Chapter 3 – Research Methods

Introduction

The approach to this study is qualitative and quantitative in nature. Different theorists agree that the combination and integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches can be beneficial in media research (see Bernard, 2002; Salomon, G. 1991). The questions and the focus of the study have adopted both qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis. *ThisDay* no longer exists as an entity, so in trying to understand its situation, I have depended primarily on interviews as my source of data. In my attempt to reconstruct what led to its demise, I had to establish whether there were any advertisers who advertised and this involved a counting exercise, which is a quantitative approach.

3.1   Qualitative Methods

The reason for a qualitative approach is that I have written a critical analysis of the demise of *ThisDay* through interviews with major players and interpreting data from the defunct newspaper. The advantages of using this research method are that it explains behaviours, processes as well as the 'actors' in the processes, attitudes and motivations. Merriam (1988) and Creswell (1994), agree that qualitative researchers are concerned primarily with process, rather than outcomes or products. This means that they are interested in understanding how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and their structures of the world. Merriam (1988) notes that the qualitative researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis; therefore data are mediated through this human instrument, rather than through inventories, questionnaires, or machines. While Creswell (1994) argues that qualitative research is descriptive in that the researcher is interested in process, meaning, and understanding gained through words or pictures that the respondents paints. Therefore, the process of qualitative research is inductive in that the researcher builds abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, and theories from details.

3.1.1   Data Collection Tools

<u>The Interview Process</u>

The interview process was used to provide answers to most of the questions asked in this study. This study is interesting because it serves as a documentary on a non-existent media entity, in which most respondents were tasked to remember a lot in detail about an organisation they no longer work for nor have fond recollections of. Interviewing has become a widely used means for data generation in qualitative research. Wisker (2001: 165) states "Interviews can provide both the detailed information you set out to collect and some fascinating contextual or other information". Interviews that are conducted for qualitative research rely for their quality on the nature of the interactions with the interviewees. This study relied heavily on the semi structured interview format.

Hitchcock and Hughes state that the semi-structured interview

> Allows depth to be achieved by providing the opportunity on the part of the interviewer to probe and expand the interviewee's responses. ... Some kind of balance between the interviewer and the interviewee can develop which can provide room for negotiation, discussion, and expansion of the interviewee's responses. (1989: 83)

To Bernard (1988), the advantage of the semi-structured interview is that the interviewer is in control of the process of obtaining information from the interviewee, but is free to follow new leads as they arise. Each respondent was asked to give a once off, in-depth interview of approximately one hour in duration. The interview guide used was a set of questions, targeted at different categories of respondents based on their status and position and phrased in a similar way across respondents to encourage consistency in data collection and to enable the researcher to make comparisons between the various respondents.

For my interviews, I used a digital tape recorder, which serves as a permanent record of the interview. This is advantageous because it allows the interviewer to be able to observe the respondent in the interview process, and limits the chances of errors that

happen often when the interviewer depends only on taking notes. Note taking can be distracting and serves no real purpose for a research of this nature.

Interviewees

Fourteen respondents were interviewed in this study. Three former members of *ThisDay's* top management who include,: the Owner/ proprietor Nduka Obiagbena, the editor Justice Malala, the editorial director John Matisonn were approached for interviews. Interviews with management covered questions of their strategy and their perceptions of market concentration with regards to *ThisDay's* survival.

Seven former staff members of *ThisDay* from the news, marketing and advertising departments were interviewed, to reconstruct their perceptions and experiences of management strategies while they worked at *ThisDay*. The staff were required to specifically assess *ThisDay's* editorial policy as it affected them, the marketing and advertising strategy employed and how they handled the pressure emanating from the negative publicity, low advertisements sale and impending fears of imminent closure. Open-ended questions were used. Thomas Burgess (2001) argues that open-ended questions can be useful if a researcher is interested in making very precise judgments of each individual respondent.

Two independent media planners / buyers and two independent media analysts were interviewed to get an outside perspective to the answers from *ThisDay's* management. Interviews with the advertising executives targeted specific areas in advertising management and the conceptions of the media planner in sourcing for and allocating advertisements as well as seek to understand why advertisers had not placed advertisements in *ThisDay*. The independent media analysts were interviewed to analyse concentration of media ownership in South Africa and *ThisDay's* strategies. They were also asked to assess the socio-political aspects of the South African press in relation to *ThisDay's* editorial stance. *ThisDay* was presented as a political newspaper and it is argued that this contributed to keeping advertisers away as people were tired of politics and any political posturing would make a newspaper look oppositional. Specific

questions on their perception of the quality of *ThisDay's* editorial content in relation to its price were also asked.

3.1.2   Quantitative Methods

This study undertook a quantitative analysis of the content of *ThisDay* newspaper text to determine the amount of advertising and establish the type of advertising and advertisers in *ThisDay* newspaper. The analysis was important because it revealed the patterns of advertisements in *ThisDay*. It also gave the researcher a clearer picture of the results of *ThisDay's* marketing strategies during analysis of the finding. The quantitative content analysis is essentially a counting exercise. This is a research technique that is based on measuring the amount of an entity in a sample of media content. Berelson (1999: 115) defines content analysis as "a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication"[29]. This study however is not hinged on counting the amount of advertisements alone. This researcher had the opportunity to revisit and re-evaluate the stories written by the editorial team. This helped to reinforce the theme that *ThisDay* newspaper offered quality general based news.

3.1.2.1   Data Collection Tools

In doing this, I took a rolling sample of the 43 editions of *ThisDay* newspaper. This was divided into two different samples of 21 editions for the first month and 22 for the eighth month. The first sample is of the first month of operation when the excitement of a new paper still existed and *ThisDay's* problems were not yet public knowledge. The second sample was eight months later when the paper started showing visible signs of distress. The first sample examined editions starting on Tuesday 7th October 2003 to the 6th of November 2003 the first month of operation. The order was Tuesday, Thursday, for the first week; Monday, Wednesday and Friday of the second week, this ran alternately until the end of the same month. The same framework was used for the second sample which starts from Tuesday 1st, June 2004 to Wednesday 30th, 2004; this month also hosted the MTN yellow paper. I will count and compare the number of advertisements placed in

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[29] In Deacon et al (1999)

ThisDay based on these two samples.[30] Copies of *ThisDay* newspapers were retrieved from The Johannesburg City Library.

3.2   Data Analysis and Interpretation

<u>Qualitative Approach</u>

I choose to use the thematic content analysis (TCA) for the analysis of my interview data. The reason for this is that the thematic content analysis allows a researcher to dig deeper to analyse the themes he identifies unlike content analysis. Wilbraham (1995) notes that the flexibility shown by TCA permits it to be used to amplify other kinds of analysis. Therefore, TCA studies, perhaps because they sustain their positivist roots, are able to produce comparable and evaluative data, she notes that,

> TCA assumes an 'atheoretical' - or 'theory-free' - stance, i.e. it is not burdened with slippery philosophical / theoretical underpinnings and overtones or jargon. It sets out an easy recipe to follow or adapt, and since method and content are fairly distinct, its applications to any form of written / spoken discourse, are limitless[31].

Three stages were involved in the analysis,

- I first listened to and transcribed my interview data.
- I started a vertical analysis of my data by chronologically summarizing the key issues and statements that emphasized the answers to the research questions.
- I analyzed the data horizontally by identifying the themes across board and compared them to my hypothesis and research questions.

<u>Quantitative Research</u>

This was by analyzing the advertisements in *ThisDay* newspaper from the sample obtained from the Johannesburg City library. The data I retrieved from the rolling sample gave me an idea of who *ThisDay's* advertisers were over a period of time, which

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[30] See Appendix C for a sample of data collected.
[31]http://www.criticalmethods.org/wil.htm

advertisers placed how many adverts on the paper. I was also able to examine the consistency of adverts placement to see if the pattern was broken whenever negative reports of *ThisDay's* problems appeared in other newspapers. I tried to determine if this explains why the advertisers who initially advertised in *ThisDay* stopped doing so eventually. I am however aware that there are strict limitations on the inferences a researcher can make with content analysis. For example Przeworski and Salomon (1995), warn that,

> Inferences about motivation or intent cannot normally be made, nor can the researcher infer what the effect of seeing such content would be on a viewer. Content analysis is only analysis of what is in the text. A researcher cannot use it to prove that newspapers intended, for example, to mislead the public, or that a certain style of journalism has a particular effect on public attitudes. The most common inferences in content analysis make use of concepts like unconscious bias or unintended consequences, and these are not the same as saying intentional bias or intended effect[32].

3.3   Limitations to research

The major limitation to this study was the inability of physically interviewing the owner proprietor Nduka Obaigbena who refused to answer to my email enquiry inspite of repeated entreaties and reminders from this researcher. Although Mr Obaigbena is no longer a resident in South Africa and the logistics of travelling to Nigeria were enormous, I was however ready to make do with a telephonic interview if possible. Otherwise I would have to be satisfied with written responses to my interview guide. The respondents are all busy professionals but I took full advantage of the time (a minimum of one hour for each respondent, Justice Malala however graciously granted multiple interviews for hours) that was scheduled for the interview. As is the nature of qualitative research, I returned to some of the respondents for clarification of issues as the research analysis evolved.

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[32]http://www.ssrc.org/fellowships/art_of_writing_proposals.page