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# Patterns and Perceptions of Newspaper Reading among University of Ibadan Students

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## Abstract

*The assumption that Nigerian youths do not read newspapers is misleading as far as current technological development is concerned. The paper argues that University of Ibadan students read newspapers regularly but mostly from digital media platforms. Anchored on aspects of Selectivity and Uses and Gratifications theories, data were retrieved through focus group discussion and in-depth interview and findings reveal that students' exposure to media is driven by the desire to gratify their socio-economic and information needs. Newspaper readership is limited to current news, entertainment, human-angle stories, news headlines and news bits while preference of online versions is attributed to accessibility, availability, affordability, flexibility, interactivity and currency of news. In line with existing transformation of the newspaper industry, the Internet and mobile phones are playing key roles in enhancing students' news seeking and reading behaviour; however, there exists gender differentials in frequency and content of newspaper readership. The paper concludes that digitalization has implications for newspaper reading among young people and points to the need for technological adaptation in a changing news landscape.*

**Key Words:** newspaper readership, digitalization, online media, print media.

## Introduction

Newspaper reading patterns vary globally but the activity is often associated with old people. Although young people constitute a reading population with unique information needs, they are less likely to read print newspapers (Edmonds, Guskin, & Rosenstiel, 2011); hence, readership, especially among young people in

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Nigeria, is considered low and declining despite a newspaper industry of over 100 newspapers (Okafor, 2014). News professionals also assume that young people have lost interest in reading newspapers, and these assumptions may be linked to the fact that newspaper is often associated with print while sidelining other newspaper platforms and digital news. Messing and Westwood (2012) argue that socialization of Internet news alters the context in which news reading occurs. Technological changes and the Internet therefore affect news processing, dissemination and consumption.

Previous studies have examined aspects of newspaper readership, including reading habits and use (Aiagan, 2011; Devandra, 2011; Onuoha, Unegbu, & Umahi, 2013; Quadri & Abomoge 2013), readership of indigenous newspapers (Alabi, 2011) and online newspaper readership (Matthew, Ogedebe & Adeniji, 2013). They approached newspaper readership from isolated perspectives, neglecting the nuances of converging media, and positing that young people are not frequent readers of newspapers. Such notions are predetermined and emerge from popular ideologies that view newspaper as a short form of print newspaper. Accordingly, little is known about newspaper readership from diversified perspectives or converging media platforms in a globalized world.

This perception may be linked to the traditional definition of newspaper by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) as print on newsprint paper, without a cover, not bound, and may include supplements like colour magazines, or inserts for special features or events (CONSER, 2006). The definition insinuates that the newspaper is a physical substance that can be seen and held, and that commonly contains news, comments, features, and advertisements. Modern definition has, however, expanded its scope to accommodate the digital form, which is available online via the Internet. Readers of this version consider it as reading 'newspapers', hence, using paid-for newspapers alone to measure readership fails to capture newspaper reading because, the Internet changes the definition of different components of the mass communication process and their relationship (Baran, 2002; Andersen, 2005; Elvestad & Blekesaune, 2008). This paper conceptualizes newspaper as

printed and digital materials that provide news and information to the audience.

A holistic examination of the phenomenon from the traditional and non-traditional newspaper contexts is crucial to determining students' news-seeking and reading behaviour and the reasons for their choices. The paper examines newspaper reading patterns with a view to describing the preferred media and frequency of readership, the content and depth of reading, perceptions and gender differentials in newspaper reading, as well as the role of the Internet and mobile telephony in newspaper reading.

Print and electronic newspapers operate in Nigeria. Vanguard, The Punch, The Guardian, The Sun, The Nation, Thisday, and Complete Sports have been identified as those with the widest circulation, the first four and Nigerian Tribune being the top five Nigerian newspapers listed among the top 50 newspapers in Africa (International Media, 2014). Popular Nigerian newspapers with online pages include, The Guardian, Thisday, Punch and Vanguard. Readers can access them freely with Internet connection. Electronic (e), online and digital newspapers are used interchangeably while print and traditional newspaper refer to the conventional newspaper.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study was hinged on Selectivity Theories (Klapper, 1960) and complemented with Uses and Gratification Theory (Katz, 1959). These theories point out that the influence of the media on the public is conditional. Selectivity processes enable the audience to select the information to consume, remember and interpret in personally important ways (Baran, 2002). Selectivity occurs due to people's unique personal beliefs, attitudes, values, needs, and modes of gratification, and psychological mechanisms such as selective exposure (or attention), selective perception and selective retention helps explain this minimal effects. The audience is active in exercising choice and discrimination of media and its content and the mechanism of selective perception drives individuals to be more radical in their preferences (Jones, 2002; McQuail, 2010). The theories help explain newspaper



reading decisions, choices, behaviour, perception and media use of University of Ibadan students.

Selective exposure is the tendency of people to expose themselves to media messages and communications that are in agreement with their attitudes and interests (Severin & Tankard, 2000; Baran & Davis, 2003). It is the decision to pay more attention and process only information and situations considered pleasant, interesting or necessary because, people only expose themselves to or attend to messages that are consistent with their preexisting attitudes and beliefs (Baran, 2002). Media consumers, therefore, have more privileges to expose themselves to selected media and messages that agree with their opinions and attitudes, and engage in information that aligns with their own ideas.

Selective perception, on the other hand, predicts that people will interpret messages to suit their preexisting attitudes and beliefs (Baran, 2002). Media use is accounted for by the perception of the benefits and differential value of these benefits to individual audience members (McQuail, 2010). Selective influences are based on individual differences and affect the interpretation of media messages. Because perception is selective, interpretation of media messages is also selective and variable.

Uses and Gratifications Theory (U&G) provide more explanation concerning media use, behaviour, choices, gratifications sought and perceived gratifications obtained. The theory was first conceptualized by Katz (1959) who noted that all media use can be understood in terms of people's efforts to fill their needs in a way that satisfies or "gratifies" them. U&G explains why audiences engage in various forms of media behaviour, focusing on "what people do with media" rather than "what media does to people" (Katz et al, 1974:12; Katz, 1959). It explains why media are used and assumes that individuals will seek out different information and use them uniquely (Wei & Lo, 2006). The theory posits that media users are active in choosing their preferred channels and messages in order to satisfy their needs and interests.

This theoretical perspective enables understanding of preferred

media “features” and usages, and aids understanding of the use of every medium, including newspapers (Elliott & Rosenberg, 1987), television (Babrow, 1987; Conway & Rubin, 1991; Poindexter & Conway, 2003;), cable television (Heeter & Greenberg, 1985), email (Dimmick, Kline, & Stafford, 2000), and the Internet (Kaye & Johnson, 2002; Beaudoin & Thorson, 2004). Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974) and Rosengren (1974) suggest that U&G research should focus on central questions, which lead to different media choices and fulfillment of needs. These theoretical propositions will help explain newspaper reading patterns and perception of students, including media use, preferred media content, gender differentials and depth of readership.

### **Methods**

The descriptive research design utilized the qualitative approach in generating data on newspaper reading among undergraduates of the University of Ibadan. A triangulation of focus group discussion (FGD) and in-depth interview (IDI) provided detailed information on the phenomenon. Following Malthouse and Calder's (2002; 2004) proposal that different manifestations of newspaper readership behaviour be examined when trying to measure newspaper readership, multiple variables and methods were used to inquire how and why students read newspapers. The study was guided by these objectives: to determine the media and frequency of newspaper reading; to examine the content and depth of reading; to describe the perception of students concerning newspaper readership, to examine the role of the Internet and mobile telephony on newspaper reading; and to identify gender differentials in newspaper usage and reading choices.

For a holistic approach to unravelling the problem, ten IDIs and five FGDs of males and females were conducted in the Faculties of Arts, Social Sciences, Law, Agriculture and Technology. They provided deep and rich insights into the study phenomenon. Five IDIs each of males and females as well as two male and three female FGDs were conducted. Each FGD session was composed of six to eight discussants aged 16 to 24 years, reflecting the age structure of most undergraduates in the university. Using the



purposive sampling technique, samples were drawn from different levels for diversified viewpoints on the phenomenon.

Data were analyzed using ethnographic summaries and content analysis, which involved critical and systematic procedures, and synthesis of narrative information to derive verbal rather than statistical conclusions about newspaper readership among university students. The analysis was achieved through the processes of transcription, reading, cleaning, sorting, thematic grouping and interpretation of data to answer the evaluation questions.

### **Results**

The examination of newspaper reading behaviour among students in the University of Ibadan shows different patterns of readership. Although males and females submitted that newspaper reading is a good habit, they vary in frequency, content and use of the medium, hence, individuals differ in the way they interact with information and news media. Students read print and online newspapers but tilt towards digital news and media platforms while the reading of print newspaper is limited and opinionated.

### **Media and Frequency of Newspaper Reading**

The result indicates that University of Ibadan students use diverse newspaper platforms, including print, electronic, mobile phones and social media to acquire information. Reading of print newspapers is however uncommon relative to online newspapers, which are available “on the go” and “24/7”. Accordingly, most students described themselves as “e-readers” but are categorized as regular, occasional, exclusive and mixed newspaper readers based on frequency of newspaper reading. While most students are regular e-readers and occasional print readers, there exist a few exclusive online readers and mixed (electronic and print) readers. This readership pattern may be related to the study population (adolescents and young people), which is exploratory by nature and adapt easily to technological changes relative to their adult counterpart. These inherent tendencies expose students to the frequent use of the Internet for diverse activities, including online newspaper reading.



Developments in mobile telephony further expose young people to digital news and information. The tendency is for students to access newspaper content from Androids and smartphones, as well as subscribe to mobile networks for breaking news. Mobiles provide youths with easy access to online news, which threaten traditional newspaper visibility, acceptability and utilization. Accordingly, rather than gather around a newspaper stand to read headlines, new media provide readers with alternative platforms for accessing and discussing news. Students associated the readership of print newspapers with old people, parents and the working class, hence, no interviewee was identified as belonging to a newspaper readers' club. Rather, most male students access print newspapers from friends, school library and porters' lodge relative to females, who mostly access same from parents because of various reasons. Some girls disclosed:

I don't read newspapers in school, there is no time for that, but I read newspapers when I am on holiday because there will be time and somebody to buy it.

For now [in school], I don't read them [newspapers] because when I was at home, I had access to them.

The attitude of students to newspaper reading is largely influenced by their associations. Most students do not buy newspapers because of ownership of smart phones, subscription to online news, lack of interest, preference of the entertainment media, among others. Some of these opinions are presented, thus:

Female: Why should I buy newspapers when I have my phone?

Male: I can't just waste my money on that [newspapers]. I don't even know the price they sell it but I am not just interested [in print newspaper].

Female: I am subscribed to online newspapers and they provide me with the latest information about the happenings of the day. I scroll through my phone to read headlines and other reports that appeal to me.

- Female: I have never used my money to buy newspaper. It's not expensive but I will prefer using my money to buy something else like a magazine, ovation and entertainment-related stuff.
- Male: The only time I bought a newspaper was when I got a scholarship and my name was printed in the newspaper. I read newspapers regularly but I hardly buy except I actually need a copy.

For students, "Nothing is actually free but Internet is cheaper". If newspaper costs are reduced and feature youth-friendly contents, readership may increase. For instance, the creation of campus columns in weekend publications of national dailies attract readership. The Guardian and The Nation have weekly columns that focus on university life and this has contributed to the popularity of weekend newspapers among students.

Although regular reading of print newspaper was found to be unpopular, a few students create reading opportunities as observed by a male participant:

They [print newspapers] are not easily accessible to all students. What makes it accessible to me is that I am a library user. I read a lot and I like to read everything I see. I just pick it up ... That's why I can easily have access to it. Others may not be opportune because they don't visit such places.

Most students do not use university-provided newspapers because of the bureaucracy associated with accessing them. The limitations of print promote online newspaper readership as exposure to and use of the Internet for news, information, education, entertainment and interaction enable easy reading of national and international news. Media choice and reading frequency are therefore related to socioeconomic factors but technological advancement has created a ready platform for accessing and reading news with limited space, time, and financial barriers.

### **Content and Depth of Newspaper Reading**

The findings reveal that the content and depth of newspaper reading depend on people's disposition, interests, values and

needs. Students expose themselves to particular news items and are selective in the proportion of read items. Undergraduates mostly read breaking news, current affairs, entertainment, fashion, sports, health and human angle stories relative to science and technology, editorials, features and opinion articles. On the depth of reading, students described themselves as "headline readers" because their reading is mostly limited to news headlines and complemented with first paragraph of stories and news bits. Although this reading behaviour is applicable to males and females, there exist readership peculiarities among them. While males are more inclined to sports news, females expose themselves to entertainment and human angle stories.

Their process of news selection is however similar as they begin by scanning through news headlines to determine which stories to pay attention to. Female interviewees from the Faculty of Arts noted that girls glance through newspapers all the time, indicating that in-depth readership of print newspaper is minimal due to unavailability of time to read lengthy news stories. Among all the participants, only a male and female indicated occasional reading of all newspaper pages due to lack of reading materials, boredom and the need for relaxation. The male submitted:

All types of newspapers are bought [in the library]. So most times, if I am going to read and I have read for some time, and I want to cool off, I can just get newspapers and read, maybe read the headlines and some of the stuff there.

Irrespective of how and why newspapers are accessed, headlines remain the core reading portion among undergraduates. As indicated in their utterances and captured by a male participant:

I have some friends who are studying Political Science. They are in final year, so sometimes, they buy [newspaper] and when I get to their room, I just pick it up, and am like 'let me just check the headlines' and all that.

Another male reiterated:

I pick stories, headlines. I don't read from beginning to end. Sports, that one is sure...



For the female:

I don't read from cover to cover, just some particular sections like sports, entertainment, and maybe general headlines ... I read the major headlines.

Students are selective readers. They choose headlines and contents that appeal to them amidst competing information. Since most students read newspapers that belong to other people, selective reading is employed to save time but have an idea of reported news of the day. Contrary to widely held opinion, students care about news and read newspapers. Majority of them enjoy reading articles that deal with current national issues, including abduction, kidnapping, bomb blasts, robbery, electoral violence and plane crash. A female student observed:

I will read a newspaper, if it's today's newspaper and would read if there is Boko Haram news and catchy headlines like, kidnapping and armed robbery.

Although males and females hold similar views concerning newspaper readership, females have more diversified reading content than males. While males read more of sports stories, females read entertainment, cartoon, fashion and lifestyle. The only female that reads sport news do so by virtue of her status as a footballer. The decision of students to read particular newspaper content is driven by their desire to use media in meeting their need of information at minimal cost.

### **Perceptions of Students on Newspaper Reading**

Reading of print newspaper is unpopular despite students' views that newspaper reading is important and could improve reading skills and academic performances. The few regular print readers do so because traditional newspapers provide them with in-depth information through its detailed reportage of national issues. A male interviewee attributed his print readership behaviour to his earlier exposure to this type of newspaper in his workplace and the desire to be informed about his environment. Accordingly:

I read newspapers every day because in Nigeria, you have to be conscious so you know where to walk and where not to walk. Because of insecurity in the country, you have to be

alert at every time. I make sure I get information ..., actually I don't buy [newspaper] because I have other sources I get my information.

Highlighting, a female discussant noted:

There are so many things in the newspapers..., you'll know our economic situation, know about Boko Haram...Not everything is placed online but most of it is in the newspapers, so, you can just grab and read in full details ...Most online news is like a video, so you have download, do this, do that, but for the newspapers [print], you just go through it direct. There is no room to download this and that.

It is instructive to note that the term 'newspaper' is mostly used to describe the print form. What drives its readership is the need for deep insights into the social, economic and political issues of the nation. Although the reasons provided by regular print readers remain viable, perceptions of occasional readers vary as their irregularity of reading print newspaper is attributed to the assumption that print newspapers are boring, costly and provide information that depresses its readers. For this group of readers, the content, cost, time constraints, emotional factors, insincerity, among others, restrain them from regular reading of print newspapers. A female discussant observed:

I do not read newspapers because, they keep painting fake scenarios of Nigeria. For instance, the Chibok girls' story. Today, they will say 234 girls were abducted and tomorrow they will say another thing. They are liars. I prefer foreign news from Forbesonline.com. It shows me the change I want to see in my country.

Reiterating, a male student added:

I don't buy newspapers with my money, where I will be reading where different people are embezzling Nigerian money. I will now be spending my money on buying rubbish.

The detailed content of print newspapers attract readership among some students but repulses others. Although students

read print newspapers because of their need for national information, some do not read because of the type of information it contains. The reading of newspaper is not only based on selective exposure but perception and interpretation. Perception of print newspaper content is diverse. While the content gratify some readers, it displeases others. Readers therefore interpret messages to suit their preexisting attitudes and beliefs and their selective influences are based on individual differences (Baran, 2002).

Discontent with newspaper content contributes to the low readership of print. Students noted that newspapers sometimes provide untruthful information, which makes the credibility of news stories questionable. The Press should be socially responsible by providing readers with factual economic and political news. Students also attributed low readership of traditional newspapers to availability of online networks, which are perceived as being more flexible, accessible, affordable, reliable and current. Highlighting:

Newspaper is going obsolete because they are printing news 24 hours behind. Online, you get news in real time... People want information very fast and Internet can do that. I believe that with time, most people will not be reading hard print.

In addition:

Internet is just the best... Everybody uses the Internet now. I think newspapers are just for the old people that don't have access to the Internet. Presently, I have not seen a student that will say 'I want to go and buy newspaper'...

Readers patronize news platforms that are powered by the Internet and provide current information via online newspapers, mobile publications and social media. Relatively, currency is minimal with traditional newspaper, whose publishing processes limit immediacy and "breaking news". Print newspapers are perceived as providing "old", "stale" and "boring" information to old people. Most students resort to seeking information from youth-friendly media networks, including online sources, but irrespective of the criticisms against traditional newspapers, some undergraduates still read them for various reasons. Such



students prefer Punch because of its simplicity and availability of a wide range of topics and Thisday for its weekend coloured magazine. They also read The Guardian, Complete Sports and Vanguard. Most students read national newspapers relative to indigenous and international newspapers.

### **Role of the Internet and Mobile Phone in Newspaper Reading**

The Internet has promoted the gradual shift from traditional newspaper to online newspaper readership, and this shift is facilitated by ownership and use of smart phones. Reduction in the cost of Internet subscription affords students fast Internet access that aid communication and information flow. Most students read electronic newspapers because information from online media platforms are diversified, accessible, affordable and current. A male discussant observed:

News can come if you add Vanguard Nigeria on your Facebook page. They have a BB pin and they can send you broadcasts, their news, breaking news and they also send you emails...Yes! I read newspapers but mostly online newspapers. I don't buy [newspapers] but I read. Maybe I lend from friends or I just find it but I hardly buy. I have my Blackberry and I get news on the go.

Similarly, another male noted:

Internet is just the best because the world is moving. Everybody uses the Internet now. I think newspapers are just for the old people that don't have access to the Internet. Presently, I have not seen a student that will say 'I want to go and buy newspaper'. Just open your phone, browse. I mean go to the sites.

Most students read online newspapers. Their reading is not limited to print and their online versions but they also expose themselves to exclusive online newspapers like Sahara Reporters, Nairaland, and Forbes online. Vanguard online is said to be more popular than its print version, but only students with mobile Internet access reported constant readership of online newspapers. Mobiles therefore play a significant role for accessing and reading online newspapers.

The Internet and mobile telephony increase readership as they readily expose students to online newspapers. A female participant stated: "Why should I buy newspapers when I have my phone". Mobile consumers subscribe to "latest breaking news, top stories and news headlines" and receive news messages that emanate from online newspapers. News get into mobile phones speedily, easily, and cheaply, providing students with a wide range of services, especially as low data bundle subscription on smart phones make online news affordable and preferable.

The "staleness" of print media messages limits the use of this traditional platform but exposure to current information promotes online readership. The ease of accessing online news, coupled with abridged news stories, exposure to breaking news, interactive forums and immediate feedback attract online newspaper readership. Preference of online media is therefore attributed to ease and convenience of use, cost effectiveness, ability to multitask, timeliness, immediacy, speed of access, and exposure to interesting news stories and diverse viewpoints.

Most Nigeria newspapers have websites, Facebook pages, Twitter accounts, Blackberry accounts, Broadcast message services and Mobile news SMS services that can be accessed at all times with mobiles. On these platforms, news is shared and discussed, live feeds come in all the day and link to articles is provided. In other words, online newspaper readership is achieved directly and indirectly by reading respectively from online newspapers and associated pages.

For instance, the 140 character limit for each post on Twitter means that news is attached with a picture, a headline and a link to the main article. The information available may be all that the reader needs at that time. This distinctive feature of social media and social endorsements trigger several decision of utility (Messing and Westwood, 2012). Mobiles enable access to online news, news blogs and gossip blogs, which meet the information and entertainment needs of readers.

An occasional e-reader however noted her preference of traditional newspaper because its bold lettering lead to easier



reading of news relative to the small characters and screens of mobiles. This underscores the assumption that newspapers would become obsolete as there remain a few fans of the print medium. To compete effectively with the Internet and have a chance of attracting young people, Colleen Pohlig (2003), editor of *Next* (a youth newspaper), says that newspapers must offer authentic and edgy news with more international news and stories with more young voices. He advised that newspapers be more flexible, present fresh writing, design and interactive options such as blogs and forums. In developing countries like Nigeria, provision of free newspapers may extend the lifespan of print newspapers while the Internet and regular power supply may challenge total utilization of online news resources.

### **Discussion**

The role of the print media in conveying news is declining. Functions of traditional newspapers are currently challenged by digitalized news platforms, which use different strategies in attracting and providing readers with regular news and information. Findings show the extent to which the new media and social networks homogenize and how selective perception of readers aggravate their media preferences. Online, mobile media, and the Internet constitute the main sources of news for most people and Facebook has been identified as the fastest growing source of referrals to major news websites (Pew, 2011a; Pew, 2011b).

In recent years, attention has been drawn to the significant reduction in print newspaper patronage and readership. Decrease in circulation of U.S. daily papers dropped from 62.8 million in 1985 to 55.2 million in 2002 but news sites like Google and Yahoo rose up greatly (Crosbie, 2004; Patterson, 2007a). While new media bring new opportunities to the newspaper industry, the emergence of new communication technologies threatens the conventional media (Garrison, 1996). New media and the Internet challenge print newspaper, leading to financial crises, staff retrenchment, reduction in payment and size of physical newspaper, and a complete shut down or migration to Web-only publication (Domingo & Heinonen, 2008; Kung, Picars & Towse, 2008; Kirchhoff, 2009; Barthelemy, Bethell



Christiansen, Jarsvall & Koinis, 2011). The rise of the Internet therefore plays a significant role in the decline of print newspaper readership.

Newspaper reading is not a daily habit for most young people (Nieman, 2003; Quadri & Abomoge, 2013). In 'Approaching the End of the "Monomedia" Era', Thomaz Souto Corrêa (2003) noted that American youth catch headlines on websites, share opinions on weblogs and see breaking news alerts along TV scroll bars instead of reading newspapers because, young people do not believe in paying for news. Accordingly, young Americans are estranged from daily newspapers and rely more heavily on television for news (Patterson, 2007b) while most Nigerian students are free readers, who access news from reading clubs, libraries and corporate subscriptions (Aliagan, 2011).

Changes in consumption are more profound among young persons, who are less likely to read newspapers than older people (Crosbie, 2004; Kung et al., 2008; Pew, 2012). Based on some of these challenges, news organizations are undergoing a process of change and adaptation, contributing to students' dependence on the Internet and social media for news. Young people frequently read online newspapers and are active in choosing their preferred media and news content. Their reading behaviour aligns with the notion of McQuail (2010) that instrumental use of the media is purposeful and selective, hence, the assumption that young people do not read newspapers is untrue and misleading.

Newspaper reading is shaped by avoidance and choice of potential gratifications expected from the media (McQuail, 2010). Students expose themselves to media content and platforms that gratify their information, entertainment and relaxation needs. They frequently and selectively read current national issues and news headlines. Reading content is selectively filtered and students expose themselves to newspaper platforms and messages that meet with their desired needs. Although students' perceptions of newspaper stories vary, Internet-enabled mobile phones and social media are mostly used to gratify their socio-economic and political information needs. The main gratifications received from media use include: education and information,

diversion and relaxation, emotional release and filling time (Leung and Wei, 2000; Debailon & Rockwell, 2005; Leung, 2007; McQuail, 2010). Newspaper improves reading abilities, broadens knowledge and keeps people abreast with global developments. While its readership improves the academic performance of students, those who read newspapers do better than students who do not read beyond course work requirement (Cull, 2011; Kumar & Singh, 2013).

The decline in print newspaper readership is global. The way students in the University of Ibadan are abandoning print for online media is an observed trend among young people in America (Pew, 2012). This is evident as the widespread use of social media changes news consumption, shapes modern media landscape and provides readers with a choice of stories from different sources (Messing & Westwood, 2012). While each new generation seems to increase readership as it ages, but reads less than the generation it replaces, members of each generation tend to maintain their reading habits as they get older (Lauf, 2001; Nieman, 2003; Nilsson, 2005).

Students care about news but its method of delivery has implications for attracting young readers. The emergence of online platforms and social networks has increased newspaper readership because while news is regularly delivered to mobiles, several Nigerian print newspapers can also be accessed online (Matthew, Ogedebe & Adeniji, 2013). New media therefore represent a new social condition of many individuals who reciprocally create new participatory media (Antonio, 2012). Although students are heavy Internet and mobile phone users, a few read traditional newspapers from university libraries (Quadri & Abomoge, 2013).

The reasons for the integration of online news into students' daily lives is to derive satisfaction such as multitasking, diversified news choices, in-depth information, 24/7 news updates, customization, low cost, discussion of news with peers and exposure to varied viewpoints. These agree with the assertions of Ngueyen (2010) and Chyi (2012) that online newspapers are popular among young people because they are cheap, interactive



and accessible.

Selectivity and patterns of newspaper reading is influenced by the placement of individuals in differentiated social structure, including sex, age, income, education and occupation. While age, gender, educational level and household income explain differences in newspaper reading and non-daily reading (Elvestad & Blekesaune, 2008), some scholars observe that students' ages and years in college affect their reading practices (Schoenbach et al., 1999; Foasberg, 2014). Studies reveal that people with higher education tended to read more newspapers than those with less education and men read newspaper more than women (Schoenbach et al.; 1999; Elvestad & Blekesaune 2008). The latter was identified in Ibadan, where gender differentials in newspaper reading was profound in frequency, content and acquisition of newspapers, and this may be related to differently gendered media culture (McQuail, 2010). Readership was associated with parental and peer influences as well as the convenience of using new media technologies.

The attitude of students to reading influences newspaper readership. Young people's reading needs are partially created by their status as students with specialized reading needs for their academic programmes (Foasberg, 2014). Newspaper reading is cursory reading (Cull, 2011) and undergraduates prefer to read abridged versions, headlines and introductory paragraphs of news reports. They regularly read news on digital screens, making online digital text a revolution in human learning and communication. Young people's low consumption of print newspapers is based on style of information presentation, media flexibility, availability, currency and cost effectiveness. Because some of the Nigerian newspapers are not sensitive to young readers' needs, they are gradually losing this segment of the population and stand the risk of losing lifelong newspaper readers (Castellón, 2012). While the Internet gratifies young people's information needs, it threatens traditional newspapers. It is therefore important to understand contemporary media environment and its influence on students' media choices, preferences and news consumption.



### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The paper examined the patterns and perceptions of newspaper reading among students of the University of Ibadan. Contrary to expectations, students have interest in news and read newspapers regularly from diverse platforms, especially nontraditional media platforms. They occasionally read print newspapers for different reasons, including detailed presentation of news stories. Reading is generally concentrated on current news, entertainment, fashion, sports, and human angle stories relative to business and technology news. The Internet, mobile phones and social media promote students' acquisition of news due to high levels of accessibility, availability, affordability, flexibility and interactivity. The Internet has created the opportunity and interest in students to explore the world around them based on their choices, preferences, perceptions and gratifications.

To address the dwindling readership of print newspapers, publishers should consider the market situation and package youth-friendly articles that will be attractive to young people. Proprietors should understand that young people have unique needs that may have implications for readership and survival of newspapers in Nigeria. In line with best practices, newspaper organizations should be socially responsible by providing free or subsidized campus copies as well as publish attractive news headlines. They should also improve their front page design, websites, and online versions as well as make entertainment a crucial component of newspapers. Since students like hard news, publishers of print newspapers should ensure that the gap between breaking news and publication is bridged while university news providers should enable easy access of students to print newspapers.

Findings from this study would form a basis for further dialogue among stakeholders on audience analysis and newspaper consumption in Nigerian. Stakeholders, including newspaper proprietors, journalists and university information providers, should pay more attention to newspaper readership needs of undergraduates. Proprietors should have functional online newspaper platforms to complement print newspapers and

ensure currency of news and cost effective information acquisition.

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