

Readers' Motivations towards Online Newspaper Reading in North Western Nigeria

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Abstract

There is speculation that the exposure of the contents of online newspapers satisfies readers' need for information and slows down the drive for the print versions. This study aims to examine readers' motivations towards reading online newspapers. Many studies conducted revealed that online newspapers give certain values to the readers which their print counterpart do not, but there is still a gap on determining what really motivates the readers to read the online versions. The study employed descriptive survey method in which questionnaire was administered to a randomly selected sample of 330 newspapers readers. The findings demonstrated a high (Mean=3.77) overall motivation level of the readers towards reading online version of newspapers. A further analysis of the findings revealed that readers (mean=3.81) are motivated to read online version of newspapers because they have access to the internet. Also readers (mean=3.62) are motivated to read online version of newspapers because of its interactive nature. Meanwhile, readers (Mean=3.93) are motivated to read online version of newspapers because of its ability to provide timely updates. The study concludes that online newspapers are gaining popularity in the newspaper industry. Therefore, newspaper publishers should strategize ways to fully embrace their technological fate and enhance quality print run.

Keywords: Online newspaper, reading, motivations, Nigeria

1.0 Introduction

The internet is today one of the most effective means of communication as a new mass medium and a forceful one too, which has become an integral part of mass media. It is not only a mass medium, but is also a global medium with a potential to reach everyone on the globe (Ohiagu, 2011). The internet has increased competition for newspapers and revised the way news is distributed. Indirectly, it has influenced advertising trends, readers' behavior and the rise of disruptive technologies. As a result, newspapers have been forced to integrate with the web and now approximately 80% of newspaper publishers have integrated web and print operation (Patel, 2010).

Newspapers are today blending into what is now considered a single system of interrelated systems (internet). The influence of the internet could be readily noticed in the online newspaper phenomenon that has greatly increased the accessibility of people to information services (Patel, 2010). Apparently, the Internet World Stats shows that Nigeria has the largest internet users in Africa; having 67.3 million internet users. Egypt has the second largest internet user rate; having 43 million internet users, followed by South Africa which has 23.7 millions. This information is represented in the following figure.

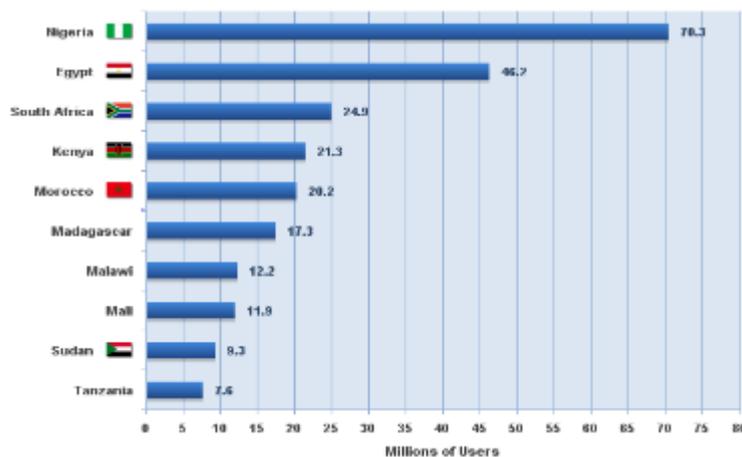


Figure 1: Africa Top 10 Internet Countries

There is this speculation that the contents of online edition of newspapers satisfy readers' needs for information and slows down the drive for the print versions (Okoro & Diri, 2012:9). Several studies were conducted in Nigeria on newspaper readership in information age. For example, Mathew, et al (2013) examined the online newspaper readership in North Eastern Nigeria, and how online newspaper is gaining acceptability among Nigerians and the challenges facing its growth. Others include Okonofua (2012), Salawu (2004) and Olusoji (2012) as well as Aliagan (2011). These studies were largely carried out in the south, east, west and north-eastern parts of the country, and there is still a gap on examining readers' motivations towards reading online newspapers particularly in the North West which this study sets to investigate.

1.1 Research questions

In attempting to provide relevant data to be analyzed in order to achieve the objectives set for the study based on understanding newspaper readers' views, behaviors, and practice on reading online newspapers, the following research questions are raised for this study:

1. What are the readers' motivations towards reading online version of newspapers?
2. To what extent are the readers motivated towards reading online version of newspapers?

2.0 Literature Review

The study adopts Uses and Gratification Theory (U&G) that focuses on readers' need and media choice. However, online newspaper reading motivations can be explored using a wide range of theoretical frameworks, and while the uses and gratification approach is not the only approach that can be used, it was adopted for the purpose of this study.

2.1 Uses and Gratification Theory

The theory was first conceptualized and used in an article written by Elihu Katz (1959), and it has two assumptions about media audiences. One of these assumptions is that individuals are active in making choices about selecting media and messages. The other assumption is that individuals are aware of their motives for information and entertainment; people use these motives as guides, as they actively seek out media messages to satisfy their needs. Therefore, the media preferences are not only explained by media content, but also by characteristics of the audience and their involvement with the content.

An understanding of the relationship between the mass media and their audiences has been sought by many researchers in the 20th century. The “uses and gratifications theory” is an example of an approach to mass communication that falls under this. This influential tradition in media research in its current form is credited to Elihu Katz, Jay G. Blumler and Michael Gurevitch. The uses and gratifications theory supports that, rather than being passively affected by media messages, individuals forming the media audiences actively choose and utilize media contents to satisfy their social and psychological needs and obtain personal gratification (Lucena, 2011).

2.2 Conceptual Framework

On the bases of previous discussions on the theoretical approach and facets of this study, a conceptual model of print and online newspaper readership was proposed. The predicted relationships between the variables in the present study are explained with the aid of theoretical model. Theoretical model means a set of predicted relationships, accompanying explanations and justifications (Allen, et al, 2009). The relationships between the variables in the present study were predicted from the tenets of Uses and Gratification Theory. The predicted relationships are indicated in Figure 2 for easy understanding.

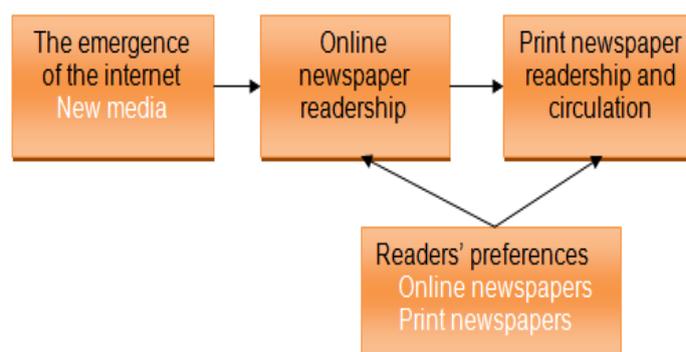


Figure 2: Proposed model

One way to analyze the situation about print and online newspaper reading is to study changes among the news readers over the years (Findahl 2008). Print and online newspaper readerships as shown in the diagram above are the dependent and independent variables respectively. It shows how readers’ preferences act as intervening variable, where readers take decision concerning the newspaper version they prefer to read based on motivation and

satisfaction with the content. The readership motivations were measured by respondents' ranking of the preferred version of the newspaper and finally the overall mean was calculated.

The diagram shows that, readers have the potentials of choosing the media messages that can satisfy their news and information needs; either from online or print newspaper contents. This is based on the assumption of Uses and Gratification theory that, communication behavior is goal directed, purposive and motivated, and people initiate the selection and use of communication vehicles. Readership is an estimate of the number of readers who read a publication. Readership shows the demographic information of readers, and what they read. However, high readership means that the publication is read by more people,

The present study concentrates on readers' motivations towards reading online versions of newspapers because the content of online newspapers becomes available to readers for free, while print newspaper circulation is one figure that all publishers of newspapers try to maximize, because the higher the readership, the higher the chance of getting revenue for a particular newspaper. Readership is also important as it tells the publishers in how many hands does a copy of a newspaper go into.

2.3 Related literature

Several studies across the world were conducted to examine print and online newspaper readership. Most of these studies concentrated mainly on print and online newspaper reading, preferences, popularity, reading time, and interactivity nature of the online newspaper. Findahl (2008) found that, although the Nordic countries are known to have a very strong tradition of newspaper reading, there was a decrease of newspaper reading from 1996 to 2002, and a small decrease from 2005 to 2006. The habits of print newspaper reading have changed very little in Sweden and most evidently in Finland, Norway and Denmark since internet was introduced.

Similarly, the findings of Ihlström and Lundberg (2002) revealed that in Swedish, the subscribing readers of the online versions have increased from one forth to more than a half of the readers, while more than 80% of the readers prefer print edition of the newspaper. Their findings also indicated that the readers are further interested in a multimedia paper edition for the future. This shows that online newspaper is gaining popularity in the newspaper industry in the country. Nguyen and Western (2006) found that "those who relied on the internet the most for news and information still used traditional sources substantially". Traditional media will continue to exist to complement the internet in providing audience's news and information needs. They concluded that (p. 16-17):

The historical coexistence of old and new media will continue in the internet age. At least within the provision of news and information, instead of driving out old media, the internet will complement them in serving the seemingly insatiable news and information needs among a substantial segment of the society. Decline of traditional news and information usage might be under way, especially when the internet becomes the most relied-on news and information source but it is unlikely for any replacement (absolute displacement) to occur.

Similarly De Waal, et al. (2004) argued that online newspapers only partly seem to substitute print newspaper reading, and to a small extent, but they do not reduce other media behaviors. In addition, online versions of newspapers do not seem to be capable of substituting a whole range of information functions of the print versions. In Malaysia, despite the internet becoming a major source of news and information in recent years, newspapers still remain as the main and important reading and informative document for the people to rely on (Salman, et al. 2011). According to the findings of Everett (2011), 50.5% of the readers favored online newspapers, but despite online reading being free, 32.7% still prefer reading print newspapers to its online counterpart. The study concluded that although the future of newspaper industry is obscure, it is certain that it will include technology. Newspapers are transforming into a news source that consumers want, and are successfully embracing their technological fate.

Abdurraheem, et al. (2012) employed a survey method to examine the future of print media in information age in Nigeria. Their study showed that the internet which houses online newspaper can be seen as a major predictor of the dwindling print newspaper readership in Nigeria, and that online newspaper was significantly the source of news. This means that the effectiveness of the internet changes the pattern of information dissemination and news consumption in Nigeria especially among the youth. The study further revealed that majority of those who read online newspapers do so because of internet access.

In sum, the preceding review suggests that traditional newspapers are now matching the internet news sources in their own game. Meanwhile, the content of both print and online newspapers matters to readers; increasing the quality of content can increase satisfaction while satisfaction has the potential to result in higher reading motivation and vice versa (Obijiofor & Green, 2001).

2.4 Print Newspapers Vs Online Versions in Nigeria

Mathew, et al. (2013) conducted a study to examine the level of online newspaper reading in Nigeria. Their findings indicated that majority (78%) of Nigerians read online newspapers. This supports one of the assumptions of Uses and Gratification theory (UG) that individuals are aware of their motives for information and entertainment; people use these motives as guides, as they actively seek out media messages to satisfy their needs. They concluded that online newspaper is gaining acceptability among Nigerians.

On the contrary, Okonofua, G., A. (2012) chose a survey method to examined the level of exposure and satisfaction of internet subscribers to online newspapers among cyber cafés users. His findings revealed that 50% of the readers read online newspapers frequently and only 7.5% seldom reads online newspapers. The findings indicated that print newspapers satisfy the news demands of readers more than the online newspapers. It is evident that online newspaper readers also read print newspapers. The findings of Mathew, et al. (2013) indicated that print newspaper industry was experiencing low readership from readers as a result of the introduction of online newspapers, while Ekareafo, et al. (2013) suggests that a key issue in the management of newspapers is the combination of editorial decisions with technical decisions to bring about quality print run.

Therefore, the present study goes beyond online newspaper reading in relation to its print counterpart, to examining the readers' motivations towards reading online version of newspapers. Meanwhile, the study measures the level of readers' motivations towards reading online version of newspapers particularly in the North Western Nigeria where the related literature suggests little attention by researchers.

3.0 Methodology

The study employed quantitative approach in which descriptive survey was used to collect and analyze data. According to Allen (2010), quantitative method refers to "any approach that uses systematic observations to account for and generalize about human behavior". The advantages of using survey are numerous; surveys can be obtained from large random samples of population, thus allowing for more robust conclusions. Moreover, surveys typically takes place in naturalistic settings and can therefore have strong generalizability. Survey design can help identify relationships among variables. It can also be used to measure newspaper reading, television viewing, radio listening and consumer behavior patterns (Wimmer & Diminick, 2003).

The target population for this study comprises only the academic staff members of Bayero University Kano who are loyal readers of Nigerian newspapers. All qualified participants were those who claimed to read both print and online versions of newspapers. Therefore, those among the readers who upon interrogation indicated that they "do not" read one or both of these versions were not given a chance to participate in the study. Evidently, Bayero University Annual Report (2012) showed that there are 1,281 academic staff members working with the university.

Therefore, a sample of 297 respondents was estimated using Krejcie and Morgan formula (1970), which is commonly used for sample size calculation. The sample size was calculated with margin error of approximately 5 percent at a confidence level of 95 percent. According to this formula, 297 responses are required to achieve a 95% confidence interval in generalizing to the 1,281 academic staff members of the selected university. The academic staff members of Bayero University were chosen because the researchers consider their intellectual ability in providing relevant responses to the questions.

The population sample was selected using probability sampling. The respondents were selected at random to enable the researcher predict the probability that each element of the population has equal chance of being included in the sample. According to Kothari (2004) "random sampling from a finite population refers to that method of sample selection which gives each possible sample combination an equal probability of being picked up and each item in the entire population to have an equal chance of being included in the sample".

Structured questionnaire was used to gather data from the readers' perspective. A copy of the questionnaire was given to any respondent at reach who upon interrogation by the researcher claims to Nigerian newspapers.. The questionnaire was used because of its ability to gather data within short possible time and produce data that are easily quantified. It is usually viewed as a more objective research tool that can produce generalisable results because of large sample sizes (Harris & Brown, 2010).

The study employed descriptive statistics to analyze the data. The most common descriptive statistics are the mean, the standard deviation, the standard error of the mean, the frequency, the variance, and the range (Anderson, 2012). Therefore, the mean, the standard deviation and the frequency were used to analyze the data. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used to quantify the data gathered. Statistical Package for Social Science is a software package widely used for statistical analyses in social science research.

4.0 Findings

In the present study, 330 questionnaires were administered to the respondents, 313 were returned signifying a high (97%) response rate, while 11 were rejected during analysis due to incomplete and invalid responses. Therefore, 302 questionnaires were analyzed.

4.1 Descriptive Statistics of Readers' Motivations towards Reading Online Versions of Newspapers

Table 1 illustrates the mean, the standard deviation and the frequency of the readers' motivations towards reading online version of newspapers. To answer the research questions, the results are presented in the table 1. From the table, the frequency of the respondents who agree with the statement is indicated as A+SA (Agree and Strongly Agree), and the frequency of those who disagree with the statement is indicated as D+SD (Disagree and Strongly Disagree) while the frequency of those who neither agree nor disagree with the statement is indicated as N (Neutral).

Table 1:
Readers' Motivations towards Reading Online Newspapers

Statement	Mean	SD	Total (%)		
			A+S	D+SD	N
1. Access to the internet at cheaper rate motivates me to read the online version	3.81	1.16	71.2	19.5	9.30
2. I read online version of the newspaper because it allows me to follow news better	3.79	1.11	63.9	14.9	21.2
3. I read online version of the newspaper because it allows me to read the news quicker	3.70	1.17	65.5	16.9	17.5
4. I read online version of the newspaper because It allows me to make comments	3.62	1.28	61.6	20.9	17.5
5. I read online version the newspaper because it provides timely updates	3.93	1.11	76.5	13.3	10.3
Total	3.77	1.17	67.7	17.1	15.1

Level indicator: low=0.1-2.99, moderate=3.0-3.49, high=3.5-5.0

4.2 Research Question 1:

This research question aims to examine readers' motivations towards reading online versions of Daily Trust newspaper. Item 1 from the above table reveals that readers (mean=3.81) are motivated to read online version of newspapers because they have access to the internet at cheaper rate. Item 2 showed that readers (mean=3.79) are motivated to read online version of newspapers because it allows them to follow the latest news better. Also item 3 indicated that readers (mean=3.70) are motivated to read online version of newspapers because it

allows them to read the news quicker. Moreover, item 4 showed that readers (mean=3.62) are motivated to read online version of newspapers because of its interactive nature. Meanwhile, item 5 showed that readers (Mean=3.93) are motivated to read online version of newspapers because of its ability to provide timely updates.

4.3 Research question 2:

This research question aims to determine the extent to which readers are motivated towards reading online version of newspapers. Table 1 above demonstrates a high (Mean=3.77) overall motivation level of the readers towards reading online version newspapers. Further analyses of the findings revealed that majority (71.2%) of the readers are well motivated to read online version of newspapers because they have access to the internet. Majority (63.9%) of the readers are motivated to read online version of newspapers because it allows them to follow the latest news better. Majority (65.5%) of the readers are motivated to a large extent to read online version of newspapers because it allows them to read the news quicker. Majority (61.6%) of the readers are motivated to read online version of newspapers because of its interactive nature. Majority (76.5%) of the readers are highly motivated to read online version of newspapers because of its ability to provide timely updates. Therefore, the findings revealed that the readers are motivated to read online version of newspapers to a large extent.

4.4 Discussion of Findings

The present study found that majority (71.2%) of the readers agreed that access to the internet motivates them to read online version of newspapers. Only 19.5% disagreed with the statement while 9.30% are neutral. Majority (63.9%) of the readers claimed that they read online version of newspapers because it allows them to follow the news better. And only 14.9% disagreed with the statement while 21.2% of the readers are neutral. This supports the findings of Abdurraheem, et al. (2012) whose study revealed that majority of those who read online newspapers do so because of internet access.

Online newspaper Web-sites make it quick and easy for readers to be involved in the news industry. It was found that majority (65.5%) of the readers said that they read online version of newspapers because it allows them to read the news quicker. Only 16.9% disagreed with the statement while 17.5% neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. However, Okonofua (2012) found that only 17.5% of the readers were motivated because it was easy to read and quick to use.

Interactivity is one of the distinguishing characteristics of the online newspapers. Newspapers' Web-sites often allow users to comment on any article or repost it via social networks. It was found that majority (61.6%) of the readers agreed that they read online version of newspapers because it allows them to make comments (interactivity), 20,9% disagreed with the statement while 17.5% are neutral. Meanwhile, provision of timely updates was identified as the major factor that motivates readers towards reading online version of the newspaper. It was found that 76.5% of the readers agreed that they read online version of the newspaper because it provides timely updates, and only 13.3% disagreed with the statement while 10.3% are neutral. This is in line with Mathew, et al. (2013) and Okonofua (2012) whose findings showed that majority of the respondents were motivated to read online newspapers because they are up to date.

5.0 Conclusion

Based on the findings, it is reasonable to conclude that readers are highly motivated towards reading online version of newspapers particularly in North Western Nigeria. Online newspapers are gaining popularity in the newspaper industry due to certain values they give to the readers such as timely updates and interactivity. This agrees with the findings of Abdurraheem, et al. (2012), Okonofua (2012), Mathew, et al. (2013) and Okonofua (2012) whose findings showed that majority of the respondents were motivated to read online newspapers because they are up to date. Therefore, newspaper publishers should strategize ways to fully embrace their technological fate and enhance quality print run.

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