



Past *Sunday Monitor* front pages captures the paper's journey from bold exclusives and unforgettable headlines to the stories that shaped national debate and chronicled Uganda's defining moments. As the curtain falls on another chapter, the *Sunday Monitor* stands as a tribute to the journalists, editors and readers who made every Sunday count, and a farewell to an era of impactful storytelling.

A *Sunday Monitor* farewell

As the *Sunday Monitor* bows out of print, it leaves behind more than ink on newsprint – it leaves a lesson: journalism's future lies not in nostalgia, but in reinvention.

BY TIMOTHY KALYEGIRA

This final print edition of the *Sunday Monitor* is properly a time to reflect, but also to look ahead. *The Monitor*, as it was then called, in November 1996, was the first national newspaper to introduce colour editions.

A Kampala newspaper titled *The Marketplace*, owned by businessman Ernest Kakwano, was the first paper of any kind to have colour pages.

The *Sunday Monitor* in 1997, when it was edited by Kyazze Simwogerere and the deputy editor Lois Nabeta, struggled with one major limitation—the quality of newsprint.

The Sunday edition was supposed to be weekend reading, the edition with a higher focus on lifestyle and leisure than the other six editions. Unfortunately, it was always difficult to accurately reproduce colours for items like cookery, nail varnish, jewellery, and fashion clothing. Beautiful colour photographs looked washed out in print. This affected features like Kironde Kaddumukasa's cookery articles. What was supposed to be beautifully prepared food ended up looking unpalatable.

This is one example where digital publishing beats print publishing, at least in places like Africa that lack high-end printing presses.

Today's premium smartphones take better pictures than traditional print newspapers can manage on their pages.

The *Monitor* website, unlike the print version, has no limitations on space, so more comprehensive coverage of the country is possible.

Because of digital's fidelity, colour photography is much better reproduced online than in print. Errors of fact or spelling can be corrected on the website, whereas once they escape an editor's eye in print, these typos and factual errors have to be lived with forever.

Over the last two years, I've been warning here that the traditional media should be careful not to bask too sentimentally in its legacy past. In this, the established media thinks much like President Museveni, who is so rooted in the National Resistance Army (NRA)'s military achievements of the 1980s, he finds it difficult to realise that 80 percent of Uganda's current population was not born when the NRA took state power 40 years ago, and they don't care much for these "bush war" tales.

Disruptive digital era

Seismic shifts are underway, brought on by the internet and artificial intelligence, which are destroying or disrupting 200-year-old industries, including the media.

However, I have also argued that the positive side to the digital revolution

IMPRESSION

Uganda or Kampala?

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olution is the sheer volume of people now consuming media, from two-year-old children scrolling through their parents' smartphones to the addicted multitudes who spend practically all their free time online. The demand is huge and shows no sign of slowing down.

All traditional media, from radio to TV and print newspapers, need to study the consumer tastes and formats and adapt to these. I fear that the more print newspapers dwell on and remain anchored to their important past milestones, the longer it will take them to make the radical editorial and publishing changes for the new media era.

Print is a format, just as landline phones, postal letters, faxes, film cameras, banking halls, and video cassette players were formats. The decline of a format should not be confused with the death of the product and service.

The end of film cameras gave way to an explosion in digital photography. Banking halls in decline made way for nationwide use of mobile money. The death of the fax and letters in envelopes was followed by the widespread adoption of email. The video cassette players of the 1980s made way for DVD players and now smartphones.

Similarly, as journalism schools and the established 1990s media community have viewed with dread the steep decline in print newspapers, confusing it with a decline in reading, there has been a tenfold increase in the active consumption of news and media on social media.

Need to be national

The other thing is that even as we lament the decline of print newspapers, even in their heyday, they were never truly national newspapers. Partly because of the limitation of physical pages and partly because of journalists' and the public's impression that Uganda is Kampala, 70 percent of all content in the *Sunday Monitor* was typically about Kampala-based people and institutions.

Uganda outside Kampala, where the bulk of the population lives, was at best given a few token news briefs and features, more to fill space than as dedicated national coverage.

Merging the Sunday and Saturday print editions into one weekend edition helps solve some of the problem of articles that act as fillers of space.

Hopefully, the weekend edition will become richer as a result. The view, though, is that newspaper publishing companies need to be more proactive about adapting to the much more convenient and less consuming news content.

It is the end of an era, but we remember that *The Monitor* was launched in July 1992 as a new edition; the reading public did not think in terms of separate days. To them, it's simply *The Monitor*.

Also, lest we forget, the *Sunday Monitor* over the past 20 or so years has been available on the internet on Saturday evening. There's no merging the Saturday and Sunday editions is taking the fact of some weekend content to its logical conclusion.

Audiences don't perceive the editorial demarcations. As is often the case online, a link to an article ten or 15 years ago can surface. A WhatsApp group, makes for interesting reading, is widely shared and forwarded, and suddenly it's as good as fresh news.

Publish solid investigative articles and columns. Publish local, unforgettable photos. Go beyond Kampala Big Men in coverage. Audiences are hungry for news and information, and Ugandan audiences abroad are five times hungrier for updates from home. Give them worthwhile content, and they will read, share, and subscribe.

There has never been a time as challenging for the business side of newspapers as today. But there has also never been a time when published content was as avidly consumed as today. Matching this increased consumption of news with a feature content with a business model is the only challenge.

1997

In November 1996, *The Monitor* blazed a trail as Uganda's first national newspaper in colour. But barely a year later, the *Sunday Monitor* was confronting an awkward truth: bold ideas printed on paper too poor to carry them.