

DETERMINANTS OF ONLINE NEWSPAPER READERSHIP IN PORT HARCOURT METROPOLIS

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Introduction

People tend to depend more on the media that meet an appreciable number of their needs than those that touch on only a few of their needs." Okenwa (2002) submits that "current scholarship presents more complex interaction between the media and the society, with the media generating information from a network of relations and influences, coupled with individual interpretations and evaluations of the information provided." A multitude of factors such as political, economic, geographical including cultural influences make the media, to operate properly not how news worthy events are perceived and which are reported at all (Ahuja 1997; Lin 1998; Emenyonu 1998; Okenwa, 2002). Okenwa (2002) further amplifies says that; "it is through the persuasiveness of the mass media such as television, radio and the press that messages reach their target audiences. These media have been largely responsible for structuring people's daily lives and routines." So why do people turn to the media? What motivates their interest? What needs do they want to gratify them? how do their needs impact on their preference for certain media contents?

The mass media perform numerous functions which have engendered audience dependence on them. Some of the key media functions are information provision, transmission of culture and education, socialization of people into the norms and mores of their culture, entertainment and interpretation of reported events. Others include: drawing attention to unethical behaviours by individuals, groups and institutions watching over governments to ensure that they behave responsibly and responsively to the tasks for which they were elected, providing reports and mobilization of the citizenry. These functions appear to generate audience expectations of what the media have to do, in line with what the gratifications media audiences tend to derive from their various needs.

Besides the emergence of online newspapers has created contradictory ideas about newspaper readership globally. Thorson & Duffy (2005) observe that "whereas the general feeling is that the online version of newspapers is a threat to the print's business model, it is difficult to tell between online version and hardcopy newspapers which one is more economically rewarding as both are readily available and appear to thrive at least in Nigeria." Ashong and Ogaraku (2017) report that "globally, the newspaper is passing through its hardest time ever, especially since the internet came to provide online functionalities and possibilities far beyond what the newspaper could offer instant and free news, interactive and multimedia features and easy accessibility through very simple handheld technologies like mobile phones and personal computers. Internet news publication is also simpler and cheaper."

With these attributes, therefore, Varian (2013) as quoted by Ashong and Ogaraku (2017), sees "the Internet as evidently a more superior way to distribute and read news. However, by astronomically increasing news sources, the Internet has inadvertently threatened the newspapers traditional stronghold on the news business." Thottam (1999) says 'in fact, it was in an attempt to tap into the Internet's huge resources, that newspapers joined other mass media to also deliver their contents digitally. But the moment readers began to rush online; print newspapers also began to suffer in three major ways: loss of breaking-news function, decline in newspaper readership and decline in advertising revenues." Chan (2005) argues that "these are newspaper's major revenue streams and the continuous failure of efforts of industry

players (publishers, editors, reporters, media scholars, etc.) to contain the decline, informed the prediction or conclusion in some quarters that the end of the newspaper is close.”

However, publishing offline or online newspapers comes with its sheer challenges in layouts, designs, photograph, illustrations, placements, graphics, aesthetics, ethics and laws. The publishers need to take these factors into consideration so as to package contents that are rich, attract attention, sustain interest and desire to satisfy curiosity of readers. One of the greatest challenges offline newspapering is that posed by laws. These laws include privacy: defamation, sedition, copyright, libel, privilege, intellectual property; plagiarism, indecency obscenity and law of contempt. According to Daramola (2013), “in news writing and reporting, journalists should put the ethics and laws guiding the practice of the profession at the back of their minds. They should as well understand and respect the national interest of their country.

Statement of the Problem

With the introduction of online newspapers, there has been a paradigm shift in the patronage of printed newspapers. The premise that many people read online versions of newspapers because of the gratifications they derive from online newspapers are commonplace. There is an assumption that hard copy (offline) newspapers may have lost readership. There is also the uncertainty as to whether newspaper readers show more interest with online version or hard copy. More worrisome is the view about what readers of online and hard copy newspapers do receive. This observation becomes necessary since the import of uses and gratifications theory is that “audience will always make use of the medium from which they derive gratifications.” Gratifications derived from the media are multiple just as the media contents are multiple. The study, therefore, is set to investigate whether the online newspaper readers in Rivers State, read the online newspapers based on the gratifications they derive from them. If so, what are the determinants of online newspaper readership?

Objective of the Study

The aim of the study is to ascertain the determinants of online newspaper readership in Port Harcourt.

The objectives of the study are to:

- i. ascertain the demographic factors that motivate exposure to online newspapers among readers in Port Harcourt.
- ii. find out the psychographic factors that motivate exposure to online newspapers among readers in Port Harcourt.
- iii. establish the factors that influence the choice of online newspapers among readers in Port Harcourt

Research Questions

The research questions stated below were formulated to guide the study;

- i. how do demographic factors motivate exposure to online newspapers among readers in Port Harcourt?
- ii. how do psychographic factors motivate\ exposure to online newspapers among readers in Port Harcourt?
- iii. what factors influence the choice of online newspapers among readers in Port Harcourt?

Theoretical Underpinning

Technological Determinism Theory (TDT)

The theory was propounded by Thorsten Veblen (1857 - 1929) out its foundation was laid properly by Marshal McLuhan in 1965. “The theory believes that technology defines the nature of the society; it is viewed as the driving force of culture in the society and it determines its course of history.” Ukonu, Ani and Nduhisi (2013) note, that McLuhan’s assertion, ‘The Medium is the Message,’ encapsulated the full import of the theory. Expounding on the McLuhan’s

postulation, Griffin (2000) states that "the new technologies., radically after the entire way people use their five senses, the way they react to things and therefore their entire lives and the entire society."

Folarin (1998) observes that "the basic premise of the theory is that the media are the extensions of human body and that they alter not only the environment but also the very message they convey; they bring new perceptual habits while their technologies create new environments." Marx (2016) posits that "technological progress leads to new ways of production in a society and this ultimately influences the culture, political and economic aspects of a society, thereby inevitably changing the society". Max expounds on "how a feudal society that used a hand mill slowly changed into an industrial capitalist society with the introduction of the steam mill.

Technological Determinism Theory is applied at various levels beginning from the introduction of newer technologies to introducing, other ideas that will generate more knowledge as well. Asemah *et al.*, (2017) point out that "technological determinism theory acknowledges that technology has the ability to drive human interaction and create social change. This concept stresses on the effects and/or impacts that information Communication Technologies (ICTs) have on users, organizations and society." It states that "media technology shapes how we, as individuals in the society think, feel, act or how society operates as it moves from one technological stage to another." Kunezik (1998) says that 'new communication technologies tend to alter the journalists' working, environment' Ukonu *et al.*, (2013) cites Folarin (1998) as explaining that "installation of electronic (computerized) news distribution system tend to level out the differences between editorial production and phases of journalistic work."

He further explains that "technological advancement has exerted enormous powers on the way people make their choices in the election of any medium that satisfies their desire," Benson, Ashong and Oke (2021) believe that "the preponderance of social media today supports the assertion that distance is no longer a harrier in information gathering and dissemination since an individual can stay in one place and collets information from other countries within a split of minutes." Ukonu *et al.*, (2013) insist that "the level of awareness of this new technology (online newspaper) by the masses will determine the level of influence the new technology will have on hardcopy newspaper purchase in South-East universities in Nigeria, since technology alters the perception of the audience coupled with the fact that the dominant medium of any age dominates people." Griffin (1994)' cited by Asmah *et al.* (2017) report that 'McLuhan traced the emergence of Western civilization in stages, tied to media available for human communication, namely: tribal age, literate age, print age and the electronic age." The theory is relevant to this study as it has brought to the fore the changing nature of communication through technology which has created a process in the world where people are connected worldwide through participation in smaller communities using online media. It provides the foundation that online newspaper reader in Nigeria use technology to access the media and contents they desire.

Concept of Readership

Readership as a concept is central to the newspapers. It is an abstract concept which captures the act of reading. Though difficult to define, the 'concept of readership is usually associated with newspapers, magazines and all kinds of periodicals." "It is the number or type of people who read a particular newspaper or magazine" (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary. 2010). According to Bottle PR, a UK based Agency established in 2004, "readership is a general term that refers to the number of people reading a particular publication, including both the individual who purchased the publication and others who have read it" (Bottle PR, 201 1). For The Huntsville Time website (2011) 'readership is the number of adults (18+) in a specified geographic area who read or looked into the publication yesterday" (cited in Obald. 2013).

It is the cross section of the society that finds time, out of interest and habit to indulge in the act of gathering information from newspapers. To read is to get ideas from printed or written materials. It is also a way of acquiring knowledge. Oyeyerni (2005) observes that "reading is a means of tapping knowledge from superior minds; a term used to refer to an interaction by which meaning encoded in visual stimuli by an author makes meaning in the mind of the reader; involves the recognition of printed or written symbols which serve as stimuli for the recall of meaning through the intellectual manipulation of concepts already possessed by the reader." The resulting meanings are thereafter organized into- thinking process according to the purpose adopted by the reader, such an organization leads to modified thought and/or behaviour, as well as leads to a new behaviour which takes its place either in person or in social development.

From a different perspective, 'reading means the vocalization of words in a given passage and the process of giving meaning to materials; this implies reading aloud, which beginners do quite often and enables teachers to detect and to correct errors spontaneously.'" Although, reading can be done aloud, but vocalization the course of silent reading slows down reading pace. For reading to be effective, it should be done with a good speed. Reading speed is expressed in the number of character or words read per minute (McVicker, 2018). There are two types of reading identified by Mevicker (2018) namely, "reading aloud and silent reading - reading aloud involves audible vocalization of what is being read and is good for young learners because it exposes error for timely corrective measure; it is used for speech delivery in public gatherings, and is also the format for dictation and oral comprehensive tests." In silent reading, "the reader reads in the inside of him and does not vocalize what he reads." Wide reading imposes reading silently and this is necessary for developing the reading habit, effective reading and for a profound understanding of literate and technical texts.

Newspaper and its Usefulness in Society

Newspapers are generally seen as "written publication containing news, information and advertisements usually printed on low-cost paper called newsprint" (Akobundu, 2009, p.1). It is a "printed publication issued at regular, close intervals, especially daily or weekly, consisting of -folded unstapled sheets and often containing current news, comment, feature articles, advertising and correspondence" (Okunna, 1999). Newspapers whether special-interest or general interest provide important and useful/news information to readers. Ronan (2005, P. 14) captures the whole essence of newspaper when he asserts that "in every language, the newspaper is irreplaceable primary source for historians of every discipline." In the views of Nwabueze, Okonkwo and Nweke (2012, p. 227) "Newspapers provide excellent memories of a country's historical events and landmarks". They are regular up-to-date sources of information available to students, scholars, administrators, the barely literate and so on, who demand for newspapers through self-acquisition, exchange and borrowing from friends, relatives, and libraries (Onwubiko, 2005). Nakinganda (2007, p.14) avers that "newspapers are sources of textual evidence useful to students, researchers, journalists, New Media and Mass Communication administrators, lawyers, politicians and the larger society." They are carriers of current information (Okunna, 1999) and the oldest and traditionally the most important sources of current information that contain far more news than are available on television or elsewhere (Sandman et al, cited in Okunna, 1999). Newspapers stimulate, motivate, inspire, interpret, build, preserve, excite, satisfy and sometimes disappoint. They record what happened previously, give an historical analysis of today's events and forecast what would likely be the turn of events (Benson et al., 2021). Newspapers are, therefore, very important sources of information on which human beings depend for useful information on a daily basis from all news fronts.

State of Newspaper Readership

From the day Marshall McLuhan "predicted about the global village phenomenon, there has been an unequalled surge in the introduction of new and better information tools, which, are increasingly complementing and replacing older traditional tools of mass information. New media delivery systems, new information processing, storage and retrieval systems have become the vogue." Presently, newspapers and magazines use the, World Wide Web (www) among other services of the net to create and maintain web servers in which they publish contents of their papers. The increase of newspapers and magazines online version may not be unconnected with some possible secondary reasons including enthusiasm for new technology and the general enc that one wishes to be part of the new wave at the moment not minding the adverse consequences.

Ashong and Ogaraku, (2017) study has shown that "globally the newspaper is passing through its hardest time ever, especially since the Internet came to provide online functionalities and possibilities far beyond what the newspaper could offer: instant and free news, interactive and multimedia features, and easy accessibility through very simple handheld technologies like mobile phones and personal computers."

Rodman (2010 p.109) observes that "with these basic features, then the production and distribution of the print editions of newspapers may be no doubt hampered thereby impinging on the revenue profile of some newspaper organizations. Above all, this phenomenon may signal an attempt at subsuming and fusing the print newspaper into the fast-paced communication technologies which are daily dominating the communication space." Literature is replete with "materials which chronicle the monumental shifts in news consumption occasioned around the globe. For examples, Murdoch Predicts Gloomy Future for Press" (Plunkett, 2005), "The Future of Newspapers: Who Killed the Newspaper?" (The Economist, 2006), "Goodbye to Newspapers?" (Bakei, 2007), "Newspaper Circulation Continues to Decline Rapidly" (Pérez-Pefia, 2008), "Newspaper Closings Raise Fears about Industry" (Lieberman, 2009). Similar reports in Nigeria include: "Dwindling Sales: A Looming Media Challenge" in Daily Trust (Omoniyi, 2010), "Experts Debate Future of Print Media: On1iñeMedia, A Threat" in Nigerian Tribune (Ekeng, 2010), "Forget Circulation Figures, Print Media is still very relevant" (Adefaye, 2010, cited in Abdulrahem et al., 2012), "The Solution to the Dwindling Newspaper Circulation in Nigeria" (Popoola, 2010), "Kaduna newspaper vendors say online publication disrupts sales" (Daily Trust, 2012). Ashong and Ogaraku (2017) say "the decline is almost everywhere; what may differ is the degree or dimension of effect." As Rodman (2010) observes "changes in readership naturally affect the structure of the industry. Over the years, for example, readers moved from the cities to the suburbs, and the industry followed as the city papers died and new suburban papers were born."

Online Newspapers and Readership

Generally, scholars and the public have "the notion that online has created more opportunities for newspapers, such as competing with broadcast journalism in presenting breaking news in a timelier manner" (Benson, Ashong & Oke, 2021). Patrick (2015) argues that "the marriage between a computer network (the Internet) and newspaper readership is said to have been contracted on July 1, 1980 and tie first newspaper to offer readers electronic contents via the computer was he Ohio Columbus Dispatch which adopted the services provided by CompuServe, a computer software company based in Ohio in the United States of America.

A home user needed a computer, and a modem to couple the telephone to the computer, to connect to the database and access online versions of the *Ohio Columbus Dispatch* newspaper." Okoncfua (2014) submits that "going online has created more opportunities for newspapers, such as competing with broadcast journalism in presenting breaking news in a timelier manner." Almost all the big newspapers including the local ones, in Nigeria, for instance, have their online versions. These include: The Guardian online, this Day online,

Champion online, Daily Trust online, Punch online, The Nation online, Leadership online, Tribune online, Vanguard online, Daily Times online, and The Sun online. In short, no fewer than 50 Nigerian newspapers have their presence online, in addition to their traditional hard copy, while some others offer only online versions" (Uwakwe, 2010; Patrick, 2015).

Patrick (2015) maintains that "online newspapers are common features in the various social media platforms, especially Facebook and Twitter as their pages display fragrantly the news feed of social media users". The emergence of online newspapers is no doubt a product of technological innovations. As observed by Hanson (2005) "evolving technology has brought changes to newspaper business." Mbachu (2003) says "initially, online newspapers simply offered electronic versions of their hard copy contents. But it is no longer so as mainstream newspapers are now involved in the breaking news process."

As Ganiyu (2011) notes "Nigerian newspapers publish their online versions by 'cut and paste' meaning that they cut stories from hard copy versions and paste them on their 'websites and social media pages such that the contents of both their online and hard copy versions read the same" But Patrick (2015) maintains that "there is exception whereby breaking news is reported on online version without it appearing on the hardcopy until the next day, a feat, which has kept newspapers in the forefront of information dissemination in the digital era." Patrick (2015) concludes that "online newspapers can be much more than cut and paste from hard copy versions of newspapers because of its instant interactive nature that the Internet permits. This feature is made possible by the interactive portal contained in online newspaper websites and social media pages that permit readers to post their comments on every report with minimum delay. The interactivity lies on subsequent posts reactions to both the news story and the earlier posts from other readers which are not accommodated in the traditional hard copy newspaper versions." Bradshaw (2000) identifies "nine factors that determine the adoption and use of online news - cost, multi-tasking, more news choices, in-depth and background information, 24/7 updates, ability to discuss the news with peers, existence of different viewpoints and opportunity to 'take back' to the media."

Online Newspaper Headlines and Opinion Formation

Generally, headlines have been characterized as short telegram-like and maximally informative summaries of the article with which they appear (Cotter 2010). They appear to follow a particular condensed grammar commonly referred to as headlines (De Lange, 2008), and are often carefully constructed to attract the attention of a reader (Ecker *et al.*, 2014). Primarily, the headline of a newspaper article performs two distinct functions; first to summarize the article it belongs to (Van Dijk 1988 in Dot, 2003) and do so by either being an abstract of the full article, or by highlighting the main point of that article (Bell 1991 in Thurman & Fletcher, 2019). Dor (2003) describes headlines as "relevant optimizers," in line with Sperber and Wilson (1986) relevance theory. Dor (2000). further explains' that "headlines are designed to optimize the relevance of their stories for their readers, emphasizing that headlines require a balance between being short and clear, and being an information-rich summary of the article; an optimum between those two goals has to be found."

Larovici and Amel (1989) cited in Thurman and Fletcher (2019) are of the opinion that the second function of a headline is a more pragmatic one. It is the function to attract the attention of the readers and to provoke them to read the article (Nir 1993 in Thurman & Fletcher, 2019). Ifantidou (2009) observes that readers actually preferred headlines that are creative, even if that makes a headline longer, more confusing or less informative; stating that "readers seem to value headlines for what they are, i.e. under-informative, creative, yet autonomous texts." On the Internet, there is much more competition between news sources for the reader's attention (Chen Conioy & Rubir, 2015) As more and more readers or news articles come from social media networks such as Facebook and Twitter (Mitchell & Page 2015), the need for a good headline that delivers the most clicks grows. This often leads to a vague headline that induces

curiosity, which is then used to lure readers into clicking on the headline. In an experiment by Ecker, Lwandowsky, Chang and Pillai (2014) in which factual or opinion news were presented to participants, but with different headlines, it was found that misleading headlines affect readers' memory inferential reasoning, and behavioral intentions. The authors argue that these effects arise not only because headlines constraint further information processing, biasing readers towards a specific interpretation, but also because readers struggle to update their memory in order to correct initial misconceptions. These efforts highlight the importance of news headlines which goes beyond attracting users to read news and it even changes individuals' perceptions or attitudes towards the content. Headline writing is influenced by the availability of more data as well. Studies have shown that, in attempting to attract more readers to their stories, editors and journalists have been changing the way they write headlines for their articles, by using words, phrases, and stylistic techniques that are known to perform well and attract more clicks (Dick, 2011; Tandoc, 2014).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The descriptive survey research design will be used for this study; this is because the description survey design allows for the investigation of issues that are connected with human opinions, attitudes, beliefs and feelings. The survey research design is often appropriate when researching in social sciences, which deal with human behavior and motivation in the society. Idowu (1985) supports this when note that survey is particularly suitable in studying the attitudes and orientations of people in large population settings (Barbie, 2004).

Population of the Study

The population of this study was drawn from the online newspaper readers in Port Harcourt Local Government Area. According to the newspaper circulation Bureau, (NCB) in 2018, the population of Newspapers readers in Port Harcourt is 12,500.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

The sample size for the study was 384, using the Cohen, Manion and Morrison's (2007) model for sample size determination at 95% confidence level. The researcher adopted purposive sampling technique to choose specific places where people who read online newspapers could be found. Such places include: universities, federal and LGA secretariats, schools, etc within the study area. The researcher also adopted purposive method in administering the instrument to the individual respondents. Here, the researcher did ensure that only respondents who read online newspapers were given the research instrument.

Description of the Measuring Instrument

The instrument for data collection of this study was a structured questionnaire with both closed and open-ended questions.

Research and Analysis

Table 1 Preferred Online Newspaper Contents

Contents	Frequency	Percentage (%)
	(n)	
News	180	48
Features/Columns	37	10
Advertorial	25	7
Editorial	22	6

Entertainment	105	28	Graphics, aesthetics and visuals
	5	1	Total
			374
			100

Table 1 shows that 48% of the respondents accessed online newspaper for news while 1% accessed online newspapers because of graphics, aesthetics and visuals.

Table 2: Online Newspaper Reader's Age

Content	Age				Total
	18 -25	26 -35	36 -45	46 and above	
News	10 (3%)	38 (10%)	76(20%)	24 (6%)	148 (40%)
Features/Columns	5 (1%)	13(4%)	25 (7%)	11(3%)	54(14%)
Advertorial	2 (1%)	15 (4%)	12(3%)	-	29(8%)
Editorial	1(0%)	3 (1%)	10(3%)	3(1%)	17(5%)
Entertainment	40(11%)	46(12%)	28(8%)	-	114(30%)
Graphics, aesthetics and visuals	2(1%)	3(1%)	7(2%)	-	12(3%)
Total	50(13%)	118(31%)	158(42%)	38(10%)	374(100%)

Table 2 shows that news is the most preferred contents by 40% of the respondents from all ages. Also 42% of the respondents within the age bracket 36-4'5 accessed most of the contents while 10% of respondents within the age bracket of 46 and above accessed the least contents.

Table 3: Online newspaper reader's psychographic factors

Psychographic Factors	Frequency (n)	(%)
Interest	70	19
Values	160	43
Beliefs	1 04	28
Social Status	30	8

Lifestyle/Attitude	10	3
Total	374	100

Table 3 shows that 43% of the respondents were motivated by values to read online newspapers, followed by beliefs 28%. Lifestyle and attitude were the least, 3%.

Pearson Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient between motivation of readers and their choice of online newspapers.

X	Y	X ²	Y ²	XY
148	173	21904	29929	25604
54	104	2916	10816	5616
29	11	841	121	319
17	5	289	25	85
114	64	12996	4096	9216
12	11	144	121	132
0	6	0	36	0
N=374	N=374	X = 39090	Y = 45144	XY=40972

Using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Co-Efficient Statistics, yielding value of 0.950. The Table value here is .7545 at 0.05 level of significance.

Decision; Since the calculated r value of 0.950 is greater than the critical table value of 7545, it leads the researcher to reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis (H_i), meaning that there is a positive correlation between readers' needs and their choice of online newspaper contents.

Research Question 1

How do demographic factors motivate exposure to online newspapers among readers in Port Harcourt.

Demographic variables included age, income, educational qualification, gender and occupation. Psychographic variables included interest, values, social status and beliefs. Findings of this study show that certain demographic factors, to a large extent, influenced readers' needs in online newspapers. For instance, the finding of the study showed that the male respondents 33% preferred news as against 21% female respondents. The difference is not very significant. However, female respondents 12% preferred entertainment contents most, against male 7%. This finding corroborates Ekanem's (2006) report that "there is a significant difference in the level of media exposure and content utilization between male and female teachers in Rivers

State. The researcher specifically studied teachers and discovered that gender is an important factor in differential media exposure even within a specific profession." The result also underscores Nwabueze (2010) who reports, that there is a relationship between respondents' gender and content preference in satellite and local television audience.

It is found out from the study that 40% of the respondents from all ages preferred news contents. Respondents (42%) within the age bracket 36-45 accessed most of the contents, while 10% aged 46 and above accessed the least contents. This result supports Talabi, Ogundeji & Adedewole's (2016) position that age is directly related to high or low media exposure. Okonofua (2014) affirms that age helps to predict the amount of media use. He argues that children are heavy viewers of television, for example, compared to teenagers who tend to watch less than any other group.

Table 3 shows that 38% of the respondents between the income bracket of N62, 000 and N77, 000 accessed all the contents of online newspapers. News was the most preferred content by 40% of the respondents from all the income brackets, while 3% of the respondents in the various income brackets said they sought other issues including aesthetics, designs, photos and videos displayed in online newspapers. Some previous studies have shown that income plays a prominent role in determining online newspapers readership. Scholars observe that those who are likely to expose themselves regularly to mass media contents must have the wherewithal to do so as poor people pay far less attention to the media because they lack the income to do so (DeFleur & Dennis, 1994; Ekaneni, 2006; Nwabueze, 2010).

The finding also showed that educational level of a reader influenced choice of content in online newspaper readership. It reveals that 20% of the respondents who were holders of First Degrees, paid more attention to news and 16% respondents who had NCE/ND read entertainment. The difference is, however, not very significant. Furthermore, entertainment was accessed more by those with lower qualifications - primary/secondary education. Highly educated online newspaper readers sought high quality content such as editorial, columns, feature articles, while those with little educational level sought entertainment and other lighter contents (Lin, 2002). This finding confirms Patrick's (2015) report that people who are highly educated tend to prefer contents which require serious intellectual participation. This result also supports earlier findings by Ekanem (2006) and Rodman (2006) which have shown a strong relationship between education and media use as well as Ukonu's et al., (2013) report that news correlates more closely with level of education than other variable with information intake.

The result of this study also shows that marital status plays a role in accessing online newspapers contents. In Table 3, 54% of the respondents who are married did not only access all the contents the most. They also accessed news content more than other respondents. Also 3% and 2% of the respondents who were separated or divorced paid least attention to all the contents respectively. It was found out from the study that occupation also determined online newspapers content preference. Table 3 presents data on content preference by occupation. News received more attention among 40% of the respondents in the various occupational brackets. Public servants accessed the various contents more than respondents in other occupational brackets with 46%. However, students paid more attention to entertainment (10%) as well as news (3%). This is not surprising because the younger generations of respondents are likely to pay more attention to entertainment contents.

Research Question 2

Do psychographic factors motivate exposure to online newspapers among readers in Port Harcourt?

The answer to this research question is expressed in Table 9 which captures psychographic factors that influence exposure to online newspaper readership in Rivers State, Nigeria. The

study shows that readers access the contents of online newspapers based on various psychographic factors, which are attitudes, beliefs, interests, social status, lifestyles and individual's backgrounds. Table 2 shows that 43% of the respondents were motivated by values to read online newspapers, followed by respondents 28% who were motivated by beliefs, respondents 8% and 3% were motivated by social, lifestyle and attitude respectively.

This finding supports the works of many scholars, who, in their separate works, identified certain attributes that influence the reader's choice of newspaper contents (McQuail, 2011; Akpan, 2006; Ekanem, 2006 and Nwabueze, 2010). These scholars have observed that "basic needs, social situation and individual's background, such as experience, interest and education affect people's ideas about what they want from the media and which of them best meets their needs." Similarly, Ashong & Ogaraku (2017) posit that "the self-imposed factors which reside within the individual's personality greatly influence the exposure to online newspaper contents by the individual."

Palmgreen & Rayburn (1985) cited by McQuail (2011) observe that "attitudes towards media are the outcome of empirically located beliefs and also of values (personal preference)." The Uses and Gratifications Theory stipulates that the reader has a certain level of expectation before exposing himself or herself to any content. Dimmick (2004, p.14) notes that, "a person's attitude towards any object is a function of his or her belief about the subject and the evaluative response associated with those beliefs."

Research Question 3

What factors influence the choice of online newspapers among reader in Port Harcourt?

The study shows that there is a positive correlation between readers' needs and their choice of online newspaper contents. This result is confirmed by hypothesis I of the study which reveals that there is a significant relationship (at 0.5 level of significance) between online newspaper readers and the choice of contents they accessed.

Similar studies have established that "certain factors are responsible in the determination of audience exposure to the mass media. The major factors have been classified into two: demographic and psychographic factors. Interest, nature of content, beliefs, habit and interest were classified as psychographic factors while demographic factors, are age, income, education and occupation" (Un, 2002; Ekanem, 2006; Nwabueze, 2010; Okonofua, 2014; Patrick, 2015). Emenyonu (1998) reports "a third factor called environmental factor which includes availability of the media and preferred content, knowledge or usage of the medium, the viewer's environment and scheduling pattern of some media contents and usage of other media."

The finding of this study corroborates McQuail's (2005) categorization of the factors that influence audience preference of newspaper contents. He categorizes same into "audience side factors and media side factors where he lists audience side factors to include: personal attributes such as age, gender, family position, study and work situation level of income and lifestyle; social background and milieu, especially as reflected in social class, education, religion, cultural, political and family environment and region or locality of residence; media related needs for such personal benefits as company, distraction, information, etc."

These needs, according to McQuail (2005) are "widely experienced, but the particular balance between them depends on personal background and circumstances; personal tastes and preference for certain general habit of leisure time, media use and availability to be in the audience at a particular time. Since media are used in space as well as time, availability also refers to being in the appropriate place (e.g. at home, in trains, driving, etc.), availability also refers to the economic potentials to be in an audience, for instance, being able and willing to pay the price of a cinema ticket, (in this case purchase of data), a music recording or a

newspaper; awareness of the choices available and the amount and kind of information processed also play a part in audience exposure; specific context of use. This varies according to the medium, but generally refers to sociability and location of use; chance often plays a part in media exposure and its intervention reduces the ability to really explain choice or audience composition." The "media side" factors McQuail listed are: "the media system, structure of the media provision, available content options, publicity, timing and presentation." Scholars have identified factors that influence readers' choice of online newspapers to include contents quality, cheap access and interest. (McQuail, 2005b; Patrick 2015; Ukonu *et al.*, 2010; Ashong Ogaraku, 2017). Cloffe and Choe (1981) classified their factors as technical structural factors, self-imposed factors and environmental factors. From findings of this study, these factors are brought by an individual's location within the social structure and which are beyond his control (age, income, education, etc.); the self-impose factors are those which reside in the individual's personality and relate to his interest in or apathy to services provided by online newspapers. The environmental factors are those outside the individual's personality and demographics. This supports McQuail's (2005b) exposition.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings of this study, it is concluded that readers' exposure to online newspaper contents was influenced by several factors; demographic, psychographic and environmental. It shows that the reader has a certain level of expectation before exposing him or herself to any content in the online newspaper that meets his needs. The study also confirms that there is a positive correlation between readers' needs and their choice of online newspaper contents. However, relationship between gratifications and choice of online newspaper contents could not be established.

Recommendations

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

This study shows that news is the most preferred content by online newspaper readers, hence;

- i. media organizations with online newspapers' version should frame, slant and generally package online news to attract more readership. Readers of online newspapers have shown clearly that they seek information and other contents of value to them. Online newspaper publishers should shift their focus to online contents that help readers gain knowledge and explore society generally.
- ii. many variables motivate online newspapers' readers to access contents that satisfy their needs. This would entail a great deal of creativity on the part of editors; for instance, inventing interactive, engaging and youth-friendly online contents, like interactive videos inserted in some pages. Results could be tremendous where online newspaper contents also focus primarily on their immediate surroundings, giving online readers exactly what they want - such news stories that are readily available on the web and routinely overlooked by the mainstream media.
- iii. online publishers should focus on contents that are primarily on the immediate surroundings of the online readers, giving them exactly what they want that are not captured by the mainstream media. Publishers of online newspapers should be guided by the laws of reporting in packaging contents to avoid unnecessary litigation that may ultimately put them out of business.
- iv. Online publishers/editors should know how to reach out to the younger generation, so as to create good reading habit in them.

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