

Assessment of Patterns of Readership of Online Newspapers in Selected Nigerian Universities

Nkemdilim Patrick (Ph.D.)¹

Abstract

Online newspapers are sources of information that can facilitate self development. While Internet use is high in many Nigerian universities, how much the staff and students know about, and read online newspapers is uncertain. This study adopts survey to determine which Nigerian online newspapers are known, and read in selected Nigerian universities; factors affecting readership; and how readership contributes to human development. Findings indicate that Nigerian online newspapers are well-known among staff and students of the selected Nigerian universities, but only a few of them spend above 40% of browsing time reading Nigerian newspapers online. However, the online newspapers had significant impact of staff and students of the selected universities in the areas of enriching their knowledge on important issues; enabling them to enlighten others on important issues; and correcting their impressions on issues. This indicates that level of their dependency on the online newspapers is high even though circumstances beyond their control force many of them to spend short time reading the online newspapers. The study recommends that reliable and affordable Internet connectivity, and steady electricity supply would encourage readership of online newspapers in Nigerian universities.

Keywords: Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs); Media System Dependency Theory; Internet; staff and students of Nigerian universities; human development)

Introduction

The marriage between the newspaper industry and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has made many, if not all, national newspapers in Nigeria to have online versions (Mbachu, 2003). It is believed that their readership is high as Adedina, Adeniyi and Bolaji (2008) aver that more people read online versions of a newspaper than its hard copy in Nigeria. What these indicate is that online newspapers are viable sources of information in our present day Nigeria. The dictum: "Information is power" suggests that information enhances human development. Human development, according to Anorue, Obayi, and Onyebuchi (2012), is a state of human well being that enables people to gain control of their environments. They point out that the sharing of information among humans through communication is a crucial component of the relationship with the human environment for development purposes.

Readership of online newspapers is an information sourcing and sharing activity. The phenomenon of online newspapers is believed to have greatly enhanced information sourcing and sharing activities in several ways. A number of benefits accrue to online newspapers in their information sharing efforts. Online newspapers provide easy, widespread, and timely access to information; allow for interactivity among information users; and enable users to store, share and retrieve their content quickly and easily (Ijeh, 2008; McQuail, 2007).

¹ +2348033549955; poni716@yahoo.com, Lecturer, Mass Communication Department, Faculty Of The Social Sciences, Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State, Nigeria.

This suggests that people who read online newspapers and use the information provided to gain control of their environment in different ramifications have the likelihood to attain human development than people who do not. In other words, it may be assumed that readership of online newspapers can contribute to human development in Nigeria.

To read online newspapers, people need to have access to the Internet. One place in Nigeria where Internet accessibility can be expected is a university. Universities in Nigeria these days possess a lot of indicators of interactions with the Internet. Many university libraries provide access to online journals and other Internet-based resources. Payment of school fees and registration by students are now online in many Nigerian universities and some Nigerian universities even build "Browsing" charges into the fees payable by students. Members of staff interested in browsing the Internet through the universities' portals are charged and such charges are deducted at source from their salaries. Even where the university does not provide Internet services, many staff and students in Nigerian universities these days have their personal gadgets through which they connect to the Internet.

Statement of the Problem

The phenomenon of online newspapering in Nigeria has reached a stage where it can no longer be ignored. Consequently, a number of scholars have examined different aspects of the phenomenon. Oyero (2007) discusses how online newspapers have blurred the distinctions between newspaper as a read-alone medium and the broadcast media that can be listened to and/or watched. Adedina et al (2008) emphasize the prospects and challenges of online newspapers along-side other media of mass communication that explore the Internet to disseminate their contents. They aver that, in spite of the issues of lack of absolute gate keeping and redundancy arising out of the deluge of information occasioned by the use of the Internet to convey mass media contents, there are issues of easy, widespread and instant reach and instant feedback mechanisms associated with online newspapers. These, they say, make people read online versions of newspapers more than the hard copy versions.

In line with the submission that more people read online newspapers than traditional hard copy newspapers, Gapsiso (2008) points out those traditional newspapers are increasingly lured into reinventing themselves to explore the Internet in content delivery because online newspapers provide readers more information, with more depth and greater speed than the hard copy versions. Uwakwe (2010) discusses the features that distinguish online newspapers from traditional newspapers. He posits that the phenomenon of online newspapers make it possible for newspaper as a medium of mass communication to compete more effectively with radio and television. A sort of consensus exists among all the above cited works on online newspapers. They point to the convergence between the Internet and traditional newspaper publishing in its attempt to remain relevant in the face of growing opposition from the newer and more technology-based media of radio and television. That online newspapers have come to stay and that people read them are not issues that anyone should contest. Instead, the patterns of their readership and their impact in an environment where Internet connectivity is common, such as a Nigerian university, should be worthy of attention.

How much do members of the selected university communities in Nigeria know about, and read online newspapers? What factors determine the rate of readership of online newspapers in the selected universities in Nigeria? How does the readership of online newspapers in these universities affect the personal development of the readers? These questions represent obvious gaps in knowledge that this study attempted to fill

Objectives of the Study and Research Questions

This study is driven by the following objectives:

- 1 To find out which Nigerian online newspapers are common among members of the selected universities in Nigeria.
- 2 To find out how much staff and students in the selected Nigerian universities read online newspapers.
- 3 To ascertain what factors affect the readership of online newspapers among staff and students of the selected Nigerian universities.
- 4 To determine the ways that readership of online newspapers among staff and students of the selected Nigerian universities contribute to their human development.

In pursuit of the above objectives, this study is built around the search for answers to the following research questions:

- 1 Which Nigerian online newspapers are common among staff and students of the selected universities in Nigeria?
- 2 How much do staff and students of the selected Nigerian universities read online newspapers?
- 3 What factors affect the readership of online newspapers among staff and students of the selected Nigerian universities?
- 4 How does the readership of online newspapers among staff and students of the selected Nigerian universities contribute to human development?

Scope of the Study

This study was limited in scope to staff and students of the University of Benin, and Benson Idahosa University, both in Benin City, Edo State; and Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State. These universities were deliberately focused on because they represent the three tiers of universities in the same geo-politico and cultural zones in Nigeria (i.e federal universities; private universities; and state universities) as Edo and Delta states belong to the defunct Bendel State. Another area of limitation in scope in this study was the online newspapers whose readership was investigated. This study enquired into the readership of online versions of Nigerian newspapers only. The study is also limited in scope to the staff and students in the selected Nigerian universities who read online versions of Nigerian newspapers from August 2014 to January 2015 (i.e. over a six-month period).

Overview of Online Newspapers

The marriage between a computer network (Internet) and newspaper readership is said to have been contracted on July 1, 1980 (Bittner, 2003). According to him, the first newspaper to offer readers electronic contents via the computer was the 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 data base and access online versions of the *Columbus Dispatch* newspaper.

Today, online newspapers are common features. Many (if not all) national newspapers in Nigeria now offer electronic versions through the Internet in addition to their traditional hard copy newspapers, while some newspapers offer only online versions (Uwakwe, 2010; Mbachu, 2003). At the last count, no fewer than 50 Nigerian newspapers were available online (www.onlinenewspapers.com/Top50/Top50-CurrentNigeria.htm).

The emergence of online newspapers is no doubt a product of technological innovations. In the words of Hanson (2005: 147), "Evolving technology has brought changes to newspaper business". In the beginning, online newspapers merely offered electronic versions of their hard copy contents (Mbachu, 2003). This form of publishing online newspapers is still visible today as pointed out by Ganiyu (2011). His study reveals that Nigerian newspapers publish their online versions by "cut and paste". What this means is that they cut stories from hard copy versions and paste them on their websites such that the contents of both their online and hard copy versions read the same.

However, online newspapers can be much more than cut and paste from hard copy versions of newspapers. One manifestation of this lies in the highly interactive nature of online newspapers, as a result of the interactivity that the Internet permits. Interactivity in online newspaper is instant. This is because there is an interactive portal contained in online newspaper websites that permit readers to post their comments on every report with minimum delay. These posts become interactive as subsequent posts react to both the news story and the earlier posts from other readers. In traditional hard copy newspaper versions, interactivity is accommodated under 'letters-to-the-editor' and these normally take time to be published. On the other hand, readers of online newspapers do not need to wait long before their comments on news stories are published.

Besides the benefit of instant interactivity made possible by the Internet, online newspapers overcome the constraint of circulating hard copy newspaper versions by transportation, with its concomitant loss in time (Nwanne, 2007). Online newspapers are accessible all over the world immediately they are published and this achieves great circulation speed.

Another feature of online newspapers which doubles as a benefit is the possibility of depth of news stories and multi-media presentations. Multi-media presentation refers to the possibilities of presenting Internet contents with a combination of more than one of the mass communication modes of text, still photography, audio, and audio-visual. With multi-media presentations in online newspapers, specific section of a news story may have hyper-links that enable the reader to navigate to other sections of the Internet and read more texts, view more photographs, listen to audio and/or watch motion picture related to the news story. This makes it possible to listen to and/or watch online newspaper contents. No wonder it has been said that online media contents blur distinctions among media modes of mass communication (Ijeh, 2008). These multi-media possibilities in online newspapers give their news stories greater depth than news stories contained in the traditional hard copy versions.

The foregoing notwithstanding, online newspapers have their constraints, especially in a country like Nigeria. Gapsiso (2008) outlines some of the constraints facing online newspaper publishing and readership in Nigeria to include monetary restraints; poor telecommunication services; and electricity. It is common knowledge that to publish and/or read online newspapers, both the newspaper and its readers must have access to requisite technology. This therefore means that for both the newspaper publishers to commence/sustain online publication, and for members of the public to read same, they must be financially able to procure information and communication technologies (ICTs) infrastructure which are not cheap.

Aside from having access to telecommunication infrastructure that supports the publishing and readership of online newspapers, there is the challenge of poor Internet services in Nigeria. It is not uncommon to find Internet users in the country complaining of facing a lot of frustrations in their efforts to access online materials as a result of unsteady Internet connections or slow pace of opening/downloading selected websites. Perhaps the most daunting constraint of publishing and readership of online newspapers in Nigeria is poor electricity supply. It is widely believed that poor electric power supply is a major infrastructural lapse in Internet related communication in Nigeria as a substantial part of the gadgets involved are electronic appliances (Ijeh, 2008; Eze, 2007; Idemili and Sambe, 2007). The frequent disruptions in electricity supply and fluctuating voltages which endanger electronic appliances pose a big problem to the business of online newspapers in Nigeria, especially in the area of readership by members of the public.

Concept of Human Development through Access to Information

To explore the relationship between information and human development, it is pertinent to first understand what the term information stands for in the context of this study. Agudoso (2007) sees information as the message and meaning that is passed from one person to another (i.e. source and recipient) in the process of communication. From another perspective, Enighe and Ehu (2008) see information as the source of the knowledge and intelligence that individuals or groups need to make the right decisions. From the above definitions, it can be inferred that information represents messages, ideas and meanings shared among persons engaged in a communication process, which provide them with knowledge and intelligence needed to make right decisions.

Information is therefore imperative to gain control of one's environment as it is vital in making right decisions. By extension therefore, information stimulates development since it enables people to make the most of the resources available to them in order to attain greater control of their environment and achieve states of human well-being (Anorue et al, 2012). No wonder intelligence (information) gathering is critical to the success or failure of strategists in all spheres of human endeavours. This also conforms to the common parlance: "Information is power". This idea has been phrased differently in the slogan: "Be informed or be deformed". The bottom-line here is that information is necessary for humans to attain self-development which manifests in their individual and/or collective well-being. So it can be safely assumed that the more one has access to the right information, the more likely one is to attain human development by making the right decisions and gaining greater control of one's environments in all its ramifications.

The issue of access to the right information brings us to the place of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the pursuit of human development. ICTs refer to all the modern improvements in the area of communication at all levels that facilitate the acquisition, organization, storage, manipulation, processing, and transmission of information (Enighe and Ehu, 2008; Agudoso, 2007). In the business of mass communication, De Fleur and Dennis (1988) see ICTs as new media and distribution systems that either contribute to, or compete with the traditional modes of mass communication. This is where online newspapers fit in.

Online newspapers, by virtue of their being classified under ICTs, are newer mass media content distribution systems that are both contributing to the provision of newspaper contents to readers while at the same time competing with traditional hard copy versions of newspapers. Online newspapers have brought about significant improvements in the ways and manner that readers consume newspaper contents. As a branch of ICTs, they have engendered great hopes in the ways people access and respond to information and these have in turn brought about great transformations in people's lives. This is because online newspapers, utilizing the possibilities of ICTs (i.e widespread reach, speed, convenience, quantity and quality as well as interactivity) allow readers to seek out specific contents that best improves their lives. Online newspapers make readers who were formerly on-lookers now more active participants by the two-way flow of information that they allow. This is because readers of online newspapers have the opportunities to access global news, interrogate news sources, and learn more through interactivity. These have imports for human development as the readers have access to more diverse and personally relevant information and can be more easily influenced by information sharing process that they have participated in. With this, people become better and more quickly informed and positively influenced by shared information (Anorue et al, 2012; McQuail, 2007).

In view of the understanding that access to information facilitates human development, it can be assumed that readership of online newspapers can greatly help readers attain self development. This assumption is predicated on the notion that online newspapers, as a branch of ICTs enable people access and share information in such a way that they become better and more quickly informed. Since information helps in acquiring knowledge and intelligence to make right decisions that enable people gain greater control of their environments and make the most of available resources, becoming better and more quickly informed through readership of online newspapers can greatly enhance human development individually and/or collectively.

Media System Dependency Theory

This study is anchored on the Media System Dependency Theory. The theory is reported to have been propounded in 1976 by the duo of Sandra Ball-Roach and Melvin De Fleur (Uwakwe, 2010; Anaeto, Onabajo and Osifeso, 2008). The core notion of the Media System Dependency Theory is that the more a person depends on having his/her information needs met by media use, the more important the media's role will be in his/her life and the more influence the media will ultimately have on him/her (Baran and Davies, 2003). What this indicates, according to Obaje (2011), is that the more a person relies on a particular medium (like online newspaper) to meet his/her information needs, the more important the role online newspaper plays in his/her life will be, and as a result, the more he/she will be influenced (by online newspapers). Uwakwe (2010) extends the scope of the theory to include the assumption that the audience depends on media information to meet set goals. Consequently, the degree of audience dependency on information from the mass media varies and the more dependent members of the audience are on the media, the more influence the media will have on them.

Some basic principles or assumptions have been identified with the Media System Dependency Theory. However, those summarized by Anaeto et al (2008) and Baran and Davies (2003) are outlined below to enable us pinpoint relationships between the theory and readership of online newspapers in Nigeria:

1. The basis of media influence on the audience lies in a relationship among the larger society, the media's role and the members of the audience.
2. In contemporary societies, people are becoming increasingly dependent on information from the media to understand the world, act meaningfully and effectively, and to relax.
3. Members of the audience depend more on the media when social changes and conflicts are high and less when society is relatively stable.
4. Members of the audience do not depend on any particular medium equally.
5. The needs of individual members of the audience are not always strictly personal but may be shaped by culture and other social conditions.
6. The more alternatives members of the audience have to meet their needs the less dependent they will be on any particular medium.

7. Members of the audience would depend more on a medium that meets more of their needs and less on a medium that meets less need.
8. Members of the audience must depend on information from the media to meet set goals before they can be influenced by the media.
9. The greater the needs of members of the audience and consequently the stronger their dependency on the media, the greater the chances that they will be influenced by media contents.

The basic assumptions of the Media System Dependency Theory outlined above indicate that online newspapers, as part of the mass media, influence readers as a result of the relationships among the social realities and the online newspapers and their readers. This means that social realities such as availability and accessibility of ICTs contribute to how much people would depend on online newspapers to meet information needs. The theory also indicates that people in modern societies, including Nigeria, are becoming increasingly dependent on information from the mass media to understand their world, gain greater control of their environments, make right decisions, and act meaningfully and effectively. These, no doubt, are parameters of human development and it is interesting to see how much people depend on online newspaper for these. Still on the society, the Media System Dependency Theory advocates that the audience would depend more on the media for information in a state of social instability than otherwise. This suggests that readers of online newspapers would read online newspapers more during periods of social changes and uncertainties and less when society is relatively stable. In other words, the state of apprehension in the social can be a factor in the rate of readership of online newspapers.

Another basic postulation of the Media System Dependency Theory that can apply to readership of online newspapers is that readers do not depend on any particular online newspaper on equal basis. This means that readers have their preferences among available online newspapers at every point in time. However, the theory also quickly points out that the information needs of individual readers that ultimately determine their dependencies are not absolutely personal. These individual needs may be shaped by culture and social conditions such as group/peer tastes, level of technological development of the society, need to actively participate in social interactions and availability of alternatives, among others. This brings to the fore the issue alternatives to online newspapers in meeting readers information needs. Media System Dependency Theory suggests that the more readers of online newspapers have alternatives in meeting their information needs, the less the degree of dependence. In the same vein, the theory indicates that media consumers would depend more on online newspapers if the latter meets more of the former's needs and less on alternatives that meet less need.

All of the above point to the basic assumption that members of the audience must be exposed to contents of online newspapers in order for them to be influenced. This exposure is usually driven by a quest to meet information needs. As a result, the theory postulates that the greater the needs of readers of the online newspaper medium, and consequently the stronger their dependence on the mass medium, the greater the chances that they would be influenced by the contents of the online newspaper medium.

Methodology

This study adopted the survey method of research described as the best method available to social researchers interested in collecting data to investigate phenomena in a population too large to observe directly (Ojebode, Onekutu and Adegbola, 2010). The study population was staff and students of the selected Nigerian universities, from which a sample of 40 respondents was purposively selected from each of the three universities to give us a sample size of 120. i.e. only people who have read Nigerian newspapers online over a six-month period spanning from August 2014 to January 2015 responded to the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

Out of the 120 copies of questionnaire distributed, 101 copies were found usable for the study. This represents a Questionnaire Return Rate of 84.2%. The remaining 19 copies of the questionnaire (15.8%) were either not returned or not properly filled. Data generated with reference to the first research question in this study (i.e. which online newspapers are common among staff and students of the selected Nigerian universities?) indicate that members of the university community in Nigeria are familiar with a total of 36 Nigerian newspapers online. In this regard, respondents were first asked to indicate Nigerian newspapers online known to them and thereafter asked to indicate which three out of the Nigerian newspapers online they had read the most within the period under review.

A breakdown of data in this direction indicate that the online version of the *Vanguard* is most common among staff and students of universities in Nigeria with 86 of respondents (85.2%) indicating that they are familiar with it and 76 (75.3%) of them saying it is one of their most read online newspaper. The data further indicate that the online versions of the *Punch Newspaper*, *Guardian Newspaper*, *Sun Newspaper*, and the *Nation Newspaper* made it into the first five most common and most read online newspapers among staff and students of universities in Nigeria, while the online versions of *Advocate*, *Oracle*, *Daily Journal*, *Business Day*, *Daily Post*, *Financial Standard*, *PM News*, *Daily News*, *Champion Newspaper*, *News Online*, and *Daily Sports* were indicated as least common as each of them had only 1 respondent mentioning them among online newspapers known and none of the respondents indicating that any of the concerned online newspapers falls among those most read within the period under review. The data is tabulated below:

Table 1: Online Newspapers Known and Most Read in Selected Nigerian Universities

Sn	Online Newspaper	Known	Most Read	Sn	Online Newspaper	Known	Most Read
1	Vanguard	86	76	2	Punch	59	29
3	Guardian	48	24	4	Sun	35	18
5	Nation	22	14	6	This Day	21	10
7	Tribune	21	6	8	Daily Times	11	6
9	Complete Sports	7	3	10	Observer	6	2
11	Sahara Reporters	6	1	12	Compass	4	1
13	Information Daily	3	1	14	Daily Independent	3	1
15	Pointer	2	2	16	Daily Trust	2	1
17	News Times	2	-	18	Leadership	2	-
19	Nigerian News Desk	1	1	20	Nairaland	1	1
21	Nigerian Entertainment	1	1	22	Pilot	1	1
23	Discus	1	1	24	24 News Africa	1	1
25	Today's News	1	1	26	Advocate	1	-
27	Daily Sports	1	-	29	News Online	1	-
29	Champion	1	-	30	Daily News	1	-
31	PM News	1	-	32	Financial Standard	1	-
33	Daily Post	1	-	34	Business Day	1	-
35	Daily Journal	1	-	36	Oracle	1	-

The above data shows that of the 36 Nigerian newspapers online, *Vanguard*; *Punch*; *Guardian*; *Sun*; *The Nation*; *This Day*; *Tribune*; *Daily Times*; *Complete Sports*; and *Observer* fall into the ten most known, and most read in the selected universities in Nigeria.

Research Question 2 enquired into how much staff and students of the selected Nigerian universities read online versions of Nigerian newspapers. Emanating data from respondents indicate that majority of them (i.e. 31 respondents, representing 30.7%) spend less than 20% of their browsing time reading Nigerian newspapers online. This is followed by those who spend between 40-59% of their browsing time reading Nigerian online newspapers (27: 26.7%); and another 22 respondents (21.8%) who use between 20-39% of the time they spend online reading online versions of Nigerian newspapers. 12 respondents (11.9%) and another 8 respondents (7.9%) said they dedicate between 60-79% and between 80-99% of the time they spend online to reading Nigerian newspapers online. Only 1 respondent (1%) indicated that 100% of browsing time is spent reading online versions of Nigerian newspapers. The pie chart below illustrates the data:

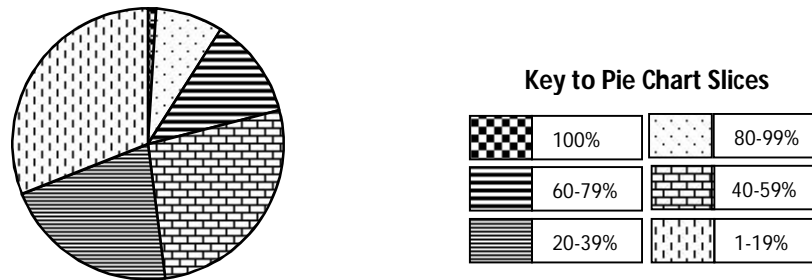


Figure 1: Pie Chart Showing How Much Staff and Students of Selected Nigerian Universities Read Online Versions of Nigerian Newspapers.

The distribution above shows that more than half of the respondents (i.e. 53 [52.5%]) spend less than 40% of total browsing time reading Nigerian online newspapers.

The third research question in this study is what factors affect the readership of online newspapers among staff and students of the selected Nigerian universities. The factors identified by respondents were grouped into two – factors that encourage readership; and factors that discourage readership. Respondents were allowed to indicate more than one of the two groups of factors. Accordingly, total frequency of factors indicated was 173 (i.e. Encouraging factors = 65 and discouraging factors = 108). The data is set out in the bar chart below:

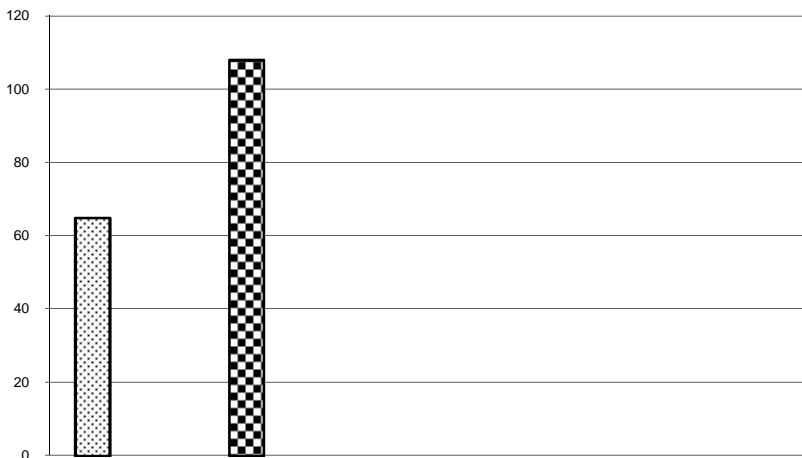


Figure 2: Bar Chart Showing Factors Encouraging and Factors Discouraging Readership of Online Newspapers among Staff and Students of Selected Nigerian Universities

Figure 2 above clearly shows that factors that discourage readership of online newspapers in the selected Nigerian universities are more than factors that encourage it. Among factors identified as encouraging the readership of Nigerian online newspapers among staff and students of the selected Nigerian universities, the general quest for information on all aspects of life including information on opportunities for personal development such as job vacancies or business openings is most prominent. This is because 23 respondents (35.4%) identified it as a factor affecting their readership of online newspapers. This is followed by the need to keep abreast with local events (8; 12.3%); easy access to online newspapers (6: 9.6%); research purposes (6: 9.2%); availability of internet infrastructure (4: 6.2%); and curiosity (4:6.2%). Factors encouraging readership of online newspapers among staff and students of the selected Nigerian universities are tabulated in descending order below:

Table 2: Factors Encouraging Readership of Nigerian Online Newspapers among Staff and Students of Nigerian Universities

SN	FACTORS ENCOURAGING READERSHIP	F	%
1	Quest for general information	23	35.4
2	Keeping abreast with local events	8	12.3
3	Easy access to online newspapers	6	9.2
4	Research purposes	6	9.2
5	Availability of internet infrastructure	4	6.2
6	Curiosity	4	6.2
7	Update of global events	3	4.6
8	Faster to read online versions than hard copy versions	3	4.6
9	Comparative low cost of online versions over hard copy versions	2	3.1
10	Seeking clarifications of information from other media sources	1	1.5
11	Prevailing issues in society	1	1.5
12	Catching-up with missed news from other news sources	1	1.5
13	Knowledge of new posts and need to check them out quickly	1	1.5
14	Activism	1	1.5
15	Attractive headlines	1	1.5
TOTAL		65	100

On the other hand, the most prominent factor reported to discourage readership of online newspaper among staff and students of Nigerian universities is poor network. This is indicated by the responses of 31 (28.7%) of the respondents. This is followed by 15 respondents (13.9%) who identified the high cost of procuring gadgets, internet connectivity, and airtime as discouraging factors. Others are absence of Internet network service (13: 12%); demands of other engagements and responsibilities (10: 9.3%); lack of interest in news generally (7: 6.5%); Internet illiteracy (6: 5.6%); and poor electricity power supply (5: 4.6%). Factors discouraging staff and students of the selected Nigerian universities from reading Nigerian newspapers online can be seen in descending order in Table 3 below:

Table 3: Factors Discouraging Readership of Nigerian Online Newspapers among Staff and Students of Selected Nigerian Universities

SN	FACTORS DISCOURAGING READERSHIP	F	%
1	Poor network	31	28.7
2	High cost of procuring gadgets, internet connectivity, and airtime	15	13.9
3	Absence of internet infrastructure	13	12
4	Demands of other engagements and responsibilities	10	9.3
5	Lack of interest in news generally	7	6.5
6	internet illiteracy	6	5.6
7	poor electricity power supply	5	4.6
8	Ready access to hard copies of newspapers	3	2.8
9	Availability of other internet applications such as chatting and social networking	3	2.8
10	Absence of regular updating of contents	3	2.8
11	Credibility problems of contents of online materials generally	3	2.8
12	Poor awareness of the existence and how to access online newspapers	3	2.8
13	Perception of reading online newspapers as a leisure activity	2	1.9
14	The possibilities of getting same news from other media sources	1	0.9
15	Incidences of exaggerations	1	0.9
16	Difficulty in accessing older contents of online newspapers	1	0.9
17	Too much advertisements	1	0.9
TOTAL		108	100

Tables 2 and 3 above show that the general quest for information on all aspects of life including information on opportunities for personal development such as job vacancies or business openings; the need to keep abreast with local events; easy access to online newspapers; research purposes; availability of Internet infrastructure; and curiosity are leading factors that encourage readership of online newspapers from Nigeria among staff and students in the selected universities in Nigeria. On the other hand, poor network; the high cost of procuring gadgets, Internet connectivity, and airtime; absence of Internet network service; demands of other engagements and responsibilities; lack of interest in news generally; Internet illiteracy; and poor electricity power supply are identified as discouraging factors.

Research Question 4 enquired into how the readership of Nigerian newspapers online has impacted on the human development of staff and students of the selected Nigerian universities. Data was generated in this regard with a 4-point likert scale item in the questionnaire used in this study. For easy analysis and interpretation, the data with computations of percentages for comparisons is set out in the table below:

Table 4: Aggregate of Impact Level of Nigerian Newspapers Online on Staff and Students of Nigerian Universities.

SN	Possible Impact	Observations				Total
		Impact		No Impact		
		SA	A	D	SD	
1	Enriched readers knowledge on important issues	47	44	6	2	99
2	Enabled readers to enlighten others on important issues	36	54	7	1	98
3	Enabled readers correct impressions on issues reported	29	50	20	1	100
4	Reinforced readers notions on issues reported	32	53	15	0	100
5	Influenced readers to take appropriate actions on issues reported	17	46	27	5	95
Total of Frequencies and Percentages		161	247	75	9	492
		32.7%	50.2%	15.3%	1.8%	
		408 (82.9%)		84 (17.1%)		100%

Table 4 above indicates that the readership of Nigerian newspapers online had significant impact on staff and students in the selected Nigerian universities within the period under review. This is evident from the observation that a total of 408 responses (i.e. 82.9%) indicated that the readership of the online newspapers had impact on them in the human development areas of enriching their knowledge on important issues and enabling them to enlighten others on important issues. Other human development areas of impact are enabling them to correct their impressions on issues, reinforcing their notions on issues and influencing them to take appropriate actions on issues reported. On the contrary, 84 responses (17.1%) indicated that the readership of online newspapers had no impact.

Discussion of Findings

Findings in this study reveal that Nigerian newspapers have an appreciable presence online. This is based on the fact that staff and students of the selected Nigerian universities identified with at least 36 of them, out of which they indicate 24 of them as most read. This finding agrees with the submission of Adedina et al (2008) that online newspapers are common in Nigeria. However, the study indicates that more than half of the staff and students in the selected Nigerian universities spend less than 40% of their browsing time reading Nigerian newspapers online. Reasons for this are contained in the answer to Research Question 3, but suffice it to say here that this low level of readership tallies with issues examined under the assumptions of the Media Dependency Theory that the levels at which the audience depend on any medium are influenced by social conditions of the audience. Social conditions in this context refer to the availability, affordability, and efficiency of the infrastructure that facilitate internet access.

Another finding indicates that there are more factors discouraging readership of online newspapers in the selected universities in Nigeria than factor that encourage it. This explains the low readership. These factors include monetary, technological, network, and electricity restraints, which as noted by Gapsiso (2008), have always posed a challenge to effective utilization of ICTs in newspapering in Nigeria.

In spite of these discouraging factors, a number of respondents indicated that the general quest for information on all aspects of life including information on opportunities for personal development such as job vacancies or business openings; the need to keep abreast with local events; easy access to online newspapers; research; availability of internet infrastructure; and curiosity encourage their readership of online versions of Nigerian newspapers.

This upholds the assumption of the Media Dependency Theory that members of the audience do not depend on any particular medium equally. This explains why some respondents indicated weak dependency on Nigerian online newspapers, while others indicated strong dependency.

The study observed a high impact level of Nigerian newspapers online on the human development of staff and students in the selected Nigerian universities who read them. This appears as strange because according to the Media Dependency Theory, impact of Nigerian online newspapers is supposed to be high only when the dependency of members of the audience on them is strong. How come that an impact level of 82.9% is observed whereas more than half of the respondents say they spend less than 40% of their browsing time reading Nigerian newspapers online? A possible explanation of this phenomenon is that respondents demonstrated strong inclinations toward readership of Nigerian newspapers online but are constrained by circumstances beyond their control. In other words, they can be said to actually have strong dependency on Nigerian newspapers online but are not able to read them as much as they would have loved to. In this way, the chances that they would be influenced by even the little they read from Nigerian newspapers online are high.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study set out to find out how much staff and students in the selected universities in Nigeria know about and read Nigerian newspapers online. The study establishes the fact that online newspapers from Nigeria are well-known and read by staff and students of selected Nigerian universities. However, these online newspapers have not completely displaced the hard copy versions of newspapers in Nigeria as some are still preferred over online versions and/or read side-by-side. In fact, some respondents indicated that they visit online newspapers' websites only to check headlines but read the full stories in hard copy versions.

Another area of interest in this study was to ascertain the factors that affect readership of Nigerian newspapers online. The general quest for information on all aspects of life including information to keep abreast with contemporary events; easy access to online newspapers; research; availability of Internet infrastructure; and curiosity encouraged readership. On the other hand, the high cost of procuring gadgets, poor Internet connectivity, and airtime; absence of internet network service; demands of other engagements and responsibilities; lack of interest in news generally; Internet illiteracy; and poor electricity power supply discouraged readership, to the point that many staff and students of the selected universities in Nigeria spend less than 40% of the browsing time reading online newspapers. The above notwithstanding, readership of online newspapers among staff and students of Nigerian universities recorded very high impact. This is an indication that the level of audience dependency on online versions of Nigerian newspapers is high in spite of the fact that circumstances beyond their control force them to spend short time reading online newspapers.

Arising from the findings of this study, the following recommendations have become necessary:

1. Efforts should be made to shore up the credibility of contents of Nigerian newspapers online
2. Efforts should be made to update the contents of Nigerian newspapers online to keep them fresh and valuable.
3. Nigerian newspapers online should advertise their media more online especially on social network sites where many young people spend most of their browsing time.
4. Efforts must be geared up to improve Internet network service provision in Nigeria.
5. Efforts must be made to improve on the present dismal state of public electricity power supply in Nigeria.
6. Efforts should be made to make internet connectivity available and affordable in Nigeria.
7. More newspaper publishers in Nigeria should be encouraged to go online.
8. There should be better management of Nigerian online newspaper sites and contents.
9. There should be regular research on readership of online versions of Nigerian newspapers.

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