of Newspaper Editors in Ebonyi State.

Based on the research topic, the variables can be identified as follows :

- a. The dependent variable is "The influence on newspaper editors, referring to their duties, responsibilities, and functions, which may evolve due to digital transformation. It refers to the changing roles of newspaper editors from traditional gatekeepers to multimedia content managers, engagement in digital strategy and content curation.

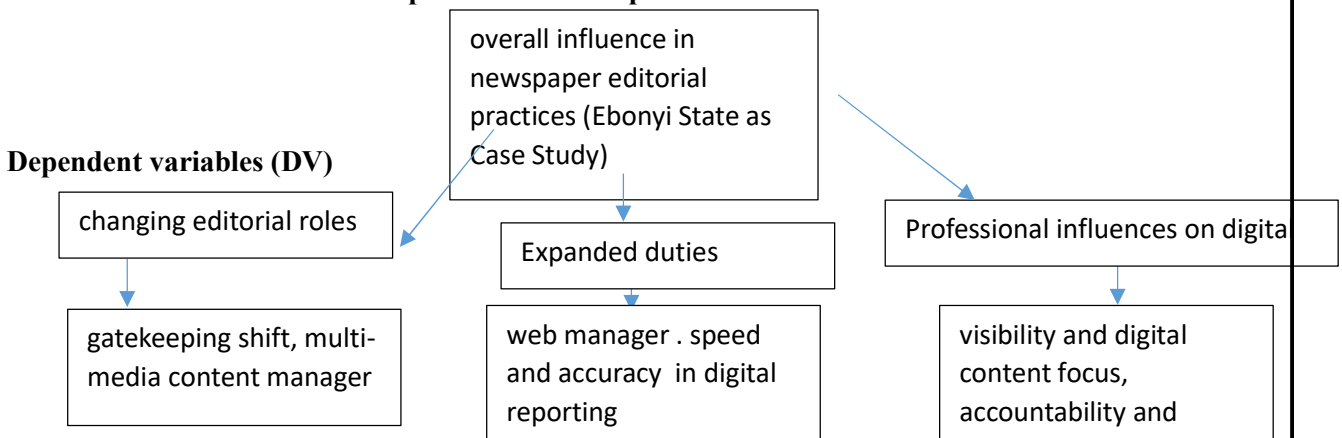
Others include:

1. the expansion of editorial responsibilities which involves supervising digital content teams, managing online and social media platforms, and upholding accuracy and timeliness in digital news production
2. it increases greater public visibility and accountability, wider audience coverage via digital platforms, and an enhanced role in shaping online narratives and public opinion.

**b, Independent variable:**

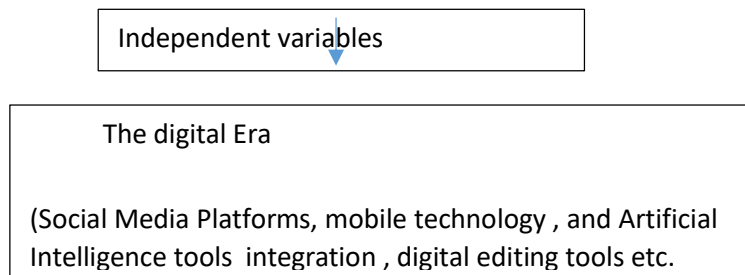
The digital era, therefore, serves as the Independent variable, shaping and influencing what editors do and how they perform their roles. This involves technological advancements, social network integration, website-like social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, blogs, artificial intelligence, and digital editing tools. Online news trend, etc. It is the condition influencing the change.

**2.2.2. Illustrative sketch of Dependent and Independent variables**



**The Independent Variable**

The Independent Variable include the digital era (technological advancement in journalism which involves elements digital like Websites, blogs, social media integration, mobile journalism, artificial intelligence, digital editing tools, online audience engagement and analytics, and real-time news cycles.



Source: Authors' Construct

**2.2 Review of related empirical studies**

Several scholars across Nigeria and other countries have examined the shifting role, challenges, and digital adaptations of newspaper editors and journalism professionals in the face of digital transformation. This section presents a review of empirical studies that shed light on the influence of editors within the modern, digitally driven media environment.

Emma-Okoroafor (2016) emphasised that Nigerian editors must now possess technical proficiency in multimedia editing tools and audience engagement metrics. In her mixed-method study involving interviews and content analysis, she concluded that the evolving digital landscape has blurred the lines between editorial work and digital marketing, particularly in online-first publications.

**Motilola Olufenwa** Akinfemisoye (2014) explored the ethical dilemmas faced by Nigerian editors in digital newsrooms. In a qualitative case study of two online newsrooms, she observed that the pressure to break news quickly often results in lapses in verification processes. Editors expressed concerns about the credibility of sources, especially user-generated content from social media platforms. One respondent noted: “You either verify it later or be left behind.” This empirical evidence underscores the tension between speed and credibility in modern journalism. She also noted that many relied on instinct and informal training to navigate new digital tools.

According to a post-conference report published by Vanguard (2024), 71% of participants indicated that AI could help streamline editorial decision-making, especially in content curation and audience analytics. However, many also warned of the need to maintain human oversight to safeguard journalistic ethics and narrative nuance.

Ojebuyi & Fadeyi (2020) explained that 67% of editors regularly use metrics such as page views, bounce rates, and social media shares to guide story placement and headline selection. While many saw this as a way to stay relevant and audience-focused, others expressed concern over editorial values being compromised in the race for clicks and shares.

Larrondo et al. (2016) in a comparative empirical study involving public broadcasting organisations in Spain, Norway, and Belgium disclosed that while physical convergence of newsrooms was widespread, actual editorial collaboration across platforms remained inconsistent. Only 39% of respondents felt their organisations had successfully integrated cross-platform workflows. Editors highlighted that resistance to change and a lack of standardised digital tools were significant obstacles.

In the United States, Singer (2004) analysed newsroom convergence through participant observation and interviews with editors in four news organisations. Her findings revealed that editors were struggling with role ambiguity and an unclear balance between traditional gatekeeping functions and emerging digital responsibilities. Many editors found themselves acting as “digital ambassadors,” promoting innovation while still managing legacy print operations. He also observed that editorial power had become diffused and shared among editors, social media managers, and automated systems that influence content visibility.

Chinyere Stella Okunna and Ifeanyi Francis Didiugwu (2021) carried out a survey at UNIZIK and among news professionals in Anambra State. Their findings indicated that traditional editors lacked the institutional support to adopt convergence journalism strategies. Corroborating this statement, Ibitoye Samuel Oluwatosin (2024) examined digital media operations in Kwara State. Through quantitative methods, she found that only 34% of editors had received formal training in digital tools, though most acknowledged the necessity of adapting.

Domingo and Heinonen (2008) found in Finland and Spain that editors had lost control over the timing and flow of stories, with digital teams sometimes bypassing editorial checks to publish quickly online.

Mabweazara (2015), writing on African journalism, argued that infrastructure limitations and lack of digital literacy were major obstacles to effective editorial adaptation, especially in under-resourced contexts.

Gbaden, Oko, and Ayam (2023) conducted a survey involving 180 Nigerian journalists, revealing that most editors lacked digital journalism training, thereby weakening their ability to lead effectively in digital-first newsrooms.

Felix et al (2024) surveyed journalists from 15 national and regional newspaper and found that 65% of editors were under pressure to prioritize trending topics over editorial quality due to audience metrics.

Chinyere Stella Okunna and Ifeanyi Francis Didiugwu (2021) carried out a survey at UNIZIK and among news professionals in Anambra State. Their findings indicated that traditional editors lacked the institutional support to adopt convergence journalism strategies.

Binns (2018) in the UK emphasised that editorial decisions made through algorithmic tools often undermined the professional judgment of editors, raising accountability concerns.

Ibitoye Samuel Oluwatosin (2024) examined digital media operations in Kwara State. Through quantitative methods, she found that only 34% of editors had received formal training in digital tools, though most acknowledged the necessity of adapting.

Marconi (2017) investigated The Associated Press's use of AI in automating editorial tasks and observed that editors transitioned to roles of fact verification and oversight of automated news production.

Etumnu & Azubuike (2024) focused on editors and media professionals in Imo State. Their study revealed that while most editors acknowledged the importance of digital tools, resource constraints limited their effective deployment.

Nicholas (2019), in his study automating the news: How Algorithms are rewriting the media, analysed how editorial influence is affected by Artificial Intelligence driven automation. His findings from US- based newsrooms confirmed that while automation facilitates faster production, it also risks marginalizing the editor's traditional judgement.

Onuegbu et al. (2025) surveyed South Eastern Nigerian journalists and editors on their use of AI tools like Google Translate and editing software. The study revealed strong awareness but weak operational capacity due to a lack of institutional training programs.

Chiluwa (2018) explored how Nigerian editors responded to social media commentary on news reports. The study revealed that editors were increasingly playing the role of moderators, ensuring that public discourse remained civil and factual.

## **2.4 Review of Similar Studies**

Asemah et al. (2013) found that Nigerian editors are increasingly involved in multi-platform content management but often without adequate technical training. Their study emphasised the importance of updating newsroom roles to reflect digital realities.

Chiluwa (2018) studied how Nigerian editors interact with online audience comments. He concluded that editors now act as moderators of public discourse, managing misinformation and maintaining civil engagement on digital platforms.

Olley and Odu (2017) reported that many editors in Abuja and Lagos were self-training in SEO, headline testing, and data tracking to stay competitive online, but institutional support remained weak.

These studies reflect consistent trends: role expansion, technology integration, audience interaction, and ethical pressures in digital publishing all of which were confirmed in the present study's findings in Ebonyi State.

## **2.5 Summary of findings**

- Editors have transitioned from being gatekeepers to digital facilitators.
- Editorial influence now includes content design, platform strategy, and audience engagement.

- Use of digital tools such as analytics, CMS, and AI platforms is growing.
- Editors face challenges such as misinformation, lack of training, editorial-commercial tension, user-generated content, and citizen journalism.
- Editorial power is no longer centralised. It is presently collaborative and technologically mediated.

## 2.6 Research Gap

Most Literature reviewed focused on editors in urban or national media hubs, such as Lagos or Abuja. There is a lack of research on how editors in smaller states like Ebonyi are navigating the digital transition. Furthermore, while many studies address digital journalism broadly, few isolate the editor's role specifically, especially in under-resourced contexts. This study addressed both gaps by focusing on editors in Ebonyi State and their lived experiences of digital adaptation. In addition, most of the reviewed studies were located in the outskirt region, while the present study was carried out in Ebonyi State. Their topics, methods, population, sampling techniques, etc., were different. The study also examined current trends and challenges from the period of 2018 -2024. Also, this present study is similar in that the previous studies carried out within and in another country have different purposes but are allied with some concepts raised in the literatures—review of this present study. Moreso, that none of the researchers researched on the Influence of newspaper editors in a digital era: A case study of selected newspaper editors in NUJ, Ebonyi State Council. Thus, the present study emphasised the need for effective editorial leadership and policies as the digital age demands not just a newroom experience and profession but also continuous learning and training on emerging technology-powered platforms and which is best in their day- to- day journalism jobs and is similar with the suggestions raised by previous studies reviewed.

## 2.7 Relevance of the Literature to the Present Study

The reviewed works provided a theoretical and empirical foundation for this study. Empirical studies from Nigeria and beyond support the idea that editorial influence is shifting but still vital. These insights shaped the study's design and informed the interpretation of findings from editors in Ebonyi State, contributing new localized knowledge to the broader discourse on digital-era journalism.

## 2.3 Theoretical Framework

This study draws on two key theories to frame the analysis: Gatekeeping Theory and Convergence Culture Theory.

### Gatekeeping Theory

Proposed by Kurt Lewin (1947) and later expanded by David Manning White (1950) and Shoemaker & Vos (2009), this theory explains the role of media professionals, especially editors, as controllers of information flow. In a digital context, however, the gatekeeping function is fragmented. Editors now share influence with algorithms, trending topics, and even citizen journalists. The theory helps explain how editorial authority is challenged and negotiated in real-time digital spaces. It describes how information passes through gates and is filtered by the editors, who are the gatekeepers. The editors traditionally held power to shape public discourse, select which news stories meet the criteria for public consumption, and ensure that ethical standards are upheld. Understanding editorial decision-making in a regional media landscape such as Ebonyi State is influenced by national trends and local audience demands.

### Convergence Culture Theory

Henry Jenkins (2006) introduced this theory to explain the merging of old and new media platforms and the participatory nature of modern media consumption. Editors must now manage content that moves fluidly between print, web, and social media. They are not only responsible for accuracy but for platform compatibility, engagement strategies, and multimedia cohesion. This theory helps contextualise the expanded influence of editors beyond a single medium. Gatekeeping Theory and Convergence Culture Theory also help to explain the evolution of editorial roles.

## METHODOLOGY

This section presents the method and procedure that was applied in this study. It was

organized under the following sub-headings:

### 3.1 Research Design

Research design is the blueprint or plan which determines the nature and scope of the study (Ogbuoshi, 2005). The study adopted survey research design method. This design enabled the researcher to gather first hand data from newspaper editors in Ebonyi State concerning their evolving roles and influence in the digital era. A survey was ideal because it allowed for the collection of data from a relatively large and diverse group in a standardized and structured manner. Data from selected newspaper editors from Nigeria Union of Journalist (NUJ) , Ebonyi State Council were considered to be representative of the entire population. The design was used because only part of the population was sampled.

### 3.2 Sources of Data

The study relied on primary data. This data was obtained through structured questionnaires administered to selected editors. To enrich the findings, informal interviews and observations were also conducted, allowing for clarification of responses and inclusion of contextual insights.

#### 3.2.1 Primary Sources of Data

The primary sources of data

were structured questionnaire, carefully designed to align with the objectives of the study. The questionnaire was divided into sections:

- Section A: Role changes and editorial responsibilities in the digital era
- Section B: Challenges faced by editors in adapting to digital platforms
- Section C: Strategies employed to maintain editorial relevance and influence

The questions included both close-ended and open-ended items to ensure clarity, consistency, and the opportunity for respondents to elaborate on their experiences.

### 3.3 Population of the Study

Nwodu (2006) defined population of study as “the total number of element within a given environment, which a researcher sets out to study. The population for this study comprised all registered members of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Ebonyi State Council, totalling 299 journalists. This population includes editors and correspondents across multiple media outlets in the state. However, this study focused specifically on newspaper editors, who are directly involved in content selection, gatekeeping, platform oversight, and ethical review in the newsroom.

#### 3.3.1 Population Distribution

S/No	Category	Population	Percentage
1	NUJ, National Guide chapel	10	3.3%
2	NUJ ,Federal Ministry of Information chapel	5	1.8
3	NUJ ,Salt TV chapel	24	8.2
4	NUJ,Afikpo Today chapel	15	5.0
5.	NUJ,Unity fm	19	6.4
6	NUJ,People’s Leadership Newspaper	19	6.4
7	NUJ,NTA Abakaliki chapel	18	6,0
8	NUJ,People’ Guide Newspaper chapel	18	6.0
9	NUJ,Information chapel	57	19.1
10	NUJ,Nigerian Patriot Newspaper chapel	13	4.3
11	NUJ,Fastlink chapel	4	1.3
12	NUJ,Correspondent chapel	35	11.7

13	NUJ,EBBC Salt FM chapel	22	7.4
14	NUJ,I-Turning Point chapel	8	2.7
15	NUJ,Citizens Advocate chapel	3	1.0
16	NUJ, The Voice Newspaper chapel	12	4.0
17	NUJ,Leader Prime chapel	1	0.3
18	NUJ,Cardinal Point chapel	13	4.3
		<b>299</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source : Authors’ field work, 2025

### 3.4 Determination of Sample Size

A total of 60 editors were purposively selected as the sample size. These respondents were drawn from seven active newspaper chapels under the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Ebonyi State Council. The selection was based on their active involvement in editorial duties and their representation of both print and digital platforms for their daily news edition .

The selected newspaper chapels and the number of sampled editors from each are as follows:

Newspaper Chapels	Number of Editors Sampled
The Ebonyi Newspaper <i>Patriot</i>	10
<i>People’s Leader</i> Newspaper	9
<i>The Voice</i> Newspaper	11
<i>The Sun</i> Newspaper	6
<i>The Eagle Online</i> Newspaper	10
<i>The Tribune</i> Newspaper	4
<i>The Authority</i> Newspaper	10
Total	60

SOURCE: Authors’ Field Work, 2025

### 3.5 Sampling Techniques

Nwodu (2006) said there are two broad base of sampling techniques; probability sample and non-probability sampling. The researcher of this study made use of non-probability sampling techniques because selection of samples was carried out on the basis of availability. This sampling strategy was employed because it helped the researcher to obtain unbiased information from the respondents. It is applicable when the researcher has limited time to conduct the research and not all members of the population have an equal chance of participating in the study. Also, when a phenomenon of this kind needs in-depth observation and exploratory studies this method applies. The purposive sampling technique was chosen because it allowed the researcher to intentionally select respondents with direct editorial responsibilities and relevant digital experience.

### 3.6 Method of Data Collection

The researcher collected the needed data through the use of interview, observation and administration of 60 copies of structured questionnaires to some selected newspaper editors in Ebonyi State. These respondents were drawn from seven active newspaper chapels under the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Ebonyi State Council. The selection was based on their active involvement in editorial duties and their representation of both print and digital platforms for their daily news edition. It was however retrieved on the spot by the researcher and her assistants.

### 3.7 Validation of the Instrument

To ensure validity, the questionnaire was subjected to expert review. Educational experts reviewed the items for clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study objectives. Their suggestions were incorporated to refine the instrument.

### 3.8 Reliability of the Instrument

For reliability, a pilot test was conducted involving ten editors who were not part of the main study sample. The responses from the pilot test were analyzed using Cronbach’s Alpha, and a reliability coefficient of 0.81 was obtained, indicating high internal consistency and dependability of the instrument.

### 3.9 Method of Data Analysis

Data collected were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were used to summarize the responses. In addition, Chi-square tests were employed to test the study’s hypotheses and determine the significance of relationships between key variables. Tables and narrative explanations were used to present the results in an accessible and organized manner.

#### 4.1 Data Presentation

This chapter presents and analyses the data collected from 60 newspaper editors selected from seven active newspaper chapters under the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Ebonyi State Council. The presentation is structured around descriptive statistics and hypothesis testing using SPSS. The findings are discussed in relation to the study’s objectives and supported with existing literature.

#### 4.1 Data Analysis

**Table 1: Changes in Editorial Rôles in the Digital Era**

Response Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	26	43.3%
Agree	21	35.0%
Neutral	5	8.3%
Disagree	6	10.0%
Strongly Disagree	2	3.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source : Authors’ Field work, 2025

**Interpretation:**

Over 78% of respondents affirmed that their roles have changed significantly due to digital transformation, particularly in areas like content scheduling, audience interaction, and multi-platform coordination.

**Table 2: Major Challenges Faced by Editors in Digital Newsrooms**

Challenge	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Speed vs. Accuracy Pressure	20	33.3%
Lack of Digital Training	13	21.7%
Content Duplication/Misinformation	11	18.3%
Multi-platform Overload	10	16.7%
Poor Infrastructure	6	10.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source : Authors’ Field work, 2025

**Interpretation:**

The top challenge editors reported is balancing speed with content accuracy. Many editors struggle with publishing timely updates without sacrificing depth or verification.

**Table 3: Digital Tools Used in Editorial Work**

Digital Tool or Strategy	Frequency	Percentage (%)
ChatGPT/AI tools	15	25.0%
Google Analytics	13	21.7%
SEO plugins	11	18.3%
Social Media Scheduling Platforms	10	16.7%
None	11	18.3%

Total	60	100%
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Source : Authors’ Field work, 2025

**Interpretation:**

Editors increasingly depend on digital tools for optimization and speed. However, nearly one-fifth still do not use any structured digital support tools.

**4.2 Hypotheses Testing**

The researchers tested the following hypotheses to ascertain the relationship or differences between the information obtained from the respondents and the expected information. In doing this, the researcher based her test on the null hypotheses stated in this study using the chi-square formula. The condition guiding the hypothetical test was to reject the null-hypotheses and accept the alternative hypotheses if the calculated chi-square is greater than that of the table value. It is expressed thus:

$$X^2 < X^{2U} \text{ (reject } H_0 \text{ and accept } H_1)$$

$$X^2 > X^{2U} \text{ (accept } H_1 \text{ and reject } H_0)$$

The chi –square testing tools are the degree of freedom (df) and probability level or significance level. The df is presented as n-1, where n- stands for the number of responses or variables with “1” as a constant unit. The significance level was presented as 0.05, making it the minimum error level or tolerance .

The chi-square formula was expressed as

$$X^2 = \sum \frac{(F_o - F_e) ^2}{F_e}$$

Where  $X^2$ = Calculated chi-square value

$F_e$ = Observed frequencies

$F_e$ = Expected frequencies

$\sum$  = Summation of all items

The expected frequencies are gotten when the observed frequencies are given or presented thus

$$\sum = \frac{\text{Summation of observed frequencies}}{\text{Number of categories}}$$

Based on the above premise, three hypotheses where tested in this study as shown below:

**Hypothesis One**

$H_0$ : There is no significant relationship between the digital era and changes in editorial responsibilities.

$H_1$ : There is a significant relationship between the digital era and changes in editorial responsibilities.

In order to test this hypotheses using chi-square, the researcher re-introduced data presented and analysed on table 1 which shows changes in editorial roles in the digital era.

**Table 1: Changes in Editorial Roles in the Digital Era**

Response Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	26	43.3%
Agree	21	35.0%
Neutral	5	8.3%
Disagree	6	10.0%
Strongly Disagree	2	3.4%

<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100%</b>
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Source: Authors' field work , 2025

**Computation of Hypotheses One**

Responses	Fo	fe	Fo-fe	(Fo-fe) <sup>2</sup>	(Fo-fe) <sup>2</sup> /fe
Strongly Agree	26	15	11	12.1	8.07
Agree	21	15	6	36	2.4
Neutral	5	15	-10	-100	-6.7
Disagree	6	15	-9	-81	-5.4
Strongly Disagree	2	15	-13	-169	-11.3
Total	60				-12.93

Source : Field work, 2025

**Results:**

The researcher arrived at the chi-square value ( $X^2=-12.93$ ) thus :

Observed Frequencies (O)

Changes in editorial roles in the digital era

Calculate Expected frequencies (E) formula

$$E = \frac{\text{Row total} \times \text{Column Total}}{\text{Grand Total}}$$

Grand Total

$$E = 15 \times 60 = 900 \div 60 = 15$$

Chi-square formula

$$X^2 = \sum(O-E)^2$$

- Test Used: Chi-Square
- SPSS output Summary: Sum all values thus:

$$X^2 = 8.07+ 2.4+6.7+-5.4+-11.3$$

$$X^2 = -12.93 \text{ calculated chi- square statistics}$$

Degrees of freedom = (df)

$$df= (\text{number of row}-1) \times \text{number of Columns}-1) = (5-1) \times (2-1) = 4$$

Thus: P- Value = 0.001

$$X^2 = -12.93$$

$$df= 4$$

P= 0.001 (significant at 0.05 level)

- SPSS Output Summary:  $\chi^2 = -12.93$ ;  $df = 4$ ;  $p = 0.001$

**Interpretation:**

The above chi-square analysis indicates how the researcher applied the observed and Expected Frequencies to calculate the chi-square statistic  $X^2 = 12.93$  with  $df= 4$  and  $P= 0.001<0.05$ , resulting to the rejection of the null hypotheses.

**Decision Rule :**

Since  $p < 0.05$ , the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) is rejected.

**Summary of Findings :**

There is a statistically significant relationship between digital media evolution and the shift in editorial responsibilities. This aligns with findings from Akinfemisoye (2014) and Singer (2010) that show editors are now engaged in multi-tasking roles, including platform moderation and digital publishing.

**Hypothesis Two**

**Table 2: Major Challenges Faced by Editors in Digital Newsrooms**

Challenge	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Speed vs. Accuracy Pressure	20	33.3%
Lack of Digital Training	13	21.7%
Content Duplication/Misinformation	11	18.3%
Multi-platform Overload	10	16.7%
Poor Infrastructure	6	10.0%
Total	60	100%

Source : Authors' field work, 2025

**Computation of Hypotheses Two**

Responses	Fo	Fe	Fo-fe	(Fo-fe) <sup>2</sup>	(Fo-fe) <sup>2</sup> /fe
Speed vs. Accuracy Pressure	20	15	5	25	1.25
Lack of Digital Training	13	15	-2	-4	-0.3
Content Duplication/Misinformation	11	15	-4	-16	-1.45
Multi-platform Overload	10	15	-5	-25	-2.5
Poor Infrastructure	6	15	-9	-81	-7.36
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>				<b>-12.86</b>

Source : field work, 2025

**Results:**

The researcher arrived at the chi-square value ( $X^2=12.93$ ) thus :  
Observed Frequencies (O)

Calculate Expected frequencies (E) formula

$$E = \frac{\text{Row total} \times \text{Column Total}}{\text{Grand Total}}$$

$$E = 15 \times 60 \div 60 = 15$$

Chi-square formula

$$X^2 = \sum(O-E)^2$$

- Test Used: Chi-Square
- SPSS output Summary: Sum all values thus:

$$X^2 = 1.25 + -0.3 + -1.45 + -2.5 + -7.36$$

$$X^2 = -12.86 \text{ calculated chi- square statistics}$$

Degrees of freedom = (df)

$$df = (\text{number of row}-1) \times \text{number of Columns}-1 = (5-1) \times (2-1) = 4$$

Thus: P- Value = 0.001

$$X^2 = -12.86$$

df= 4

P= 0.001 (significant at 0.05 level)

- SPSS Output Summary:  $\chi^2 = -12.86$ ; df = 4; p = 0.001

**Interpretation:**

The above chi-square analysis indicates how the researcher applied the observed and Expected Frequencies to calculate the chi-square statistic  $X^2 = -12.86$  with df= 4 and P= 0.001<0.05, resulting to the rejection of the null hypotheses.

**Decision Rule :**

Since  $p < 0.05$ , the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) is rejected.

**Summary of Findings**

The top challenge editors reported is balancing speed with content accuracy. Many editors struggle with publishing timely updates without sacrificing depth or verification. Etumnu and Azubuike (2024) focused on editors and media professionals in Imo State. Their study revealed that while most editors acknowledged the importance of digital tools, resource constraints limited their effective deployment.

**Table 3: Digital Tools Used in Editorial Work**

Digital Tool or Strategy	Frequency	Percentage (%)
ChatGPT/AI tools	15	25.0%
Google Analytics	13	21.7%
SEO plugins	11	18.3%
Social Media Scheduling Platforms	10	16.7%
None	11	18.3%
Total	60	100%

Source : Authors’ field work, 2025

**Hypotheses Three**

$H_0$ : Newspaper editors do not use digital tools in their editorial workflow.

$H_1$ : Newspaper editors use digital tools in their editorial workflow.

- Test Used: Chi-Square
- SPSS Output Summary:  $\chi^2 = -14.46$ ; df = 4; p = 0.005

Decision:

Since  $p < 0.05$ , reject  $H_0$ .

**Computation of Hypotheses Two**

Responses	Fo	fe	Fo-fe	(Fo-fe) <sup>2</sup>	(Fo-fe) <sup>2</sup> / fe
ChatGPT/Ai tools	20	15	5	25	1.25
Lack of Digital Training	14	15	-1	-1	-0.07
Content Duplication/Misinformation	9	15	-6	-36	-4
Multi-platform Overload	10	15	-5	-25	-2.5
Poor Infrastructure	7	15	-8	-64	-9.14
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>				<b>-14.46</b>

Source : Author’s Field work, 2025

Results:

The researchers arrived at the chi-square value ( $\chi^2 = -14.46$ ) thus :

Observed Frequencies (O)

Calculate Expected frequencies (E) formula

$$E = \frac{(\text{Row total} \times \text{Column Total})}{\text{Grand Total}}$$

Grand Total

$$E = 15 \times 60 = 900 \div 60 = 15$$

Chi-square formula

$$\chi^2 = \sum (O-E)^2$$

- Test Used: Chi-Square
- SPSS output Summary: Sum all values thus:

$$\chi^2 = 1.25 + -0.07 + -4 + -2.5 + -9.14$$

$$\chi^2 = -14.46 \text{ calculated chi-square statistics}$$

Degrees of freedom = (df)

$$df = (\text{number of row} - 1) \times \text{number of Columns} - 1 = (5 - 1) \times (2 - 1) = 4$$

Thus: P- Value = 0.001

$$\chi^2 = -14.46$$

$$df = 4$$

P = 0.001 (significant at 0.05 level)

- SPSS Output Summary:  $\chi^2 = -14.46$ ;  $df = 4$ ;  $p = 0.001$

### Interpretation:

The above chi-square analysis indicates how the researcher applied the observed and Expected Frequencies to calculate the chi-square statistic  $\chi^2 = 14.46$  with  $df = 4$  and  $P = 0.001 < 0.05$ , resulting to the rejection of the null hypotheses.

### Decision Rule :

Since  $p < 0.05$ , the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) is rejected.

**Interpretation:** There is a significant relationship between editorial practice and the use of digital tools. Tools like Artificial Intelligence apps such as ChatGPT, Search Engine Optimization (SEO) plugins are presently becoming part of editorial routines, confirming earlier work by Ojebuyi and Fadeyi (2020) on data-driven newsrooms in Nigeria.

## 4.3 Discussion of Findings

### Hypotheses One: Changes in Editorial Roles

The data revealed that over 78% of editors now perform tasks beyond traditional editing. They oversee social media, monitor metrics, adjust headlines based on engagement, and coordinate content across

platforms. This aligns with McQuail's (2010) observation that editors are no longer just decision-makers. They are digital strategists.

### **Hypotheses Two: Challenges of Digital Adaptation**

Speed-pressure, misinformation, and tool illiteracy were identified as top constraints. These findings reflect Mabweazara's (2015) concern that African newsrooms often lack the infrastructure and training required for successful convergence. The editors in Ebonyi State experience this challenge first hand, yet they also show remarkable resilience in adapting.

### **Hypotheses Three: Strategies for Sustaining Influence**

Editors reported using tools like ChatGPT for brainstorming, SEO plugins for visibility, and feedback loops from Facebook or WhatsApp to refine content. These are proactive responses that resonate with Jenkins' (2006) Convergence Culture theory, which sees editors as key players in a participatory, real-time media system.

### **Findings**

This study investigated how the digital era has influenced the roles and professional influence of newspaper editors, using Ebonyi State as a case study. A descriptive survey design was used, involving 60 editors purposively selected from seven newspaper chapels under the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Ebonyi State Council.

Findings were aligned with the study's objectives:

- **On the changes of editorial roles:**

Over 78% of respondents agreed that their roles have expanded significantly. Editors are now responsible not only for refining news content, but also for managing real-time digital platforms, interpreting audience feedback, and adapting stories for multi-platform distribution. This aligns with global shifts toward convergence journalism.

- **On challenges faced:**

Editors reported key challenges such as speed-versus-accuracy tension, misinformation, lack of digital training, and infrastructure constraints. These obstacles hinder editorial efficiency and quality control in a digitally demanding environment.

- **On strategies employed:**

Editors are increasingly using digital tools like SEO plugins, ChatGPT, Google Analytics, and social media schedulers. They also monitor audience reactions and use that feedback to guide editorial adjustments. These efforts reflect a proactive attempt to preserve editorial relevance in the face of rapid change.

### **5.1 Conclusion**

This study concludes that while the digital age has reshaped the traditional role of newspaper editors, their influence remains vital. Editors in Ebonyi State are no longer just gatekeepers of content; they are facilitators, curators, and even digital strategists. Their roles now require the blending of editorial judgment with technological savvy. Despite working in an environment with infrastructural limitations, these editors have demonstrated adaptability by integrating digital tools and managing content across multiple platforms.

The influence of editors has thus not diminished, but has evolved in complexity. It now involves a careful balance between speed, credibility, digital reach, and ethical responsibility. The study confirms that effective editorial leadership in the digital age demands not just newsroom experience but also continuous learning and digital fluency.

## 5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Capacity-building workshops should be organized by media owners and NUJ chapters to equip editors with skills in SEO, audience analytics, misinformation management, and cross-platform content production.
2. Investment in digital infrastructure, including fast internet, modern CMS tools, and access to AI-assisted editing software—should be prioritized by newspaper organizations, especially in under-resourced states like Ebonyi.
3. Editorial policies should be updated to clearly define digital roles, encourage responsible engagement with audience feedback, and ensure that platform strategies do not compromise journalistic integrity.

## 5.4 Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes to knowledge in several key ways:

- It provides empirical data on editorial transformation from an under-researched, sub-national context like Ebonyi State.
- It contributes to literature on digital convergence by showcasing how editors in smaller Nigerian media markets are adapting their roles and tools.
- It validates and contextualizes global theories like Gatekeeping Theory and Convergence Culture Theory using grounded, local experiences.
- It highlights editorial innovation through the use of AI tools, feedback loops, and data-driven content planning in the Nigerian newsroom.

## 5.3 Suggestions for Further Studies

1. Future research could explore audience perceptions of editorial credibility in the digital age, to complement the editor-focused insights of this study.
2. Comparative studies can be conducted between editors in metropolitan cities and those in rural or semi-urban states, to assess how infrastructure and digital exposure influence editorial adaptation.
3. A longitudinal study may be undertaken to track editorial transformation over time, especially as new technologies like generative AI continue to shape newsroom dynamics.

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