READERSHIP OF ONLINE NEWSPAPER BY CYBER CAFÉ USERS IN UYO URBAN

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Introduction

The fastest way for people to stay informed on the latest news stories is through the Internet which has opened a new landscape for newspapers.

While, the number of online newspaper readers continues to improve in many developed and even developing countries, can same be said about online newspaper readers in Nigeria, specifically in Uyo Urban?

Afolabi (2008) posits that "online newspapers only reach a fraction of the population in Nigeria due to low computer literacy level and high cost of internet subscription.

It is uncertain therefore, whether there is a high readership of online newspapers in Uyo urban. Therefore, to what extent are Internet subscribers in Uyo Urban really reading online?

Study objectives

❖ *To find out readers awareness of the existence of online newspapers.*

❖ *To determine the level of exposure of internet subscribers to online newspapers.*

❖ *To ascertain whether online newspapers satisfy the news demands of its readers.*

❖ *To ascertain whether online newspaper readers also read the printed newspaper.*

❖ *To ascertain the demographic groups that expose themselves to online newspapers more.*

❖ *To find out the motivations for readership of online newspapers.*

❖ *To ascertain the contents of online newspapers readers expose themselves to more.*

Online newspapers in Nigeria – Overview

- *In 2004, there were about 95 reasonably regular newspapers. However, in 2012, the number has almost doubled with Ayankunbi, (2012) positing that as at today, the total number of newspapers in the country is in the neighbourhood of 150.*

- *Ayankunbi, (2012) expresses concern that despite having about 150 newspapers published in the country and a population of over 150 million people, the combined daily circulation figure of all of them is about 300,000 copies.*

- *In 2008, about 22 independent internet newspapers existed; these are however mostly online editions of print newspapers. This number has however increased to over 34 internet newspapers in 2012.*

- *According to 2007 statistics by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), only eight million Nigerians (or 5.9% of the population) had access to the internet. Most of these – probably up to 90% – gained access only through cybercafés that charge per hour and therefore do not spend much time on the net unless it is absolutely necessary for their purposes.*

- *This situation has however, witnessed an exponential growth with the availability of internet access via cell phones, Internet modems, iPads, Blackberry, Andriod, and other browsing enabled devices, all these have skyrocketed access to the Internet in Nigeria.*

- *This is evident in the increase of people with access to the Internet in the country. Presently, Nigeria has the highest number of Internet users in Africa, with a population of 45,039,711 Internet users as of Dec.31, 2011, 29.0% of the population, (internetworldstats.com, 2012).*

Theoretical framework

➢ **The theoretical framework for this study was built around two mainstream theories: Diffusion of Innovations and Uses and Gratifications Theory.**

● According to Rogers (1995), important characteristics of an innovation include:

● *Relative Advantage (RA)—the degree to which it is perceived to be better than what it supersedes*

● *Compatibility (COMP)—consistency with existing values, past experiences and needs*

● *Complexity (CMPX)—difficulty of understanding and use.*

● *Trialability (TRY)—the degree to which it can be experimented with on a limited basis*

● *Observability (VI)—the visibility of its results.*

➢ The uses and gratifications theory propounded by Katz in 1970, is concerned with how people use media for gratification of their needs.

➢ An outcome of Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, it propounds the fact that people choose what they want to see or read and the different media compete to satisfy each individual's needs.

➢ **Methodology**

➢ The research technique chosen for this study was survey. The population of this study was made up of online newspapers readers in Uyo Urban. Uyo Urban is the central district located in Uyo Local Government Area, the capital of Akwa Ibom State in Nigeria.

➢ Akwa Ibom State was created on September 23, 1987 and is located between longitudes 7° 25, and 8° 25, east and latitudes 4° 32 and 5° 33, north of he Equator, situating at the South South corner of Nigeria.

➢ In other to reach the subjects of this study, the researcher relied on the segmentation of Uyo Urban given by the Uyo Capital City Development Authority (UCCDA).

➢ Thereafter, segment one was selected and from this segment, the following major roads were selected namely: Ikot Ekpene road, Oron road, Aka road, Wellington Bassey way and Olu Obasanjo way.

- Two functional cybercafés were selected from each of the roads in the segment making a total of ten (10) cybercafés and respondents were selected based on availability.

- The accidental sampling method was adopted in the administration of the questionnaire. In each of the cybercafés, a copy of the questionnaire was given to any respondent at reach who upon interrogation by the researcher claimed to access newspapers online.

- In each of the ten (10) cafes, 30 copies of the questionnaire were administered making a total of 300 copies of the questionnaire distributed across the ten (10) cybercafés representing 10% of the estimated population.

- Data were analyzed using frequency tables and simple percentages.

- Of the 300 questionnaire copies administered, 291 were completed and returned. However, 280 were found suitable for analysis.

Results

➢ *The level of awareness of the existence of newspapers online was very high among readers as they all responded that they read online.*

➢ *Not only are more people reading online, the findings further show that 50% of the population read online newspapers frequently and only 7.5% of the respondents (21) seldom read online newspapers.*

➢ *Print newspapers satisfied the news demands of readers more than online newspapers did. Therefore, it is clear that online newspapers did not satisfy the news demands of 70% of the population (196) of this study.*

▪ *This may not be unconnected with the fact that reading online in Nigeria costs a fortune and internet users pay by the minute to surf the web, while in other advanced countries, most homes are connected to the Internet.*

- 100% of the respondents (280) still read print newspapers. 65% of the respondents (182) read print newspapers frequently, while 32.5% read newspapers occasionally. Only 2.5% of the respondents (7) seldom read print newspapers.

- The population of people reading online is male dominated, and the percentage when compared to the female respondents is overwhelming. 85% of the respondents (238) were male while only 15% of the respondents (42) were female.

- A further breakdown of the female respondents show that only seven were within the age bracket of 31 – 40, while the remaining 35 were within the 18 – 30 age bracket. No female respondents fell within the age brackets of 41 – 50, 51 – 60 and 61 and above.

- The reason for this low level of readership among the gender may be attributed to the fact that a high number of women in Nigeria who fell within the age brackets that have no presence online are mostly career women or housewives who spend most of their time taking care of their homes or businesses and therefore, rarely had the time to access the Internet.

- Respondents who exposed themselves more to news headlines were mainly dominated by those within the 41 – 50 years age bracket.

- Respondents who exposed themselves more to business contents which included stock reports, real estates etc were mainly dominated by those in the 51 – 60 years old bracket closely followed by some respondents in the 41 – 50 years age bracket while more female respondents exposed themselves to arts/entertainment contents than the male respondents.

- Sport contents were more popular among respondents in this study because unlike print, online newspaper gave more in-depth sports reports/analysis and they made used of a lot of pictures and also carried more reports on foreign sport activities thus making this section more popular especially among the young readers within the 18 – 30 years age bracket.

➢ 52.5% of the respondents (147) were motivated to read because it was updated faster/breaking news; 7.5% of the respondents (21) were motivated by coverage and content to read online newspapers; respondents who were motivated because it was easy to read and quick to use were 17.5% of the respondents (49).

▪ Those who said they were motivated to read online newspapers because of the diversity/variety of sources were 17.5% of the respondents (49); while 5% of the respondents (14) were motivated to read newspapers online by options not listed.

Conclusion

➢ As Marshall McLuhan did put it years back, "we shape our tools, and our tools shape us."

➢ If newspapers are to continue in business in today's technology-driven society, and in the face of stiff competition from competitors as well as other media like television and radio, and to also curtail the decline in readership, newspaper proprietors in Nigeria should not see online newspapers as a makeshift initiative as they are often tempted to do.

➢ Instead, they should see it as part and parcel of their newspaper outfit, and a holistic approach should be taken towards the quality of reportage and services rendered to readers online.

➢ This study therefore encourages newspaper proprietors to see the packaging of news stories, in-depth news analysis, layout design and other items online as influence variables and improve upon them since reading online is different from reading print.

Recommendations

The following are some of the recommendations made:

➢ *Reading online is different from reading print, therefore, online newspaper editors must find a way to study and understand the difference in the reading patterns of both online and print newspaper readers. It is only through this that they can make online newspapers more convenient for readers to read.*

➢ *Online newspaper editors must develop strategies on how to sustain readership among the young readers and also try to draw more of the other age groups as well as females to read online.*

➢ *There is need for the representation of newspaper websites to extend beyond a mere presence into an effective utilization and offering of the unique qualities of the Internet -mainly interactivity.*

➢ *Reading online is very dynamic therefore, regular audience survey must be carried out to ascertain the changes the different target audience would want implemented.*

Thank You For Your Audience