

Readers' Preferences for Print and Online Newspapers in Northwestern Nigeria

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Abstract

Print newspaper circulation declines as the online versions are available for free. This study determines the extent of readership preferences for both print and online newspapers in northwestern Nigeria. Daily Trust, being the largest circulating newspaper in the study area was selected for case study. The study employed quantitative approach, in which descriptive survey method was used to gather and analyze data from print and newspaper readers in the study area. Structured questionnaire was used as data-gathering instrument. The questionnaire was distributed to a sample of 330 newspaper readers using simple random sampling. The findings revealed a moderate (Mean=3.38) readers' preference for the online version of the newspaper to its print counterpart. Further analysis of the findings revealed that majority of the readers (Mean=3.49) find themselves reading less print copy of the newspaper because they have access to the free online versions. Majority of the readers (mean=3.37) will continue to read the print version despite the availability of its free online counterpart. Also, majority of the readers (Mean=3.08) spend less time reading the print copy of the newspaper due to the availability of its online versions. Meanwhile, majority of the readers (Mean=3.51) are confident that the newspaper will continue to survive despite the availability of its free online versions.

Keywords: Preferences, Print Newspaper, Online Newspaper, Newspaper Circulation

Introduction

Print media industry experiences changes as a result of advancement in technology especially new media. Smith and Hendricks (2010) asserted that the dynamic nature of the industry resulted in constant revolutions and changes than at any other time in the print media history globally. New technologies become a major threat to print newspapers in the 21st century. This is certainly evidenced in the work of Everett (2011), who examined how some technological discoveries are rapidly replaced by the new media, which is more impressive

and efficient in dissemination of information. In the digital age, online news is instantly disseminated, posing challenges to print news. As a result, most newspapers integrated the Internet for more quicker and accessible news-delivering techniques.

As pointed out by Patel (2010), newspapers have now blended into the internet, which is viewed as a single system, consisting of interrelated systems. The phenomenon of online newspapers has greatly augmented the people's accessibility to news, signifying the influence of the internet. The Internet World Stats of 2017 apparently clarifies that Nigeria, having 91.6 million internet users, is ranked the largest Internet country in Africa. Okoro and Diri (2012) predictively argued that there is an assumption that the accessibility of online newspaper content tends to lower the readership of its print counterpart, as the online version satisfies readers' needs for information. A number of related studies were conducted in Nigeria, mainly in the west, south, and north-eastern parts of the country. But little or no scholarly attention is given to the readers' preferences for print and online newspapers, particularly in the Northwest, which is the focus of this study. This study aims to measure the readership preferences, and determine the extent to which online newspaper reading affects the readership of its print versions in Northwestern Nigeria. Daily Trust, the most widely circulated daily newspaper in the study area, was chosen for the purpose of this study.

Print and Online Newspaper Readership

A number of studies were conducted across the world on readership of print and online newspapers. The main focus of these studies was on content preferences, popularity, and reading time. For instance, the findings of Findahl (2008) revealed that since the Internet was introduced, readership of print newspapers has slightly changed in Sweden and most obviously in Denmark, Norway and Finland. In the same vein, Ihlström and Lundberg (2002) found that readership of online newspapers has significantly increased in Sweden. Despite the increase in online newspaper reading, some findings predicted bright future for print newspapers. For instance, Nguyen and Western (2006) established that print newspaper reading might considerably decline, especially at a time when people make internet the most relied-on source of information, but it is doubtful for online newspapers to absolutely replace or displace their print versions. It is evident that those who heavily relied on the internet for information still read print newspapers.

De Waal, Schonbach, and Lauf (2005) found that online newspapers might slightly substitute their print counterparts, but they do not seem to replace the entire functions of the print versions vis-à-vis news and information. In addition, Salman, Ibrahim, Yusof, Mustaffa, and Mahbob (2011) asserted that print newspapers remain an important source of information in Malaysia, despite the availability and interactive nature of the internet, which becomes the most effective means of communication in recent years. Also, the findings of Chan (2007) indicated that the internet becomes the most effective and preferred medium for information. But according to Thurman (2004), most of daily readers still prefer print newspapers to their online counterparts in terms of local popularity.

It seems the internet becomes a necessity for the survival of newspapers, as most of them have inevitably integrated the web. In this regard, Everett (2011) argues that though the future of print newspapers is equivocal, it will definitely include technology. This is because the internet becomes a crucial and timely source of news for journalists, which facilitates the process of newsgathering and dissemination due to the rich information it offers (Chari, 2009). This implies that if the newspapers successfully embrace technology, they will continue

to play their role as informative and educative reading material, as well as credible source of information.

Print and Online Newspapers in Nigeria

Some studies attempted to investigate the print and online newspaper readership in Nigeria. For instance, the findings of Mathew, Ogedebe, and Adeniji (2013) regarding online newspaper readership in the country showed that more than half of newspaper readers in Nigeria read online newspapers. This indicates that online newspaper accounts for more readers than their print counterparts in the country. In fact, online newspapers are gaining popularity in Nigerian. The findings of Okonofua (2012) showed that print version of newspapers satisfy the information need of readers more than their online counterparts, affirming that readers of online newspapers also read print versions. According to the findings, the low readership phenomenon facing print newspapers in Nigeria might not be unconnected with the introduction of online newspapers, which provide news content to the readers for free. In this regard, Ekhareafor, Asemah, and Edegoh (2013) suggest that an important issue of newspaper management in Nigeria is to combine editorial and technical decisions to provide quality print run.

The most significant change in the print media industry in Nigeria has probably been the arrival of some strong new dailies, such as *The Sun* and *The Daily Trust*, both of which are in the top ten papers in terms of percentage of national readership. *The Sun* has the highest percentage of national readership and the *Daily Trust* is in tenth spot, a strong showing given that it is a regionally-focused daily in the north of the country (AMDI Report, 2006). However, there are various challenges facing the print newspaper industry in the country. For example, some politicians in Nigeria feel that ownership of a paper is a way of making their voices and political agendas heard. Once the agenda is thought to have been realized, or perhaps not realized, there is a tendency for such politicians to turn their backs on the paper, which is why some newspapers die off prematurely.

Another challenge to newspapers in Nigeria is that, politicians who own newspaper companies consider them to be the media through which they can achieve their political agenda. In most cases if the political agenda of such politicians is achieved, they abandon the newspaper. As a result, many newspaper organizations in Nigeria have been closed down (MediaReach OMD Nigeria, 2005). Dare (2011) argues that however, it is in the print newspapers that the backbone of the Nigerian media can be located. This is clearly justified by the history of the media industry. The combined circulation of the newspapers in Nigeria has been on a steady decline. The reasons for the decline include the economic downturn, the high cost of newsprint, and a marginalized middle class and in recent times the advent of the internet and the multiplicity of online platforms to obtain news and information for free. The ability to employ new media tools is predicated on the level of internet access or internet penetration in any country. Presumably, a country with low internet penetration will be saddled with a weak media and near absence of audience participation in news and information gathering.

The number of internet users may have direct relationship with online newspaper readership. More people are becoming aware and conversant with the internet almost everywhere in the world, thereby making it possible for the readers to access the media content through it. The adoption of online news has also consistently risen while the growth of the internet use continues (Kang, 2009: 15). None of the preceding studies explicitly focused on how online newspaper reading affects the print newspaper circulation, particularly in Northwestern

Nigeria. Hence, the present study determines the extent of readership preferences for both print and online newspapers in Northwestern Nigeria.

Theoretical Approach

Though the effects of online newspaper reading on its print counterpart can be explored using various theoretical approaches, Uses and Gratification theory is adopted for the purpose of this study, as it centers on media need and choice. Uses and Gratification theory was first theorized and tested in Elihu Katz's article in 1959. The theory proposed two inferences about audiences of media. First, audiences are active in the selection of media and their messages. Second, audiences are mindful of their reasons for choice of a particular medium vis-à-vis both information and entertainment. They consider these reasons as they ardently search for media messages for information needs and gratification. Therefore, not only the content defines media preferences but also audience's characteristics and their relationship with the media content. According to Potter (2012), the basic tenets of Uses and Gratification theory formed five claims: 1) communication behavior is purposive, motivated and goal directed; 2) individuals initiate the choice and usage of communication medium; 3) communication behavior is mediated or guided by a host of psychological and social factors; 4) in the gratification of needs, the media contend with other forms of communication; 5) people are naturally more powerful than the media in the course of effects.

The Uses and Gratifications theory has been applied as an approach in many communication studies to understand the relationship between audiences and their media choice (Lucena, 2011). The theory has been examined by many researchers, but the dominant tradition of applying this approach in media research is attributed to Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch. The theory claims that individuals, who are the audiences, choose and use media messages to satisfy their psychological and social needs; they gain personal gratification rather than being inactively affected by media messages.

Changes may occur in print and online newspaper readings due to emergence of the Internet. Readers make decision regarding choice of either print or online version, depending on their information needs. This implies that by offering online news content, readers of a particular newspaper can actively gain personal gratification from either of the newspaper versions of their choice. For instance, if the readers of Daily Trust newspaper decide to read more online version than its print counterpart, then the readership and circulation of the print version might be affected. This is based on the inferences of Uses and Gratification theory as pointed out by Potter (2012).

Methodology

The method found suitable for this study is quantitative approach. The study used descriptive survey to gather and analyze data. Quantitative approach refers to any approach that uses systematic observations to account for and generalize about human behavior. Survey method can be applied to large population samples, and it allows researchers to make strong conclusions (Allen, Titsworth, & Hunt, 2009). Surveys naturally take place in realistic situations, which can yield valid and generalizable results. They allow researchers to easily categorize variables in their studies. They can be used to measure audience's usage of media, such as newspaper reading, television viewing, and radio listening (Wimmer & Diminick, 2003).

Academic staffs of Bayero University Kano (BUK) were the target population of this study. Only those who claimed to read both print and online versions of Daily Trust newspaper were selected. Those who upon interrogation showed that they do not read either or both of these versions were not included in the study. According to its Annual Report, BUK has 1,281 academic staffs. From the population, 297 respondents were chosen as sample, estimated using Krejcie and Morgan formula (1970). This sample was calculated with approximately 5 percent margin error at a confidence level of 95 percent. This means that in generalizing to the 1,281 readers, 297 responses are required to achieve a 95 percent confidence level. BUK academic staffs were chosen because the researchers were confident of their intellectual ability in providing valid response to the questionnaire.

Probability sampling was used to select the respondents. In this type of sampling, each element of the population has equal chance of being selected. Kothari (2004) asserted that random sampling refers to a technique sample selection that gives each element of the population an equal probability of being picked up and each item to have an equal chance of being included. Structured questionnaire was used as data-gathering instrument. The variables in this study were measured using five-point likert scale, which provides pre-determined options to the respondents. Wimmer and Diminick (2003) asserted that this type of scale is commonly used in communication studies. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze data in the present study. The study employed mean, standard deviation, and frequency, which according to Anderson (2012) are the commonly used descriptive statistics. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used to obtain the statistical results. SPSS is widely used for statistical analyses in communication research.

Findings and Discussion

Altogether, 330 copies of questionnaire were distributed to the respondents in the present study. Of the 330 questionnaires, 313 were returned, indicating a high response rate of 97 percent. Due to invalid and incomplete responses, 11 questionnaires were rejected during analysis. Hence, 302 out of total number of the questionnaires were considered for analysis.

Readership Preferences for Print and Online Versions of Daily Trust

In analyzing the descriptive statistics, A+SA stands for 'Agree plus Strongly Agree' options as given in the questionnaire. It was used to indicate the frequency of Daily Trust newspaper readers who agree with the statements. D+SD stands for "Disagree plus Strongly Disagree" and was used to indicate the frequency of those who disagree with the statements. Meanwhile, N stands for "Neutral" and was used to show the frequency of those who neither agree nor disagree with the statements. Five-point likert scale suggests that '5' is the highest mean value. Hence, the findings are reported within the range of 0.00 and 5.00. The findings are depicted in the following table.

Table 1

Effects of Daily Trust online newspaper on its print versions

Statement	Mean	SD	Total (Percentage)		
			A+SA	D+SD	N
1. Daily Trust online newspaper has made the print version less important	3.44	1.27	62.6	28.5	8.9
2. I find myself reading less print copy of Daily Trust newspaper	3.49	1.27	64.6	24.2	11.3

3. I will continue to read print copy of Daily Trust newspaper	3.37	1.13	49.0	20.5	30.5
4. I spend less time reading print copy of Daily Trust newspaper	3.08	1.19	45.4	29.8	24.8
5. I feel confident with the future of Daily Trust newspaper	3.51	1.16	62.2	20.9	16.9
Total	3.38	1.20	56.7	24.7	18.4

Level indicator: low=0.1-2.99, moderate=3.0-3.49, high=3.5-5.

The objective of this study was to determine the readers' preferences for print and online versions of Daily Trust newspaper. Item 1 on Table 1 indicates that majority of the readers (Mean=3.44) opined that the online versions of Daily Trust newspaper has made the print versions less important. Item 2 shows that majority of the readers (Mean=3.49) find themselves reading less print copy of the newspaper because they have access to the free online versions. Item 3 indicates that majority of the readers (Mean=3.37) will continue to read print copy of the newspaper despite the availability of its free online versions. Also, item 4 shows that majority of the readers (Mean=3.08) spend less time reading print copy of the newspaper due to the availability of its free online versions. Meanwhile, item 5 indicates that majority of the readers (Mean=3.51) are confident with the future of the newspaper. The second objective of this study was to determine the extent of preferences for the online version of Daily Trust newspaper to its print counterpart. Table 1 revealed a moderate (Mean=3.38) readers' preference for the online version of the newspaper to its print counterpart. Further analysis of the findings revealed that majority of the readers (Mean=3.49) find themselves reading less print copy of the newspaper because they have access to the free online version, while majority of the readers (Mean=3.08) spend less time reading the print copy of the newspaper due to the availability of its free online version.

Discussion of Findings

The objective of this study was to examine readers' preferences for print and online newspapers in northwestern Nigeria. The study found that readers in the study area prefer the online version of newspapers to a moderate extent. This is in line with the findings of many studies conducted in Nigeria (Santana, et al., 2011; Mathew et al., 2013; Ekhareafu et al., 2013). A careful analysis of the data brings to light the fact that in Nigeria, readers prefer online versions of newspapers to their print counterparts in to a moderate extent. The reading preferences differ as it shows an indication of shifting towards the online versions. The readers are well motivated to reading online version of newspapers. The decline in circulation of print newspapers in Nigeria is related to proliferation of the internet, particularly the introduction of online newspaper and its readership.

The internet is one of the major factors that affect newspaper readership and circulation in Nigeria. Notwithstanding, Thurman (2014) found that print newspapers still account for the majority of daily readers in terms of popularity. In this study, the reading preferences differ as it shows an indication of shifting towards the online version. It was found that majority of the readers (64.6 percent) find themselves reading less print copy of the newspaper because they have access to its free online version. However, the future of the print versions may be bright despite the effectiveness of the internet which poses challenges to its survival. It was found that a greater percentage of the readers spend less time and read less print copy of the

newspaper while also majority are confident that the newspaper will continue to survive and the readers will continue to read the print versions.

The historical coexistence of old and new media will continue in the internet age. The findings of Salman et al. (2011) also revealed that the effect of new media on conventional media is still manageable. This study has presented evidence for future survival of the print newspapers in Nigeria. It is also evident that the findings provided valuable information regarding readers' preferences for print and online newspaper contents. It provided insights into the extent to which the readers are motivated to read online newspapers. The present study supports the findings of some studies (Abdurraheem et al., 2012; Ekareafu et al., 2013; Mathew et al., 2013) which were carried out in Nigeria. This study provided insights into understanding the current situation in the print media industry particularly in Nigeria. This can help in providing valuable information on how newspaper publishers can adopt technology to sustain their publications in digital age of communication.

Conclusion

This study examined the readers' preferences for print and online newspapers in Northwestern Nigeria. It is evident from the findings that print newspapers will continue to survive because there are some values they give to the readers which their online counterparts do not. Advancement in technology may not lead to the complete demise of the print newspapers. The readership of print versions may decline, but readers will never substitute print newspaper with its online counterpart. In northwestern Nigeria, print newspapers will continue to survive despite the challenges they face from their online counterparts. As postulated by Uses and Gratification theory, the findings of this study showed that audiences are aware of their reasons for choice of media messages. They consider these reasons as they actively search for media messages to satisfy their needs for information. Newspaper publishers should take advantage of the new technology to maximize their potential. Newspaper publishers should take advantage of the new technology to maximize their potential.

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