Consumption Pattern of Online News Media among Undergraduate Students in Two Universities in North-Central, Nigeria

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Abstract

Located in the Uses and Gratification Theory, through survey method this study aimed to explore the pattern of reading and usage of online news media among undergraduate students in the two universities in North-Central Nigeria. Findings show that most of the respondents preferred using online news media because of its cost effectiveness and easy accessibility to news. Majority of the respondents preferred entertainment news and fashion news over other news. Based on these findings, the study recommends that authorities of the universities should sensitize students on the benefits of using online news media for academic purposes.

Keyword: *Online news Media, Social media, Technology, News consumption*

Introduction

The Internet is playing fundamental roles in different areas of the 21st century society. In the present-day society, it is virtually becoming impossible for anything to take place without the involvement of the Internet. People now greatly depend on the Internet to execute different tasks and knowledge of the dynamics of the Internet are now considered as essential requirements for people to function effectively. For example, the Internet has substantially impacted on knowledge acquisition, family life, marketing, among other areas of human existence.   Dominick

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 (2009) cited in Popoola (2013), corroborates this assertion by noting that the impact of the Internet significantly cut across different areas of human existence. Larger parts of human society have included the Internet into the daily activities of human beings. The Internet has also provided more sources of information among people in the society, therefore making information freely available to people of different cultures and socio-economic status (Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2009).

The 21st century brought several changes in the way the world receives and disseminates news. With the emergence of the internet came proliferation of many online media channels. For this reason, media are no longer limited to radio, television and print; there are now a plethora of media platforms for disseminating news and information within minutes. Thus, a common feature of our globalized world is the explosion of media options which are continually offering a bewildering amount of information on a variety of issues (Ende, 2011, p.55 cited in Abdulrauf-Salau, 2013).

Media convergence has facilitated the combinations of different media outfits into a single device or platform in contemporary times. And this convergence is facilitating a more efficient and better delivery of information to news consumers today. As such, online news media utilization has grown among media audience steadily. University students need the media to get information, entertainment and education. Some use their laptops to download music and other forms of entertainment content from the Internet. Others watch football matches and get regular sports updates, especially concerning their favorite teams

or clubs. Apparently, it is easier for students to use the media today than probably their parents did; digitalization and new communication technologies have made it so. With the mobile phone, students can watch television programmes, listen to radio, read newspapers and educate themselves on a variety of issues via online media platforms (Aririguzoh, Sobowale & Usaini, 2016).

Hassan (2013) argued that mass media audience have also responded to the changing nature of society with their readiness to consume media contents through the Internet. He adds further that the Internet has broken the elastic symbol that was hitherto attachment to reading hardcopies of newspapers. Therefore, even the elites have no choice than to migrate to the Internet in search of news to meet their desire for information.

Kate and Stroud (2006) adds that in the area of politics, for example, the Internet now serve as a main source of information, unlike in the past when it was a supplementary source of information. Using the example of the United States of America, the researchers argued that more than 75% of the electorate gets information about American politics through Internet-powered media. Pew Internet & America Life Project Tracking Surveys, (2006) reported that even though the television still plays critical roles in information dissemination, Internet-powered media are now challenging the dominance of TV.

With the coming on board of media platforms powered by the Internet, there is an increase in online news consumption among Nigerians. As a matter of fact, Nigeria media websites are very popular with Nigerians in the diaspora as they enable them

keep in touch with developments in their country (Rabiu, 2014). Liccardi Ounnas, Pau, Massey, Kinnunen, Lewtwaite, Midy & Skar (2007) hold the opinion that social media platforms, for example, provide avenues for students to socialize as well as exchange information.

According to World Association of Newspapers (WAN) (2007) reported that people of young age regard the Internet as a dependable source of information. Youth utilize the Internet to satisfy varied information need (Lee, 2006; Vissers & Quintelier, 2009 cited in Wok, & Tamam, 2011). For students to engage in active learning they need to keep abreast of vital information in their respective fields of study and the world in general. Hence they need to surf for information in every available media platform at their disposal. It is because of this need that this study was carried out to determine that pattern of online news media consumption pattern of two undergraduate students in North-Central universities in Nigeria.

Research Questions

In broad terms, this research seeks to find out the consumption pattern of online news media among undergraduate students in two universities in North –Central Nigeria, but specifically it is to:

RQ 1. What is the extent undergraduate students use online news media for news consumption?

RQ 2. Which online news media platforms undergraduate students utilize for news consumption?

RQ 3. What type of information undergraduate students consume mostly on online?

RQ 4.   What are the reasons for the undergraduate students to utilize online news media for news consumption?

RQ 5.   How do the undergraduate students perceive the content of online news media in Nigeria?

Literature Review

The researcher examined existing empirical literature with a view to understanding available information on the subject matter. Usha (2015) carried out a study in India with the aim to determine the gratification that college students get in their utilization of the Facebook. The researcher made use of survey research design to achieve the aim of the study. The researcher also made use of the questionnaire as the instrument for data collection. The study found that the quest for friendship ranked higher among the gratification for the use of the Facebook. The researcher documented further that media audience are both active and reflective.

Gunder and Krogager, Povlsen, & Degn (2014) equally reported a similar result among young Danes. Gunder extended the study of Usha by including demographics like gender and age. Their study demonstrated that both gender and age are significantly correlated with social media utilization among the sample that took part in the study.

Also, Yoon and Zhang (2013) cited in Nnaane (2017) examined if there is an association between the utilization of social media and how college students depend on it to meet their need for information. The study was conducted in the United States of America. The researchers made use of survey research design that was administered through online platforms. The

study showed college students depend on the Internet more that those who were not students. In particular, the ratio of dependence to the Internet was 8% for college students and 1% for those who were not students. Alsridi (2018) conducted a study to determine the gratification that youth seek in their application of social media platforms. The researcher made use of survey research design and deployed the questionnaire as the instrument for data collection.

The findings of the study demonstrated that there is a steady increase in the utilization of news online among youths. The result further revealed the device through most of the youth get information was mobile phone. This means that the increasing penetration of mobile phone use is also assisting youth in the use of social media platforms. With regards to location, it was found that the use of social media takes place in different locations like homes, schools, places of worship, among others. Nonetheless, the researcher reported that young college student's only have short time consuming Internet powered media.

Mathew, Ogedebe & Adeniji (2013) investigated the utilization of the content of online newspaper in Nigeria. The researchers studied 150 sampled and the data was collected with the use of a structured questionnaire. The researchers focused mainly on civil servants as well as petty traders. The researchers reported that more than half of the respondents who took part in the study reported reading newspapers online. The main reason for reading newspapers was to get current information on issues of interest. However, the interested part of the study was that the respondents reported that they face some challenges in the

process of trying to access information through online platforms. These challenges included poor electricity supply to power their devices, lack of constant online access, among others. The researchers also recommended some measures that will make access to information through Internet powered platforms easier. Among the recommended solutions included improvement in power supply and upgrading the internet infrastructure in the country.

Rye (2014) conducted a study with a focus on the utilization of information through online platforms for the purposes of academic writing. The researcher examined this using a survey research design with the questionnaire as the instrument for data collection. The result of the study showed that students typically establish connection directly to existing literature when searching for sources regarding far away realities. Instead, the students draw a link to the flow of information globally through the utilization of national approach of information circulation that indirectly links them to what is taking place within their locations. Wok, Idid & Misman (2012), cited in Mumtaz, Karamat and Iqbal (2015) studied how young Malaysians deploy the social media for the purposes of information seeking. The researchers made use of survey research design. They utilize the questionnaire to collect data for the study. The researchers reported that social media platforms have become very popular among the young population in the Asian country of Malaysia. Their finding aligned with the study of Mathew, Ogedebe & Adeniji (2013) who found that people within the 17-30 years old youth of the country indicate that the young generation uses social media

platforms at least 5-7 times on a weekly basis. The purpose of using social media was found to be the exchange of information for personal satisfaction. The researchers took another step by classifying the type of information that social media users share into positive and negative information. The result revealed that negative information contents were shared more frequent than positive information.

Storsul (2014) examine how young people present themselves on social media within the content of political information. The overall aim of the study was to understand how people of young age make use of social media for the purposes of exchanging political views. The researchers carried out the study in Norway and utilize the survey research design. The outcome of the research showed that   young people in Norway depend largely on social media platforms to take part in the politics of their country. The result also revealed that even though young Norwegians make use of social media for political purposes, especially for getting information, when it comes to political deliberations, youth in Norway are usually skeptical in the use of social media. This means   that social media is found useful for political information sharing but not for political deliberations.

Theoretical Framework

The researcher made use of the Uses and Gratification Theory" to execute this study. The theory was first suggested by Blumler and Katz in 1974 with the aim to explain the benefits that people derive in their utilization of media platforms. The theory was coined after many years of arguments on the role of the impact as well as the effect that media contents have on their consumers.

U&G came about so as to strike a balance and move away from what the media do to its users to gratification that media users seek in their choice of media. The theory equally assumes that media users are active, they are not as passive as previously thought especially by theories of media effect. U&G assumes that media audience can make a choice regarding the media they want to consume taking into accounts what they seek to achieve. Or what they want to get from the media. This is summarily called the motivation for media use. See Baran (2002). Sweetser and Kaid (2008) cited in Asemah Asemah, Nwammuo, & Nkwam-Uwaoma, et al (2017) are of the view that U&G theory has been recently deployed to determine the utilization of entertainment media. The theory has equally been found useful to examine audience consumption of political news contents. The other assumption of the theory is that mass media audience have different options of media to choose from. Their decision concerning which media to consume is typically best serves their interest (Mumtaz, Karamat & Iqbal, 2015).

Blumer and McQuail (1969) cited in Asemah, et al (2017), classified the gratification which people seek from watching broadcast contents related to politics in three broad ways: The first one is those with political needs. This may include to get re-enforcement on voting, or to be guided on how to vote during elections. The second one is surveillance with the objective of getting current information on issues. The last one is excitement like getting exposed to political party victories, rallies, campaigns, among others. The Internet is now playing fundamental roles in the politics of the 21st century. Kaye and Johnson (2002) examine

the motivational drive for online information seeking and reported gratification for seeking political information online and found that the primary objective was for them to be guided in their political behaviour. See also Folarin (2005). Therefore, the researcher decided to make use of the U&G theory to provide a framework for understanding the way and manner of online media use among undergraduates. In addition, this will further point out their specific interest in news consumption as they subscribe to news online.

Methodology

The researcher made use of survey research design to carry out this study. The choice of survey was because the nature of the study demanded that the researcher should get the views of the sample so as to gain insights that will assist in the attainment of the study objectives. Survey, according to Babbie (2010), is normally regarded as appropriate when a study aims to get the views of a population on an issue. For this study, therefore, the population was made up of undergraduate students from two universities in North-Central part of Nigeria. The schools are Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai (IBBUL) and Nasarawa State University, Keffi (NSUK). According to the record obtained from the website of both schools the population of undergraduate students in Nasarawa State University Keffi (NSUK) for the 2018/2019 academic session was 17,000. While that of the Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai (IBBUL) stood at 13,400. Combining the populations of the two institutions we arrive at a total figure of 30, 400 students. A total of 400 undergraduates made up the sample size for the study. The

researcher got this sample size using the Taro Yamane (1967) technique for sample size determination.

The researcher combined two sampling techniques to scientifically select the sample for the study. These are simple random sampling technique and purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling technique, also called judgmental sampling, was appropriate for the population of the study since it centered on students, while the simple random sampling techniques was used to scientifically choose the sample. The researcher made use of the questionnaire to collect data for the study. The instrument was design in such a way that it was easy for the respondents to comprehend the information as well as elicit answers for the study. Therefore, in the first part of the instrument, the researcher collected personal information about the sample. Such information included age, gender, among others. In the second part of the questionnaire, the researcher collected information that assisted in the attainment of the study objectives. To analyze data for the study, the researcher made use of mean and standard deviation as well as simple percentages. The bench mark for accepting or rejecting items on the five point Likert scale was 3.0. Out of the 400 copies of the questionnaire administered to the respondents, 385 copies were filled and returned. It is, thus essential to clarify here that the analysis was based on the 385 copies that were returned and found useful.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Response	NSUK	IBBUL
Sex		
Male	210 (43.3%)	215 (44.3%)
Female	275 (56.7%)	270 (55.7%)
Total	**485**	**100%**
Age	190 (39.1%)	165 (44.0%)
20-29 years	125 (25.8%)	150 (30.9%)
30-39 years	105 (21.7%)	105 (21.7%)
40-49 years	65 (13.4%)	65 (13.4%)
50 years above	**485**	**100%**
Total		

Source: Field survey, 2019

Table 1 above, indicated that female participated more in the study more than the males. The females outnumbered the males with 56.7% and 55.7% respectively. On the other hand, the majority of the respondents were between the ages of 20 to 29. This constituted 39.1% and 44.0%.

Table 2: Extent of respondent's use of Online News Media

Response	NSUK	IBBUL
Large extent	200 (41.2%)	210 (43.3%)
Moderate extent	195 (40.2%)	200 (38%)
A little extent	90 (18.5%)	75 (15.5%)
Total	485	100%

Source: Field survey, 2019

In table 2 above, the extent of respondent's use of online news media was presented. The result indicated that majority of the respondents said they use online news media to a large extent. This accounted for 41.2% and 43.3% as reflected in the table above.

Table 3: Frequency of respondent's use of online news media for news consumption

Response	NSUK	IBBUL
Sahara reporters	113 (23.3%)	90 (18.5%)
Premium times	89 (18.4%)	90 (18.6%)
Nairaland.com	78 (16.0%)	85 (17.5%)
Naija.com	80 (16.5%)	75 (15.5%)
Nigeria village square	79 (16.3%)	85 (17.5%)
Punch.com	50 (10.4%)	60 (12.4%)
Total	**485**	**100%**

Source: Field survey, 2019

Table 4 above, shows the various types of online news media platforms the respondents subscribe to for receiving online **news.**

Table 5: Types of Online news information respondents subscribes to online

Response	NSUK	IBBUL
Entertainment	150 (30.9%)	140 (28.9%)
Politics	75 (15.5%)	75 (15.5%)
Sports	70 (14.4%)	65 (13.4%)
Education	90 (18.6%)	55 (11.3%)
Fashion	100 (20.6%)	150 (30.9%)
Total	485	100%

Source: Field survey, 2019

Table 5 above reveal the kind of information category respondents subscribe to online. The result shows that majority of the respondents were interested in entertainment with 30.9% and fashion which accounted for 30.9%. Others were politics, sports and education.

Table: 6 Reasons why respondents utilize online news media for news consumption

Response	NSUK	IBBUL
It's cost effective	80 (16.5%)	65 (13.4%)
To get news update	75 (15.5%)	88 (18.1%)
News is easily accessible	70 (14.4%)	76 (15.7%)
I access news any time	65 (13.4%)	94 (19.4%)
I can get my favorite news	85 (17.5%)	77 (15.9%)
I can express my opinion	110 (22.7%)	85 (17.5%)
Total	485	100%

Source: Field survey, 2019

Table 6 above, shows the reasons why respondents utilized online news media. From several reasons the respondents gave, majority of them said they can express their opinion online (22.7%) and 19.4% affirmed that they can easily access news at any time they wish.

Table 7: Respondents perception on the content of online news media in Nigeria

Items	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean Score	Decision
	5	4	3	2	1		
Most of the content of online news media in Nigeria is credible.	215	220	10	35	5	4.1	Accepted
The content of online news media in Nigeria is sensational.	170	256	14	15	30	4.0	Accepted
Reader's comments on Nigeria online news media platforms are derogatory and full of hate speech.	221	186	45	21	12	4.2	Accepted
Most Nigeria online breaking news is reported ahead of conventional media.	163	265	25	12	30	4.1	Accepted
Nigerian online news media are more objective than conventional media.	260	179	12	10	24	4.3	Accepted
Some online news media in Nigeria plagiarized news report from other media organizations.	195	243	10	22	15	4.2	Accepted
Nigerian online news media platforms often expose corruption in government.	176	241	20	24	24	4.0	Accepted

Source: Field survey, 2019

Table 7 above, indicate the perception of the respondents on the content of online news media in Nigeria. Majority of the respondents attested to the fact that most online news media in Nigeria were objective in their news, they are credible, and expose

corruption cases in the country. Many of them also said Nigerian online news media are the first to report breaking news. On a negative note, they were of the opinion that online news media are unduly sensational with their news, they also plagiarized some of their news report and to crown it all online readers comments are usually fill with hate speeches and derogatory comments.

Findings & Discussion

Five research questions were formulated to give direction to the study. The following were the major findings of the study. Research question one sought to determine the extent to which undergraduate students utilize online news media for news consumption. Findings from the study indicate that majority of the students amounting 41.2% and 43.3% said to a large extent utilize online news media for news consumption. The findings support previous research that collage students are the predominant proportion of people who utilize the social media to gratify certain information needs that is peculiar to their generation. According to Wok, Bolong & Ahmad (2011) assert that the younger generation uses the Internet more than TV and newspapers as a source of information and since there now exists online TV and online newspapers, the younger generation tends to use multiple media for information. This finding also justifies the Uses and Gratification Theory used in this study. As a follow up question to the extent of online news media usage, results in table 3 shows the frequency of respondent's use of online news media for news consumption. The result indicates that a majority of 46.4% and 47.4% were of the opinion that they use online news

media very often. The result indicates that more respondents affirmed that they very often use the online news media as source of information.

The second research question was design to identify the online media platforms that undergraduate students utilize for news consumption. From the analysis in table 2 the following online news media platforms were identified by the students. They include the following; Sahara Reporters, Premium Times, Nairaland.Com, Naija.Com, Nigeria Village Square, and Punch.Com. Among the online news media platforms Premium Times and Sahara Reporters accounted for (23.3%) and (18.6%). These are the popular online news media platforms in Nigeria. This confirms the views of Alsridi (2018) in his study of uses and gratifications of online news among young adults in Bahrain whose research discovers that online media use of local and Arab news websites among the young people in Bahrain was quite high.

The third research question sought to ascertain the type of information undergraduate students consume the most online. From the analysis in table 5, the study discovered that the respondents subscribe more to fashion and entertainment news compare to other news genres. This shows that majority of the respondents subscribe more to entertainment news more than any other type of information. This is quite revealing because as students, it is expected that the respondents will pay more attention to educational related news that would aid their learning process as well as use online media for educational

purposes. However, the contrary shows that the respondents were more interested in other things differently.

The fourth question was to discover the reasons why undergraduate students utilize online news media for news consumption. From the responses given by the students several reasons were given for the use of online news media among the students. One of such reasons was that majority of the respondents (22.7%) attested to the fact they could express their personal opinion online. 16.5% said online news media are cost effective. As students, with small amount of money they can subscribe for data to use to browse. Other reasons were that they get news update frequently, they can also get news any time they want and with online news media respondents can easily access news at their convenient. This finding supports a previous study conducted by Aririguzoh, Sobowale & Usaini (2016) who reported that mobile devices aid undergraduate students to get news in a cheaper way.

The last research question was designed to find out the perception of undergraduate students on the content of online news media in Nigeria. Findings from the data indicated that majority of the respondents were of the opinion that Nigeria online news media platforms were credible, objective and were always ahead in reporting breaking news compared to other media outlets in the country. On the other hand, the study discovered that Nigeria online news media platforms sensationalized some of their reports. In addition, it was found that online reader's comments among Nigeria media audience were full of hate speech and derogatory speeches and comments

in online conversation. One interesting discovery from the study was that respondents attested to the fact the Nigerian online news media usually expose corruption in government and their reports are more objective more than the conventional media of communication.

Conclusion

The aim of the study was to examine the pattern of online news media among undergraduate's students of two universities in North-Central Nigeria. The study concludes that majority of the students use online news media to a large extent. The study shows that majority of the students do use online news media to source for entertainment and fashion related news. The research further establishes the fact that Nigeria online news media platforms are credible, objective and sensational in their reportage of events. The respondents were of the opinion that Nigerian online news media are credited with the commendation for exposing corruption in government. Based on these findings, we recommend that undergraduate students should utilize online news media more for educational purposes than entrainment. Online news media in the country should adhere to the principles of journalism by not reporting sensational reports of events in the country. The study likewise recommends that online media audience should be educated on how to be civil in online conversations. To this end, government should embark on enlightenment campaign to sensitize online media audience not to use derogatory language against individuals online.

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