Newspapers' Readership among College of Agriculture Students in Oyo State

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Abstract

Development practitioners are constantly in search of appropriate media to reach specific target groups in the development process. Newspapers are relatively more suitable for the literates. This study therefore investigated the readership of newspapers among college of agriculture students in Oyo state. A total of 162 respondents were randomly selected and administered with questionnaire on areas such as newspapers reading status, types of newspapers read, frequency of reading of newspapers, preferred newspaper segment, information sourced and constraints to readership of newspapers. Descriptive statistics, chi-square and PPMC were used to analyse the collected data. Results show that many of the respondents (64.8%) read newspapers with The Punch being most read (39.1%). Many respondents (43.8%) read weekly, while news segment was the most preferred (40 points) by the respondents. Also, educational (120 points) and agricultural information (117 points) topped the list of information sought by the respondents while cost was the most limiting factor (85.8%) in the readership of newspapers. Respondents' sex ($X^2 = 13.25$, $p \leq 0.05$), sponsorship ($X^2 = 15.58$, $p \leq 0.05$) and level of study ($r = -0.22$, $p \leq 0.05$) were significantly related to frequency of reading. Information targeted at students will be more likely received if packaged in the news form while access to newspapers could be improved by stocking of college libraries with newspaper copies for free reading.

Key words: Readership, Newspaper segment, Reading status, Preferred segments

INTRODUCTION

Development in the present age is technology-driven. New technologies and more efficient ways of doing things are being discovered faster than they are being adopted. The gap created between technology development and adoption is partly due to information deficit (Nwachukwu, 2003). Therefore, development practitioners all over the world are consistently searching for appropriate media for the dissemination of useful development-related information. Media studies have shown that various segments of the population respond to media types differently (Abdulraheem, Adisa and La'aro, 2012) and as such, media for development are chosen with the belief that they have characteristics which are appealing to the targeted audiences.

Among the media of communication, the newspaper has a perennial presence. It is one of the oldest media of communication which still abides with us in spite of the development and evolution of the media. Norris (2000) opined that in spite of the decade-long prediction of the impending demise of the newspapers in the United States premised on its dwindling readership among the youth and loss of advertising sales which are due to the emergence of the electronic media, their continued popularity and technological adaptation to new forms of production and distribution cannot be underestimated. The situation in Nigeria is similar to the above (Abdulraheem *et al*, 2012). This may be due to the fact that newspapers are durable and are referential in scope as messages found in them can be revisited whenever they are needed unlike the radio and television which are transient in nature and cannot be referred to unless recorded.

According to Oladele (2009), newspaper provides up-to-date information on local, state, national, and world affairs. It gives the most current analysis and criticism on executive and

legislative decision-making; the latest in music, theatre, television, and fine arts; and even columns and comics to make people laugh. *The Economist* described a newspaper as a package of content—politics, sport, share prices, weather and so forth—which exists to attract eyeballs to advertisements (Communications management, 2011).

Newspapers can be used to support agricultural development and its related issues could influence the public understanding of and participation in the agricultural policy process (Lightfoot, 2003). They can provide information regarding agricultural issues and events to the non-farming public, which now use this information to gain knowledge about and make decisions regarding agricultural issues facing the agriculture industry. Agricultural related issues in newspapers may be captured as agricultural news; features or interviews while information related to new programmes and interventions in the area of agriculture are also covered by newspapers and can thus be brought to the attention of all stakeholders.

Students of agriculture have a major stake in agricultural development in Nigeria since they constitute the future of the sector. They are therefore expected to keep abreast of relevant information that could enhance their job prospects as well as lead to the development of the sector. Being literate, one would expect that a major hurdle in the use of newspapers as media of communication; literacy has been crossed. However, this assumption cannot be taken for granted. Hence, this study attempted to investigate the readership of newspapers among college of agriculture students in Oyo state with a view to ascertaining the appropriateness of the medium in reaching the future generation of agriculturists. According to Readership Institute (2013), newspaper readership is about how newspaper readers behave. This can be summarised into time, frequency and completeness. It is in line with this need that the following specific objectives were set to;

1. examine the newspaper reading status of the respondents
2. ascertain the types of newspapers read
3. investigate the frequency of reading newspapers
4. identify the preferred newspaper segments among the respondents
5. ascertain the preferred information sourced by the respondents
6. identify the constraints faced by students in accessing and reading newspapers
7. examine the relationship between personal characteristics and frequency of reading newspapers

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Federal College of Agriculture; Ibadan which happened to be the origin of formal agricultural training in Nigeria. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 30 percent of students in each of the five departments and at all the levels (ND I, ND II, HND I, and HND II) to arrive at a sample size of 162 respondents. Questionnaires were used to obtain data on socio economic characteristics of the respondents such as age, sex, marital status, educational level, sponsorship, type of information interested in, preferred segment, constraint in reading newspapers and readership of newspaper among the students.

Respondents were asked to state their actual age in years while information on sex of respondents was elicited as either male or female. Marital status was measured as single or married. Level of education was measured as ND I, ND II, HND I and HND II. Respondents were also asked to state whether they get their allowance monthly, weekly or daily while sponsorship was measured by asking if students were sponsored by their parent, guardian or self.

Respondents were also asked to specify the type of daily newspaper they preferred to read on a checklist provided. The respondents were also asked to rank the following information types to determine their preference: agricultural news, political scenario of Nigeria, social news, Entertainment (sports, fashion and arts), education, health, science (technology and environment), religion or business. The frequency of such was also asked as always, occasionally, and rarely.

The respondents were asked to rank the following newspaper sections to determine their preference: News, Editorials, Columns, Comics, Forecast, Interviews, or Critics. Frequency of readership was also elicited as always, occasionally and rarely while constraints were measured using the degree of severity on a-three point scale of very severe, moderately severe and not severe.

Descriptive statistics such as frequency counts and percentage distribution were used to summarise personal characteristics of respondents. Inferential statistics such as Chi-

Square and Pearson Product Movement Correlation (PPMC) were used to test the hypotheses of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Personal characteristics

According to Table 1, the mean age of the respondents was 22.0±3.4 years. More than half of the respondents (50.6%) were between 21-25 years of age, a considerable proportion (37.7%) was between 16-20 years, 10.5% were between 26-30 years while few (0.6%) were between 31-35 years and 0.6% were also between 41-45years. This implies that majority of the respondents are young, vibrant and they constitute active section of the community. This is in line with expectation, as the study was about students, majority of who are youth.

The respondents' distribution by sex shows that most (63.6%) of the respondents were males while 36.4% were females. This implies that male enrolment in the college is higher than that of female students. This may be due to the technical nature of the courses being offered in the college which are traditionally considered as male-related courses.

Majority (95.7%) of the respondents was found to be single while only 4.3% were married. This is not surprising as majority of the respondents were young and still in school.

It was also found that majority (64.2%) of the respondents was Christians and 34.6% were Muslims while only 1.2% of the respondents were traditional worshippers.

The breakdown of the respondents based on level of study reveals that 38.9% of the respondents were in ND I, 24.7% of the respondents in NDII, 17.3% of students in HND I and 19.1% in HND II. This shows a decline in enrolment of the students as they progress in classes. This may be due to demands from Universities and other higher institutions or due to students' attrition from institution due to some other reasons.

The distribution of the respondents based on sponsorship shows that most of the respondents (87.0%) were sponsored by their parents, 6.8% were sponsored by their guardian while 6.2% were self-sponsored. This may make newspaper reading status dependent on the economic status of the parents of the students who are responsible for the sponsorship of majority of the respondents.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents based on personal characteristics

Variable Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age: 16-20yrs	61	37.7
21-25yrs	82	50.6
26-30yrs	17	10.5
31-35yrs	1	0.6
41-45yrs	1	0.6
Marital status		
Single	103	95.7
married	59	4.3
Religion		
Christianity	104	64.2
Islam	56	34.6
Traditional	2	1.2
Level of study		
ND I	63	38.9
ND II	40	24.7
HND I	28	17.3
HND II	31	19.1
Sponsorship		
Parent	141	87.0
Guardian	11	6.8
Self	10	6.2

Newspapers' reading status

Table 2 shows that majority of the respondents (64.8%) read newspapers while 35.2% of the respondents do not read newspapers. This agrees with Aliagan (2011) that majority of the respondents in a newspaper readership survey were youth in the age range of 20 – 30 years. This implies a large newspaper reading status among the respondents and suggests that newspapers could be a veritable tool for information dissemination among the youth. However, the proportion of the students who do not read newspapers still calls for concern considering the important role of newspapers in information dissemination and total development of the mind.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents based on newspaper reading status

Reading status	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	105	64.8
No	57	35.2

Types of newspaper read

Table 3 shows that The Punch was the most read newspaper (39.1%) among the respondents. Nigerian Tribune and The Nation also had considerable proportions of readers of 20.9% and 13.3% respectively. Others include; Vanguard (6.7%), The Sun (5.7%), Guardian (4.8%) and Complete Sport (3.8%). Meanwhile, Daily Trust,

The Sport and Alaroye had (1.9%) each. This result is in line with the findings of Aliagan (2011) that majority of the respondents of his study ranked The Punch newspaper first among the newspapers sampled. This suggests that important information disseminated through The Punch newspapers will likely be received by a considerable number of the students.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents according to newspaper they read

Types of newspaper	Frequency	Percentage
The Nation	14	13.3
Nigerian Tribune	22	20.9
The Punch	41	39.1
The Sun	4	3.8
Complete Sport	5	4.8
Vanguard	7	6.7
Guardian	6	5.7
Daily trust	2	1.9
The sport	2	1.9
Alaroye	2	1.9
Total	**105**	**100**

Newspapers' reading frequency

Table 4 shows that majority of the respondents (43.8%) read newspaper on a weekly basis while a considerable proportion of the respondents (29.5%) read them daily. Meanwhile, quarterly readers constitute 15.2% of the reading population while monthly readers constitute 11.5% of the respondents' population. These findings reveal that majority of the respondents (71.5%) were not daily readers of the newspapers. This implies that relevant information disseminated on daily newspapers may not be received by the majority of the respondents on time until a week has passed or such information had become stale. This underscores the importance of archiving newspapers in the school libraries for future reading and referencing by students who did not read such papers when it was freshly circulated.

Table 4: Distribution of respondents according to frequency of reading newspaper

Reading period	Frequency	Percentage
Daily	31	29.5
Weekly	46	43.8
Monthly	12	11.5
Quaterly	16	15.2
Total	**105**	**100**

Preferred newspaper segment

Results in Table 5 show that news was the most preferred segment (40 points) among the respondents. Entertainment (37 points) and sports (36 points) segments equally ranked high in the order of preference among the respondents. This is in line with the findings of (Aliagan, 2011) which rated news as the number one item read by respondents in the newspapers. This suggests that the news segment could be a viable medium for passing intended development related messages across to the respondents.

Table 5: Distribution of respondents according to the segment of newspaper they read

Segment	Score	Rank
News	40	1st
Entertainment	37	2nd
Sport	36	3rd
Interview	31	4th
Forecast	31	5th
Comics	30	6th
Column	30	7th
Critics	6	8th
Editorial	5	9th

Distribution of respondents according to preferred information

Table 6 shows that educational information (120 points) was the most preferred information type among the respondents. Meanwhile agricultural information (117 points) also recorded high preference among the respondents while entertainment information (102 points) ranked third among other information types. The findings imply that educational and agricultural information relevant to the academic disciplines of the students motivated them to read newspapers, while entertainment also ranked high among the respondents' preferred information types. Hence, the newspapers will continue to be a useful source for the academic, recreational, and information needs of Nigerian students (Ola and Ojo, 2005).

Table 6: Distribution of respondents based on preferred information type

Information type	Score	Rank
Agriculture	117	2nd
Social	80	7th
Educational	120	1st
Health	83	4th
Business	42	9th
Religion	62	8th
Science	81	6th
Entertainment	102	3rd
Political	83	4th

Constraints to newspaper readership

Results in Table 7 show that although cost (85.8%) and objectivity (82.1%) were generally considered to be constraints limiting the readership of newspapers among the students, time (52.5%) and cost (43.2%) were found to be very severe constraints which limited readership of newspapers among most of the students. These imply that cost is an important factor limiting readership of newspapers among the students. The issue of cost may be due to the fact that the respondents were students who rely on their parents and guardians for money and have other pressing needs to spend money on, while time may be a constraint due to the effect of new media like twitter and short message services of breaking news which are currently being used to broadcast news.

Table 7: Distribution of respondents based on constraints to newspaper readership

Constraint Category	Not a constraint	Constraint Moderate	Very severe
Objectivity	17.9	47.5	34.6
Writing style	24.7	42.0	33.3
Time	18.5	29.0	52.5
Cost	14.2	42.6	43.2

Test of relationship between selected personal characteristics and frequency of reading of newspapers.

As shown in Table 8a and b, Chi-square and PPMC analyses reveal that selected personal characteristics such as sex ($\chi^2 = 13.25$, $p \leq 0.05$), sponsorship ($\chi^2 = 15.58$, $p \leq 0.05$) and level of study ($r = -0.22$, $p \leq 0.05$) were significantly related to frequency of reading. However, religion ($\chi^2 = 10.83$, $p \geq 0.05$), marital status ($\chi^2 = 13.25$, $p \geq 0.05$) and age ($r = -0.22$, $p \geq 0.05$) were not significantly related to frequency of reading.

These results indicate that sex, sponsorship and level of study of the respondents have implications on frequency of reading newspapers. The finding that sex and sponsorship have implications on frequency of reading newspapers agreed with Norris (2000) that sex and economic background are predictors of newspaper readership as men read newspaper more than women and the more affluent read newspapers more than the poor. The negative correlation between the level of study and frequency of reading newspaper implies that the higher the level of study, the lower the frequency of reading newspaper. This might be due to the fact that,

those in higher level of study gave more time to their studies than those in lower level of study because they are about to graduate. The lack of significance in the relationship between age and frequency of reading newspaper among the respondents may be due to the low variability in the ages of the respondents who are students and mostly in the same age bracket.

Table 8a: Chi-square analysis of selected personal characteristics and frequency of reading of newspapers

Personal Characteristics	Chi-square	p-value	Decision
Sex	13.249	0.001	S
Religion	10.834	0.068	NS
Marital status	13.378	0.051	NS
Sponsorship	15.584	0.004	S

Table 8b: PPMC analysis of selected personal characteristics and frequency of reading of newspapers

Personal Characteristics	r-value	p-value	Decision
Level of study	-0.221	0.005	S
Age	-0.040	0.615	NS

CONCLUSIONS

This study revealed that newspapers were read by many of the respondents on a weekly basis. The Punch had the largest reading population among the respondents and the news segments of the newspapers are the most preferred segments. Meanwhile, educational and agricultural information are highly sought by the respondents and cost is the most limiting factor to readership. Male students sponsored by their parents and those in lower levels of study have higher frequency of reading of the newspaper.

Relevant information targeted at the students could be packaged as news items in the Punch newspapers for enhanced readership among students while school libraries should set up special corners where students can have free access to newspapers at their leisure in order to reduce the constraints of time and cost faced by the students.

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