

ABSTRACT

The new media has offered print newspapers the opportunity to reach a wider range of readers through online versions, without any demographic or distribution problems. The advent of online newspapers has made access to news available to anyone who has access to the Internet with just a click of the mouse. However, while many developed and even developing countries are maximizing the potentials of the online versions of newspapers, how far have we gone in utilizing this technology in Nigeria, and what are the challenges that could hinder its effectiveness in our society? This paper therefore examines the level of exposure of internet subscribers in Uyo Urban to online newspapers, to ascertain whether online newspapers satisfy the news demands of its readers, ascertain the demographic groups which expose themselves to online newspapers more, to find out the motivations for readership online and to also ascertain which contents of online newspapers readers expose themselves to more. Based on the findings of the study, the researcher made some recommendations to address some of the challenges of reading online and also proffered solutions on how to effectively harness the potentials of this medium.

KEY WORDS: Internet, online newspaper, new media, online journalism, website, digital age.

TITLE: READERSHIP OF ONLINE NEWSPAPERS BY USERS OF
SELECT CYBER CAFÉS IN UYO URBAN

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Introduction

The movable printing press invented by Gutenberg around 1439 gave the printed word a leading role as a medium for mass communication and as an offshoot of the printing press, and the only medium for mass communication then, the newspaper monopolized the mass media industry for centuries until the dawn of radio and television and currently the Internet, (Okonofua, 2010).

Print media news can be said to be one of the most important forms of communication in the conduct of human activities. Today, different types of newspapers exist, with varied interest aimed at definite audiences.

The continuous increase in the number of newspapers available on the stands and, consequently, competition, has pushed papers to increase the diversity of their contents and the diversity of the views captured in their contents. Newspapers are now looking for new and grey areas to gain advantage over other titles and capture a larger market share, and the online media has presented them this platform. The new media has offered these papers the opportunity to reach a wider range of readers through online newspapers without any demographic or distribution problems.

The numerous advantages of the online media both in terms of supply and demand have brought about a veritable revolution in modern journalism. The changes brought about as a result of the emergence of online services and the explosive growth of the Internet has been massive. Now, one can be a publisher and electronically transmit information around the world by spending less, with virtually no capital expenditures and spread the information at close to zero marginal costs. Clearly, Information Technology has completely changed from a network of oral and print mechanisms to one that is largely visual and computer-generated, “and the speed with which one can get information has been reduced from months and days to nano-seconds.” (Adeya, 2001).

The scenario where the cost of conventional elements such as paper and ink once dominated newspapers have been eliminated by the internet which also makes news delivery timely and this has prompted newspaper publishers to harness the potentials of the Internet by establishing online versions of their newspapers to further expand their readership base and reach to capture the fast rising online audience members, (Okonofua, 2010).

An online newspaper, also known as a web newspaper, is a newspaper that exists on the World Wide Web (WWW) or Internet, either separately or as an online version of a printed periodical. The first online newspapers appeared only about fourteen years ago in 1994 with few newspapers operating then. Today, according to Giwa (2006:1):

Over 80% of all hard copy publications have online and digital versions. Ten years from now, that percentage may rise to 100. All traditional publishing activities will be supplemented by digital versions, which will be promoted more favourably.

There seems to be little doubt that online newspapers have the potential to be an important development, widely adopted by newspaper publishers and readers. Wilkerson (2008), states that: “the newspaper industry has contended that online readership has expanded its total audience.” Egan (2008) corroborates this statement by asserting that; “online newspapers have increased the readership of some newspapers ten-fold.”

When taking a closer look at journalism as it is presently, we notice a dramatic change during recent years. Media is no longer dependent on time and space. New technology makes it possible to consume up-to-date media contents at all times. The consumer also plays an increasingly important role in choosing his or her own media content. “The growth among newspaper websites demonstrates that these entities offer unique incentives to visitors,” said Gerry Davison, senior media analyst, Nielsen/NetRatings. “Most, if not all of the top newspaper sites offer interactivity such as blogs, podcasts and streaming video/audio. These interactive features, combined with Internet users’ thirst for up-to-date information, make newspaper websites an increasingly appealing choice for news.”

The advancements in technology have made newspaper publishers to diversify into online versions, thus affording them the opportunity for increased connectivity with readers. According to encyclopedia.com, “it would be difficult to find a daily newspaper in the UK or United States, in fact in the world, in the 21st century that does not have or share a website”. Online newspaper combines many of the qualities of printed paper with the advantages of electronic media - the ability to deliver new editions instantly and without the need to print copies and transport them over distances to thousands of retail outlets and millions of subscribers.

The advent of online newspapers has made access to news available to anyone who has access to the Internet with just a click of the mouse. The burden posed by the circulation of newspapers to their potential readers is no longer an issue because readers can have access to the news when they want and at their own expediency because news is constantly accessible on the website of the newspaper.

From the foregoing discourse, it is obvious that the internet has opened a new landscape for newspapers as it has given the print a platform to conquer its limitations, a platform where audience members are active participants in the news making process and are able to shape the news to meet their needs. While, the number of online newspaper readers

continues to improve in many developed and even developing countries, can same be said about online newspaper readers in Nigeria, specifically in Uyo Urban?

Besides, Afolabi (2008) posits that “online newspapers only reach a fraction of the population in Nigeria due to low computer literacy level and high cost of internet subscription. It is uncertain therefore, whether there is a high readership of online newspapers in Uyo urban. Therefore, to what extent are Internet subscribers in Uyo Urban really reading online?

The following research objectives guided this study to its conclusion:

- (i) To find out readers awareness of the existence of online newspapers.
- (ii) To determine the level of exposure of internet subscribers to online newspapers.
- (iii) To ascertain whether online newspapers satisfy the news demands of its readers.
- (iv) To ascertain whether online newspaper readers also read the printed newspaper.
- (v) To ascertain the demographic groups that exposed themselves to online newspapers more.
- (vi) To find out the motivations for readership of online newspapers.
- (vii) To ascertain the contents of online newspapers readers expose themselves to more.

Background of Online Newspapering in Nigeria

Nigeria has a vibrant newspaper industry with a number of active print outlets, and as at 2004, there were about 95 reasonably regular newspapers (20 national dailies, 23 national weeklies, 10 regional dailies, 19 regional weeklies, 6 provincial or local dailies, and 17 provincial or local weeklies). (Source: Media World Yearbook 2004 – A Resource Guide to the Nigerian Media). However, in 2012, the number has almost doubled with Ayankunbi, (2012) positing that as at today, the total number of newspapers in the country is in the neighbourhood of 150.

Ayankunbi expresses concern that despite having about 150 newspapers published in the country, the combined daily circulation figure of all of them is about 300,000 copies. "Let us leave 20 percent of the print run as unsold copies, this leaves us with 240,000 as effective sales. Is this not ridiculous in a country with over 150 million people?...The inference is that most of the newspaper houses in Nigeria are in a very dire situation." (Ayankunbi, 2012)

Given the increasing use of internet technology globally, the development of online newspapers as a new way of publishing has introduced a new, efficient, and fast way of disseminating and accessing news (Khan, 1999). The Internet country code for Nigeria is (.ng). Eleven Internet Service Providers (ISPs) operate in the nation. (Source: Press Reference). In 2008, about 22 independent internet newspapers existed; these are however mostly online editions of print newspapers. (Source: KAS Democracy Report 2008). This

number has however increased to over 34 internet newspapers in 2012, (library.stanford.edu/depts/ssrg/africa/nigeria/nigerianews.html)

Making sure that breaking news reaches its audience as quickly as possible; ThisDay has been a pioneer in media technology and remains the first newspaper from Sub-Saharan African using satellite enabled networks to provide news to some of the remotest villages, real-time. Its URL (Uniform Resource Locator) is www.thisdayonline.com and it is an example of a state of the art Nigerian online newspaper. The Sun published by The Sun Publishing Limited is another Nigerian newspaper operating an online edition. Its URL www.sunnewsonline.com is the most visited newspaper site in Nigeria. It posted a record figure of 24 million visits in the 3rd quarter of 2008. The print edition also has the highest percentage of national readership. (Source: MediaReach OMD Nigeria, 2005).

With the use of cutting edge technology, layout design and graphics, Guardian Newspaper - www.ngrguardiannews.com has also been able to take online newspapering in Nigeria a step further. The use of comic pictures for their headlines on the online version has made the paper even more appealing to readers. Others include, but are not limited to the following; Business Day - www.businessdayonline.com, Daily Champion - www.champion-newspapers.com, Nigerian Tribune - www.tribune.com.ng, Newsday - www.newsdayngonweb.com, Pioneer - www.pioneerng.com, Financial Standard - www.financialstandardnews.com, Punch - www.punchng.com, Daily Trust - www.dailytrust.com, Tide - www.thetidenews.com, Independent - www.dailyindependent.com, New Age - www.newage-online.com, Pointer - www.pointernews.com, Port Harcourt Telegraph - www.thephctelegraph.com, The Nation – www.thenationline.ng.com, Comet - www.cometnews.com, and Triumph - www.triumphnewspapers.com.

According to 2007 statistics by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), only eight million Nigerians (or 5.9% of the population) had access to the internet. Most of these – probably up to 90% – gained access only through cybercafés that charge per hour and therefore do not spend much time on the net unless it is absolutely necessary for their purposes. The option of downloading online web pages for offline viewing does not exist for most internet users because they do not own personal computers. This assertion therefore raises doubts whether online newspaper technology can be successful in Nigeria, vis-à-vis Uyo Urban.

This situation has however, witnessed an exponential growth with the availability of internet access via cell phones, Internet modems, iPads, Blackberry, Andriod, and other browsing enabled devices, all these have skyrocketed access to the Internet in Nigeria. This is

evident in the increase of people with access to the Internet in the country. Presently, Nigeria has the highest number of Internet users in Africa, with a population of 45,039,711 Internet users as of Dec.31, 2011, 29.0% of the population, (internetworldstats.com, 2012).

Review of Literature

Early scholarly studies focusing on online newspapers formed the basis for this study. A study by Oluseyi Folayan (2004): "Interactivity in online journalism: a case study of the interactive nature of Nigeria's online Guardian", found among other things, that there was a very low level of interactivity in the online site of Nigeria's Guardian newspaper. The researcher further noted that indeed, there is no lack of online newspaper sites on the Internet but that such sites should turn their presence online into a more active and participatory medium.

Another study by Jane Traub, and Gregg Lindner (2004): "Internet and print newspaper readership," shows that there is currently a fairly small percentage (about 3%) of total adults who read newspapers online exclusively, that is, using the Internet to read newspapers but not reading a daily or Sunday printed paper. Most of those reading any online newspaper are also readers of either a daily or Sunday printed newspapers. Part of the reason for this is that internet usage and newspaper readership both skew upscale; higher education and higher income respondents with "white-collar" occupations. However, some interesting differences are noted when examining the relative age skews of those who exclusively read online newspapers to those who exclusively read printed papers. The online-exclusive newspaper reader is much younger, and more highly educated, than the print-exclusive newspaper reader.

In another study carried out by Scarborough Research in (2008), titled: "Internet opportunity knocking on the newspaper door", released the results of a special analysis of newspaper website audience. Scarborough Research found that newspaper website audience is growing and is compensating for some of the declines in print readership. The special analysis, which examined data collected August 2004-March 2007 for 88 newspapers in the top 50 local markets, found that newspaper website audience coverage has grown 14 percent– from 6.4 percent for the 12 months ending September 2005, to 7.3 percent for the 12 months ending March 2007. Overall, the increase in website audience is mitigating print audience losses by 28 percent.

The analysis also found that newspaper websites are delivering younger, more elusive audiences, particularly in the coveted 18-34 year old demographic. "Website

exclusive” readership among adults ages 18-34 increased 21 percent (from 2.4 for the 12 months ending September 2005 to 2.9 percent for the 12 months ending March 2007).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was built around two mainstream theories: Diffusion of Innovations and Uses and Gratifications Theory. Rogers (1995:5) defined an innovation as an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or another unit of adoption. Additionally, diffusion is defined as “the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system”.

According to Rogers (1995), important characteristics of an innovation include:

- **Relative Advantage (RA)**--the degree to which it is perceived to be better than what it supersedes
- **Compatibility (COMP)**--consistency with existing values, past experiences and needs
- **Complexity (CMPX)**--difficulty of understanding and use.
- **Trialability (TRY)**--the degree to which it can be experimented with on a limited basis
- **Observability (VI)**--the visibility of its results.

These factors influence intention to use a new technology, which in the case of this study is online newspapers, and its diffusion into societal behaviour. Rogers (1995) diffusion of innovation theory uses these factors as a basis for modelling intention and subsequent behaviour.

McQuail and Windahl (1993) however, noted that diffusion of innovations does not easily incorporate the impact of “features” that media channels have (for example, immediacy, interactivity, mobility) that are clearly important determinants of choice. This necessitated the uses and gratifications theory.

USES AND GRATIFICATIONS THEORY

The uses and gratifications theory propounded by Katz in 1970, is concerned with how people use media for gratification of their needs. An outcome of Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, it propounds the fact that people choose what they want to see or read and the different media compete to satisfy each individual's needs.

In general researchers have found four kinds of gratifications:

- Information - we want to find out about society and the world- we want to satisfy our curiosity. This would fit the news and documentaries which both give us a sense that we are learning about the world.
- Personal Identity - we may watch the television in order to look for models for our behaviour. So, for example, we may identify with characters that we see in a soap.

The characters help us to decide what we feel about ourselves and if we agree with their actions and they succeed we feel better about ourselves.

- Integration and Social Interaction - we use the media in order to find out more about the circumstances of other people. Watching a show helps us to empathize and sympathize with the lives of others so that we may even end up thinking of the characters in programme as friends.
- Entertainment - sometimes we simply use the media for enjoyment, relaxation or just to fill time.

Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974:20) give an oft-cited, classic seven-point précis of the uses and gratifications tradition. They define uses and gratifications studies as "concerned with (1) the social and psychological origins of (2) needs, which generate (3) expectations of (4) the mass media or other sources, which lead to (5) differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in (6) need gratifications and (7) other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones.

Methodology

The research technique chosen for this study is survey. The population of this study was made up of online newspapers readers in Uyo Urban. Uyo Urban is the central district located in Uyo Local Government Area, the capital of Akwa Ibom State in Nigeria. Akwa Ibom State was created on September 23, 1987 and is located between longitudes 7° 25', and 8° 25', east and latitudes 4° 32' and 5° 33', north of the Equator, situating at the South South corner of Nigeria. (Akwa Ibom State Government, AKSG, 1994).

However, since no listing or figure of online newspaper readers is readily available, the researcher had to rely on a personal observation, where it was observed that an average of 300 internet users surf the web daily in each of the cybercafés thus, making a daily average of 3000 daily users. The researcher selected respondents from available cyber cafes in Uyo urban.

In order to reach the subjects of this study, the researcher relied on the segmentation of Uyo Urban given by the Uyo Capital City Development Authority (UCCDA). Thereafter, segment one was selected and from this segment, the following major roads were selected namely: Ikot Ekpene road, Oron road, Aka road, Wellington Basseway and Olu Obasanjo way.

Two functional cybercafés were selected from each of the roads in the segment making a total of ten (10) cybercafés and respondents were selected based on availability. The accidental sampling method was adopted in the administration of the questionnaire. In

each of the cybercafés, a copy of the questionnaire was given to any respondent at reach who upon interrogation by the researcher claimed to access newspapers online.

In each of the ten (10) cafes, 30 copies of the questionnaire were administered making a total of 300 copies of the questionnaire distributed across the ten (10) cybercafés representing 10% of the estimated population. Data were analyzed using frequency tables and simple percentages. The researcher utilized self-administration of the questionnaire copies in the cybercafés in the major roads of segment one of Uyo Urban given by the Uyo Capital City Development Authority (UCCDA) as follows:

i	Aka Road (Webcenta Cybercafé and ServiceTrail Café)	60
Ii	Ikot Ekpene Road (McGiraffe Cybercafé and Edwina Resources)	60
iii	Olu Obasanjo Way (Ektronics Café and Vital View Communications)	60
iv	Oron Road (Joescom Café and Eagle View Café)	60
v	Wellington Bassey Way (Kaniex Café and Cyba World Café)	60
	Total	300

Of the 300 questionnaire copies administered, 291 were completed and returned. However, 280 were found suitable for analysis.

The following research questions were raised:

- (i) Are newspaper readers aware of the existence of online newspapers?
- (ii) Do internet subscribers regularly expose themselves to online newspapers?
- (iii) Do online newspapers satisfy the news demands of its readers?
- (iv) Do online newspaper readers also read printed newspapers?
- (v) Which category of people read news online?
- (vi) What contents of online newspapers do readers expose themselves to more?
- (vii) What motivates readers to read newspapers online?

Results

Research Question One

Are newspaper readers aware of the existence of online newspapers?

Over the years, online newspapers have become more popular among readers and as shown in *table v* of this study, all 280 respondents were aware of the existence of online newspapers. For this study, it was necessary to ascertain the awareness levels on the existence of online newspapers among readers since not every household has or can afford a personal computer, or internet connectivity and with an estimated population of about 150 million people, and only about 45 million of these people access the Internet and the fact that most online newspapers in Nigeria have only been operating for about 6 – 8 years, it was

very important to ascertain if readers were aware of the existence of online newspapers and the findings show in *table v* that 100% of the respondents (280) were all aware of the existence of online newspapers which is an indication that the level of awareness of the existence of newspapers online was very high among readers.

Research Question Two

Do internet subscribers regularly expose themselves to online newspapers?

In *table ix*, out of the 280 respondents sampled, 50% of the respondents (140) said they read online newspapers frequently, while 42.5% of the respondents (119) read online newspapers occasionally, and 7.5% of the respondents (21) seldom read newspapers online.

This statistics is very incisive pointing to the fact that not only are more people reading online because the findings further show that 50% of the population read online newspapers frequently and only 7.5% of the respondents (21) seldom read online newspapers.

Research Question Three

Do online newspapers satisfy the news demands of its readers?

A theoretical framework that can be employed in analyzing question three is the uses and gratification theory which is concerned with how people use media for gratification of their needs.

Though the findings in this study show that more respondents read online newspapers frequently, *table x* shows that 55% of the respondents (154) still depended on print newspapers as their primary source of news and those within the 31 – 40, 41 – 50 and 51 – 60 years age bracket made up the large number of these respondents, while 35% of the respondents (98) depended on online newspapers as their primary source of news and these respondents were mostly the young who fell within the 18 – 30 years age bracket, and 10% of the respondents (28) did not depend on newspapers for news and these respondents were mostly female. Also, in *table xii*, 70% of the respondents (196) said print newspapers gave them more in-depth analysis of news stories, while 30% of the respondents (84) said that online newspapers gave them more in-depth analysis of news stories.

From the above statistics therefore, the findings show that print newspapers satisfied the news demands of readers more than online newspapers did. Therefore, it is clear that online newspapers did not satisfy the news demands of 70% of the population (196) of this study.

This may not be unconnected with the fact that reading online in Nigeria costs a fortune and internet users pay by the minute to surf the web, while in other advanced countries, most homes are connected to the Internet. Another reason why most readers

according to the findings of this study still depend more on print newspapers may be attributed to the fact that most online newspapers in Nigeria don't incorporate most of the unique features that foreign online newspapers do such as podcasts, interactivity etc.

In addition, this study agrees with that of Folayan, (2004), that the interactive options as did exist on newspaper sites were not effectively utilized to the extent that relevant literature indicates ought to be typical of a truly interactive journalistic style, and this finding is typical of most online newspaper websites in Nigeria however, it is not in the place of the researcher to generalize.

Research Question Four

Do online newspaper readers also read printed newspapers?

Tables iii and *iv* best answer this question. As evident in *table iii*, 100% of the respondents (280) said they read print newspapers, while in *table iv*, 65% of the respondents (182) read print newspapers frequently, 32.5% of the respondents (91) read newspapers occasionally while only 2.5% of the respondents (7) seldom read print newspapers.

However beneficial online newspapers maybe, it was not created to replace print newspapers, instead they were made as supplement to curb the decline in the readership print copies and most of the newspapers with online versions contain almost the same contents which explains the reason why most of those who read print newspapers also make up a large percentage of those reading online.

From the data in the aforementioned tables, it is evident that online newspaper readers also read print newspapers and the age demographic who read print newspaper frequently were mostly those in the 31 – 40, 41 – 50 and 51 – 60 age brackets respectively, while those who read newspapers occasionally were mostly those who fell within the 18 – 30 age bracket and those who seldom read newspapers were mostly made up of female respondents. The findings in *table iii* of this research show that 100% of the respondents (280) still read print newspapers and *table iv* shows that 65% of the respondents (182) read print newspapers frequently, while 32.5% read newspapers occasionally. Only 2.5% of the respondents (7) seldom read print newspapers.

Research Question Five

Which category of people read news online?

Table ii best answers this question. It indicates that respondents within the age bracket of 18 – 30 were the most active category of people reading online with 57.5% of the respondents (161) falling within this bracket. The next active age bracket were those who belonged to 31 – 40 years age bracket and this group amassed 27.5% of the respondents (77) and were closely followed by those who fell within 41 – 50 years age bracket making up

10% of the respondents (28); while only 5% of the respondents (14) belonged to the age bracket of 51 – 60.

The population of people reading online is male dominated, and the percentage when compared to the female respondents is overwhelming. 85% of the respondents (238) were male while only 15% of the respondents (42) were female. A further breakdown of the female respondents show that only seven were within the age bracket of 31 – 40, while the remaining 35 were within the 18 – 30 age bracket. No female respondents fell within the age brackets of 41 – 50, 51 – 60 and 61 and above.

The reason for this low level of readership among the gender may be attributed to the fact that a high number of women in Nigeria who fell within the age brackets that have no presence online are mostly career women or housewives who spend most of their time taking care of their homes or businesses and therefore, rarely had the time to access the Internet.

From the statistics presented on this research question, it is obvious that the young, those within the 18 – 30 age bracket were the most active group of respondents reading online and as reflected in table ii, this age demographic totaled 57.5% of the respondents (161).

Research Question Six

What contents of online newspapers do readers expose themselves to more?

Readers have different distinctive features that set them apart and these features emanate from their opinions, norms and values, attitudes, mental outlook and individual interests and these features to a large extent determine what contents of online newspapers readers exposed themselves to.

In *table xv*, 22.5% of the respondents (63) exposed themselves more to *news headlines* of online newspapers; 20% of the respondents (56) exposed themselves more to *business contents*; 35% of the respondents (98) exposed themselves more to *sports contents*, while 10% of the respondents (28) exposed themselves more to *arts/entertainment contents*; and 12.5% of the respondents (35) exposed themselves more to other options not listed. From the data in *table xv*, we can see that respondents exposed themselves more to *sports contents* of online newspapers with 35% of the respondents (98) indicating this option, while news headlines was the next content that readers exposed themselves to more with 22.5% of the respondents (63). Business contents got 20% of the respondents (56); arts/entertainment had 10% of respondents (28) while other options not listed got 12.5% of the respondents (35).

The above statistics once again brings to mind the uses and gratification theory which reminds us that people use the media for different purposes and this explains why the contents readers expose themselves to differ according to certain factors earlier mentioned.

Respondents who exposed themselves more to news headlines were mainly dominated by those within the 41 – 50 years age bracket. Respondents who exposed themselves more to business contents which included stock reports, real estates etc were mainly dominated by those in the 51 – 60 years old bracket closely followed by some respondents in the 41 – 50 years age bracket while more female respondents exposed themselves to arts/entertainment contents than the male respondents.

Sport contents were more popular among respondents in this study because unlike print, online newspaper gave more in-depth sports reports/analysis and they made use of a lot of pictures and also carried more reports on foreign sport activities thus making this section more popular especially among the young readers within the 18 – 30 years age bracket.

Research Question Seven

What motivates readers to read newspapers online?

Katz, in propounding the uses and gratification theory placed the question “what do media do to people?” with the question “what do people do with media?” He found that the media are used by individuals to meet the following specific needs:

- Cognitive needs
- Affective needs
- Personal integrative needs
- Social integrative needs and
- Tension release needs

Readers are motivated to read online for certain needs which vary among readers. Once these needs are fulfilled, the motivation to read online is sustained.

In *table xvi*, the statistics show that 52.5% of the respondents (147) were motivated to read because it was *updated faster/breaking news*; 7.5% of the respondents (21) were motivated by *coverage and content* to read online newspapers; respondents who were motivated because it was *easy to read and quick to use* were 17.5% of the respondents (49); those who said they were motivated to read online newspapers because of the *diversity/variety of sources* were 17.5% of the respondents (49); while 5% of the respondents (14) were motivated to read newspapers online by options not listed.

A further breakdown of findings reveal that respondents who derived information benefits were motivated to read online because it was updated faster/breaking news and the respondents were mostly those in the 18 – 30 age category, while respondents who exposed themselves to news headlines and business contents were motivated because of the coverage/contents of online newspapers and most of these respondents fell within the 41 – 50

age bracket. The study further shows that more female respondents were motivated to read online because it was easy to read/quick to use, while more respondents in the age bracket of 18 – 30 who exposed themselves to sport contents were motivated to read online because of the diversity/variety of sources. Only 5% of the respondents (14) were motivated to read online by other options not listed and respondents in the 51 – 60 years age bracket were those who preferred this option most.

News has come to be consumed by the minute online and any breaking news will immediately be reported and that way, readers are able to keep abreast with information round the clock whereas, they would have to wait till the next day before they could get the complete detail from the print and by then, such would no longer be regarded as news and though this explains the reason why most readers are motivated to read online because it is updated faster/breaking news however, readers are motivated to read online for various reasons, and whatever motivates them to read online is based on the experience and satisfaction they get and this factor determines the frequency with which readers access the Internet to read their favourite newspapers. This explains the reason why respondents in this study were motivated by the different options listed and other options not listed but had to choose just one option. This is to say that, most respondents were motivated by more than one reason to read online.

Conclusion

As Marshall McLuhan did put it years back, “we shape our tools, and our tools shape us.” The search for means to transmit information quickly by man has led to the breaking of new grounds and it is clear to see that online newspapers are here to stay; there’s no denying that fact anymore. Once given new ways to learn and communicate people will not allow them to be taken away.

If newspapers are to continue in business in today’s technology-driven society, and in the face of stiff competition from competitors as well as other media like television and radio, and to also curtail the decline in readership, newspaper proprietors in Nigeria should not see online newspapers as a makeshift initiative as they are often tempted to do. Instead, they should see it as part and parcel of their newspaper outfit, and a holistic approach should be taken towards the quality of reportage and services rendered to readers online.

Indeed, there is no lack of online newspaper sites on the Internet, but that is not the issue; the concern is that the representation of such sites constitutes nothing but a mere presence on the Net and while this in itself is not a bad thing, there is a need for

representation on the Net to extend beyond a mere presence into an effective utilization and offering of the unique qualities of the Internet such as interactivity (Folayan, 2004:93).

This study therefore encourages newspaper proprietors to see the packaging of news stories, in-depth news analysis, layout design and other items online as influence variables and improve upon them since reading online is different from reading print.

Recommendations

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

1. Reading online is different from reading print, therefore, online newspaper editors must find a way to study and understand the difference in the reading patterns of both online and print newspaper readers. It is only through this that they can make online newspapers more convenient for readers to read.
2. Online newspaper editors must develop strategies on how to sustain readership among the young readers and also try to draw more of the other age groups as well as females to read online.
3. One very important issue is for online newspaper editors to pay more attention to the quality of reportage available online as well as give more in-depth analysis of news stories in order to make online newspapers a more dependable source of news for readers.
4. One of the major motivations for readership online is because news is updated faster. Therefore, online newspaper editors must always ensure that breaking news is posted promptly online along with accompanying pictures and images in order to sustain the attention of readers online.
5. Coverage and contents are very important features of online newspapers in motivating readers to visit newspaper websites and online newspaper editors must pay critical attention to this subject matter.
6. More pictures and bolder captions should be used in other contents of online newspapers as this was one of the major reasons why respondents were attracted to more of the sports contents because this section made more use of these items.
7. There is need for the representation of newspaper websites to extend beyond a mere presence into an effective utilization and offering of the unique qualities of the Internet - mainly interactivity.
8. Reading online is very dynamic therefore, regular audience survey must be carried out to ascertain the changes the different target audience would want implemented.

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