ATTENTION AND RESPONSE PATTERNS TO ONLINE AND OFFLINE NEWS BY UNDERGRADUATES IN SOUTH WEST NIGERIA

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Abstract

News flow does not equate to news readership online. Often times, the rate at which the news items flow to the audience is not proportionate to news consumption. Thestudy probed the main news media adopted by the people and examined the proportion of news readership to news flow online to determine the news flow and the reading pattern of the undergraduates in three selected South West schools. The survey method was adopted and 297 respondents out of 300 hundred samples chosen from three southwest states were studied. The results showed that news readership was higher on the online platforms compared to other media and that readers paid attention to what they read online explicable through comments and reactions. The study recommends a feature style of writing, which adopts graphs, pictures, charts, and diagrams in order to intrigue the readers and compel readership for news in categories other than gist, entertainment, and political news.

Keywords: Convergence, **Proliferation**, **Readership, News Media, Readership**

Introduction

Dissemination of news and engagement of public for developmental discourses – quite in the purview of the agenda-setting scheme of the media is a major calling of the fourth estate of the realm, besides its entertainment and educational functions. The traditional media organizations hold this tenet dear to their visions and missions as information and public engagement are the main selling points attracting advertisers to any medium. Notably, the first mass medium in Nigeria – Iwe Irohin fun Awon Ara Egba ati Yoruba, established in 1859, earned the coinage – Oro po ninu iwe kobo – transliterated "too many information in a penny paper". There was too much information to read in the *greyscale* paper that was adjudged worth more than its price. Likewise, the technology at the time was purchased – slug casting, so there was no luxury of complementing the texts with pictures, which they say are worth more than a thousand words. The Iwe Irohin was purely wordy and had no source of escapism for the earliest newspaper readers. The paper's layout is in no way comparable with modern newspapers. The famous BCURPH formula of Balance, Contrast, Unity, Rhythm, Proportion, and Harmony did not feature. The pages were grey as there were no illustrated pictures and headlines. Sina Aina (2007)

The vision of the visionaries' newspaper dubbed Iwe Irohin, which was "*to get the people to read, to beget the attitude of seeking information through reading*", was marred by the low literacy level that characterized the community where the paper was domiciled – Abeokuta. As technology improved, leading to the development of the still camera, video camera, and colour printing press, mass communication in the purviews newspapering and news broadcasting has been given a fillip, bettering the qualities and quantities of mass media produces such as news and entertainment. Furthermore, in the view of Stranbhaar and LaRose, the media forms are combining with the new ones in ways that change our media consumption patterns, our lives, and the society in which we live. The news media is highly proliferated with new micro news media birthed by multimedia internet-mediated gadgets and the morphing of the traditional media into virtual forms to compete with the news force of the new media. News is a global media form. It flows at incredible speed, 24/7 across radio, TV, print, mobile phones, and the internet, in both local and international contexts, and, increasingly in ways both formal and informal (such as 'blogs' and immediate use of mobile phone footage in disasters like the tsunami of 2004 or the London bomb of 2005) – Branston & Stafford (2006). With the emergence of the internet, and digitization of news technologies, news gathering, processing and dissemination have been miniaturized inside the comport of a computer system standing as a text editor, page planner, press, and publisher on the world wide web in a string of processes doable by a single person. And also, the commonality of multimedia gadgets like phones, tablets, *phablets,* and notepads, news flow is considerably ultrahigh compared to what was

obtainable yesteryears in the dispensation of pure traditional media. In a short span of years, technology has moved us away from analog communication and into the digital age in which nearly all other forms of communication are created, stored, and transmitted in digital form. Stranbhaar & LaRose (2016).

Statement of Problem

As demand for newspapers trickles down the more as the cost is out of reach of an average Nigerian who lives on less than a dollar daily; and as TV viewership drops due to staggered, epileptic power supply, more people turn to mobile media for news consumption. Besides, the growing population of the mobile audience has necessitated the transformation of terrestrial media to virtual media to cater to the online audience. However, the barrage of online news stemming from multiple platforms and channels on mobile phones cannot be said to be commensurate with the rate of news consumption in both online and offline media. Though, with the affordance of a longer life span for virtual news items, which gives online news consumers access to all news on all platforms available to them asynchronously, the majority of the news is susceptible to being skimmed or skipped the most recent. In essence, important news is missed in order to pace up with the tide of time by most online news surfers. Media studies now tend to make more modest claims for the influence of particular news bulletins given the proliferation of new technologies and forms, leading to 24-hour news and internet use in official and unofficial news forms. Branston & Stafford (2006) Most consumers of news have now, unconsciously or consciously, developed selection schemas for sorting through the barrage of daily Whatsapp, twitter, Facebook, telegram, Google, and a host of other phone-based apps networking myriads of blogs and vlogs. According to American Press Institute, several new factors largely unexamined before such as the intrusiveness of ads, navigability, load times, and having the latest details also are critical in determining whether consumers consider a publisher competent and worthy of trust. News publishers' personage, at best, could thus be said to have descended below the rating of an impartial entity of the fourth estate of the realm in this dispensation that news gathering, processing, and dissemination have been communized through prowling figures of miniaturized online news vendors, news syndicates, and the likes. It has now become imperative to study the degree of responsiveness and attentiveness of news readers to the barrage of daily news flows from multiple sources to adjudge whether the readers of news are sophisticated to follow news development online and offline for personal and group uses.

Research Objectives

Consequently, the following research objectives were drawn:

1. To examine the readership degree of online and offline news
2. To elicit responsiveness and attentiveness of news readers to online news sources
3. To elicit responsiveness and attentiveness of news readers to offline news sources
4. To identify popular news media adopted by news readers

Research Questions

The study pivots around four cardinal research questions:

1. To what extent do people read the news (online or offline)?
2. To what extent do people pay attention and to the news
3. To what extent do people pay attention to and respond to news in papers?
4. What are the contemporary news media used by news readers?

Literature Review

Miljan (2008) averred that new technologies have impacted the print medium fundamentally. One major aspect of this impact is the affordance of cross-ownership of stream of media by same set of capitalists who leverage a team of media workmen to produce media contents across the chain ownership. In essence, the media contents across various channels are being produced and reproduced by a few media workforce making the contents monotonous and deter thoughtful and engaging reading habit on the part of the readers.

Abasifreke Idiong, Nsikak Solomon Idiong and Nkereuwem Uduokah (2018), in their study – influence of media convergence on newspaper readership in Akwa Ibom state, revisited the technological tidal waves sweeping against the existence newspaper as a mass medium. They set out to extent to which convergence has impacted newspaper readership and various survival strategies used by publishers employed by newspaper publishers. The study found that

new technologies pose threats to and deplete economy of the traditional newspaper and as such, publishers resort to various means of leveraging online and offline tactics to sustain the medium.

Ate Andrew Asan and Onuwaikwu Paul (2019) in the study – convergence and print media news production in Nigeria; a study of Daily Trust, Nigeria, delved into relationship between online virtual production of newspaper and physical hardcopy of same. The study revealed that there was no much difference between online and physical version of Daily Trust.

Newspaper production online and offline by major publishers have maintained similar structures in terms of designs and format. The same BCURPH principle is applicable to both online and offline production, with the exception of interactive and multimedia features like hyperlinks, audio and video.

Theoretical Framework

This theory is anchored on the Technological Acceptance Model. This is an information systems theory that models how users come to accept and use technology. The model suggests that when users are presented with new technology, a number of factors influence their decision about how and when they will use it. The model was developed by *Fred Davis* and *Richard Bagozzi* in 1989

TAM assumes that an individual's information systems acceptance is determined by a few major variables, notably:

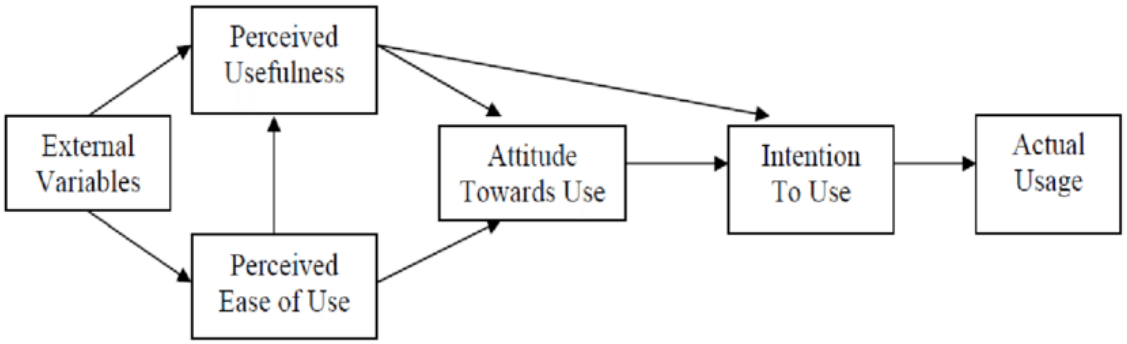
Perceived usefulness (PU) – This was defined by Fred Davis as "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her job performance". It means whether or not someone perceives that technology to be useful for what they want to do.

Perceived ease-of-use (PEOU) – Davis defined this as "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free from effort" (Davis 1989). Ease of use of a particular technology dispels every barrier to using the technology. If it's not easy to use and the interface is complicated, no one has a positive attitude towards it. The level of convenience can also be expressed on the basis of cost, availability, and affordability. Virtual news or multimedia news accessible on virtual platforms through the internet proves to be considered accessible to urban sophisticates compared to people resident in rural areas.

External variables such as social influence are important factors to determine the attitude. When these things (TAM) are in place, people will have the attitude and intention to use the technology. However, the perception may change depending on age and gender because everyone is different.

The **Actual system use** is the end-point where we want everyone to be able to do with technology.
We have to form Behavioural Intention, which is a factor that leads people to use the technology.

The **behavioral intention** (BI) is influenced by the **Attitude** (A) which is the general impression of the technology.



1Figure

TAM has been applied to different computer-related technologies (e.g. word processors, e-mail, WWW, Hospital Information Systems) under different situations, by different groups of users (e.g. organizations, undergraduate

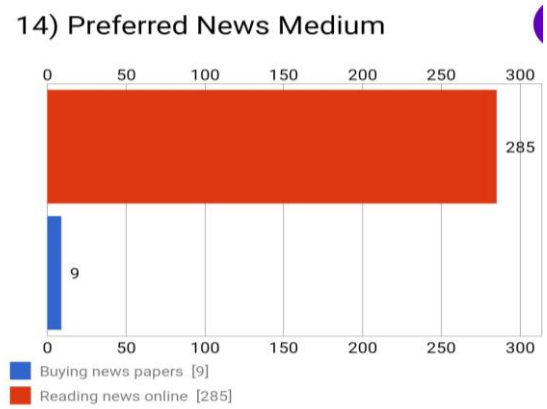
students, and knowledge workers), leading its proponents to believe in its robustness. It provides an explanation of the determinants of computer acceptance that is general, and capable of explaining user behavior across a broad range of end-user computing technologies and user populations. This is evident in the continuous adoption of computer usage in almost all human endeavors, as the technology is accepted by all as useful in whichever business one does and easy to use.

This theory is relevant because Social media and social networks change the way news is generated and accessed. They influence media in three dimensions: as a tool for journalists to create content, as a tool to distribute and impart information, and as a tool to seek, receive and access information. The exercise of these fundamental rights by journalists and citizens also relies on unhindered access to the internet. Christian Moller (2012)

Methodology

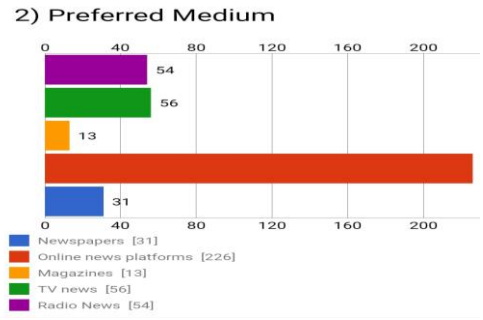
The survey method was adopted in the study with a questionnaire as the major research instrument. Three hundred samples were targeted in Lagos, Ogun, and the Oyo States, using quota sampling technique and purposive method to select respondents from the University of Lagos, Federal Polytechnic, Ilaro, and the University of Ibadan through students' WhatsApp platforms. Results of the findings were analyzed in charts and percentages for easy grasp.

Data Analysis



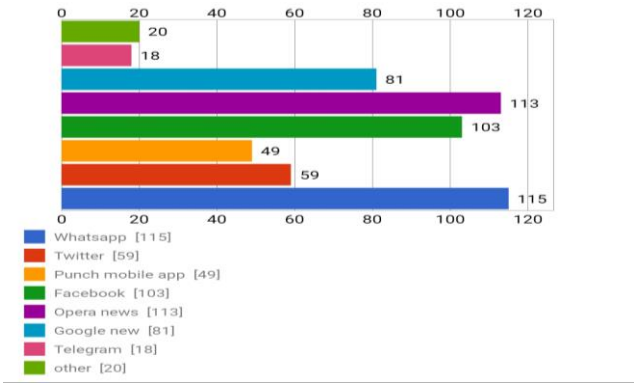
2 Figure

95.96 percent of the respondents amounting to 285 out of 297 preferred reading news online to buying the newspapers.



3Figure

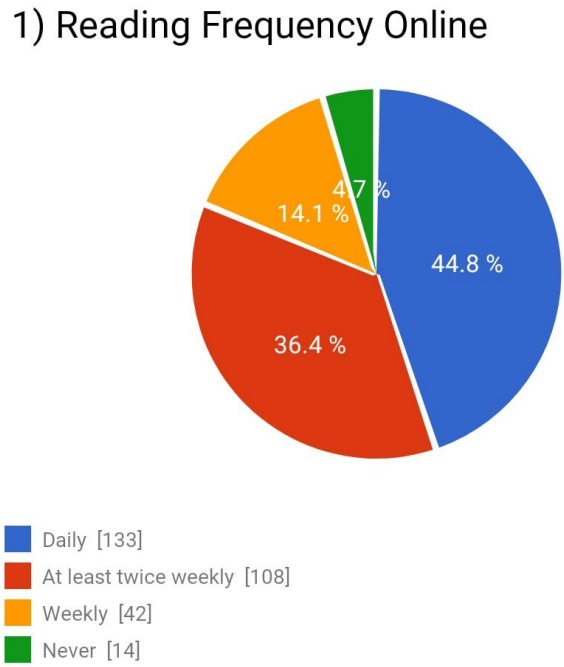
76.1 percent of the respondents preferred reading news online to other news media like newspapers, magazines, TV, and Radio. Newspaper preference got 10.44 percent following Magazine from the least preferred.



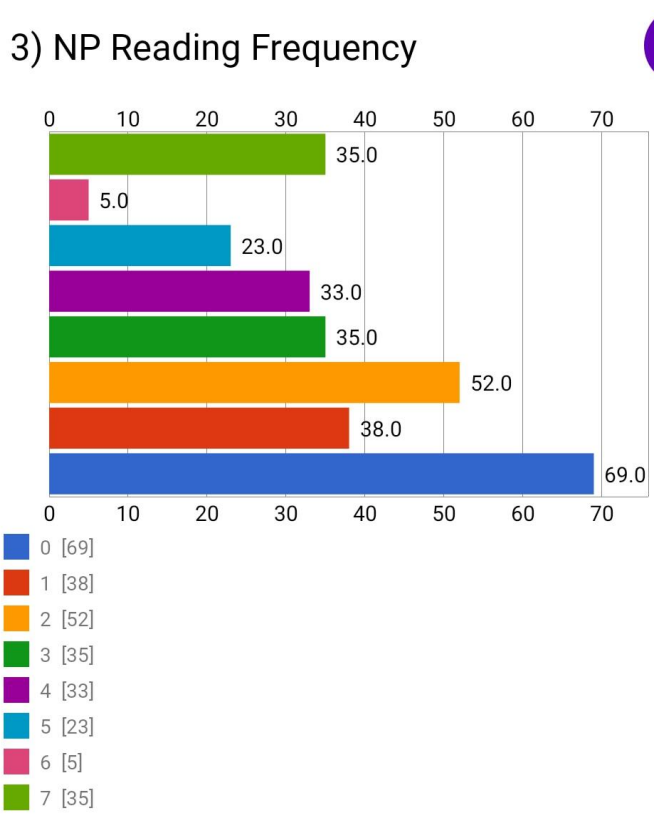
4Figure
This figure highlights major online news platforms used by respondents. 115 out of 297 read news on WhatsApp (get news links from WhatsApp), followed by 113 respondents who read news on the opera mobile app, while 103 respondents source news on Facebook. Telegram and Punch Online from the least got 6 percent and 16.5 percent respectively.

5Figure

93.9 per cent of the respondents used smart phones which enabled them to access news online at will, while only 5.1 percent did not have smartphones which could deter them from accessing news online easily and frequently.

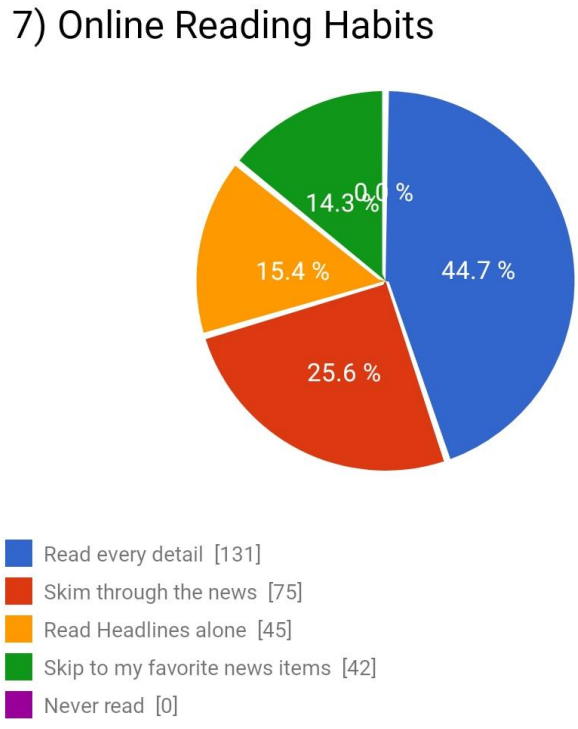


6Figure
7Figure
45.12 percent of the respondents daily read news online through various platforms, while 36.34 percent news online at least twice weekly. Only 4.71 percent do not read news online.



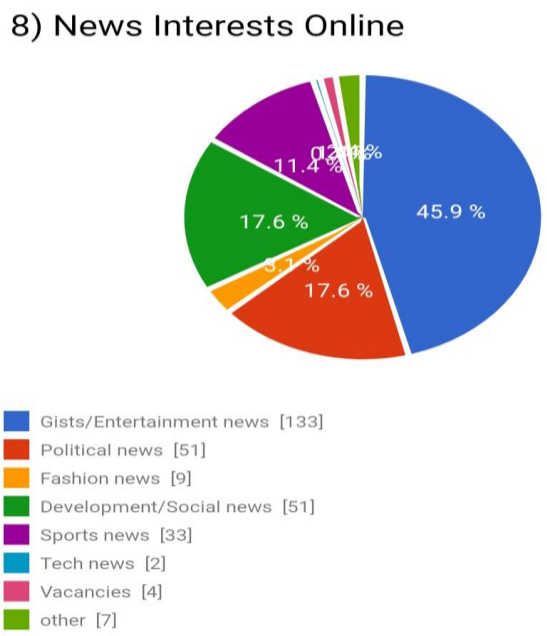
8Figure

23.23 percent of the respondents do not read newspaper at all. 11.78 read the newspaper every day of the week, while other respondents read newspapers occasionally.

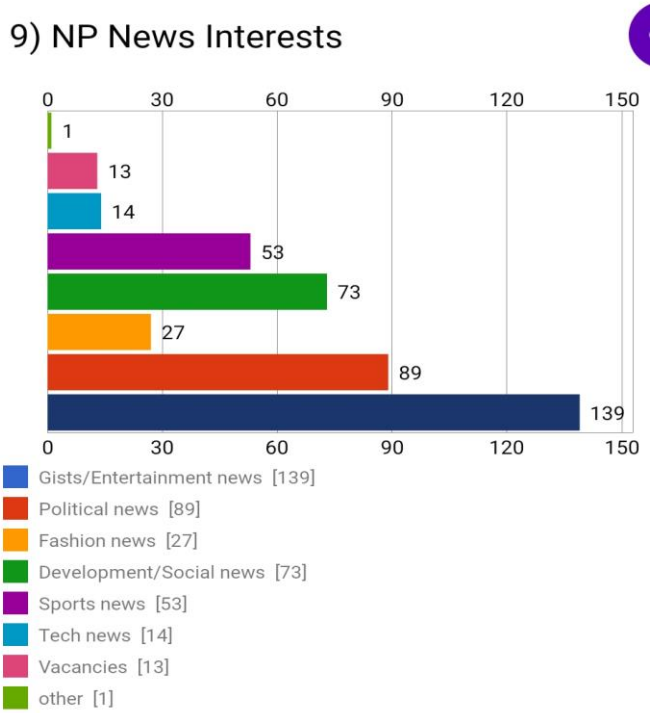


9Figure

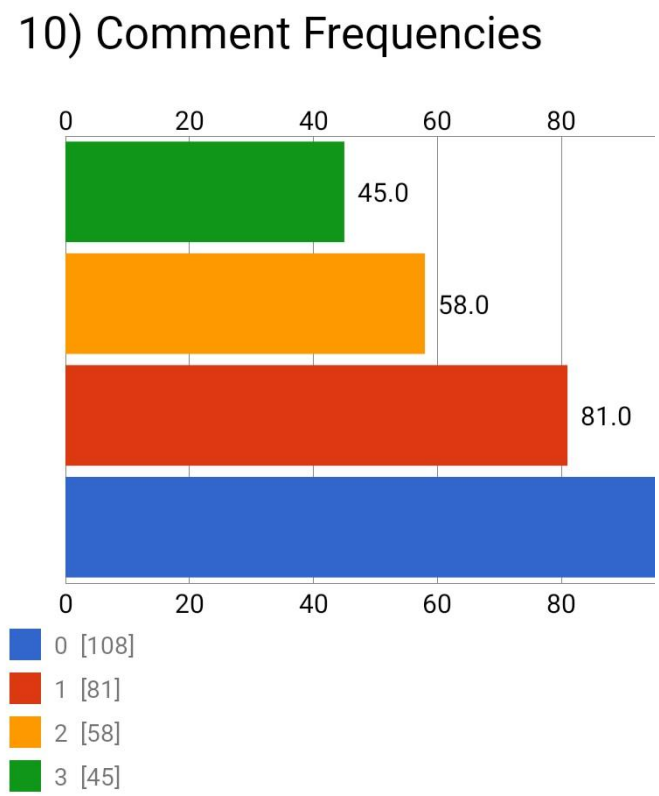
44.7 percent of the total respondents habitually read every text of the news items, while 26.6 percent skim through the news items. 15.4 percent read headlines alone while 14.3 skips to their favourite aspects of the news items.



10Figure
45.9 percent of the respondents read gist and entertainment news online, while development/Social news and Political news interest 35.2 percent of the respondents. Sports takes 11.4 percent while fashion takes 3 percent. Vacancy interests only 1.35 percent of the total respondents.

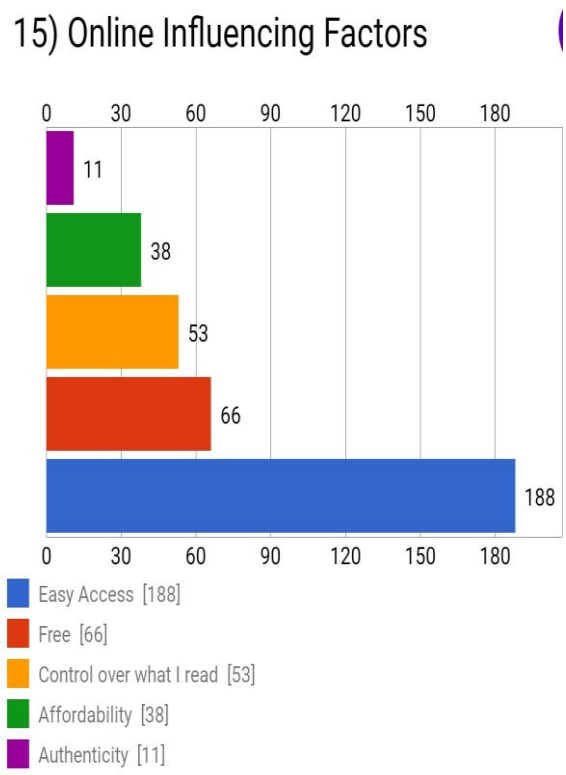


11Figure
46.8 percent of the respondents also read gist and entertainment news on Newspapers, followed by 29.97 percent who read political stories on newspapers. 24.58 read development/social news in newspapers, while 17.85 read fashion news in newspapers. Vacancies and Tech news constitute the least read news on newspapers by the respondents with 4.38 per cent and 4.71 percent respectively.



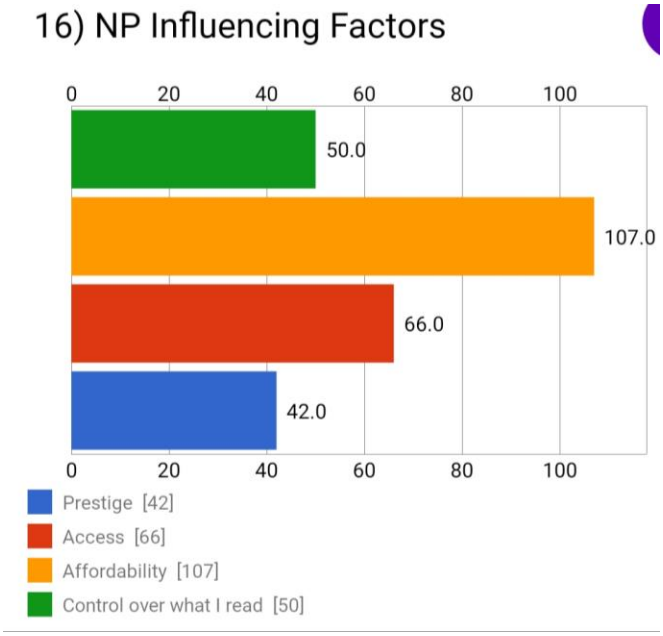
12Figure

36.36 per cent of the respondents do not comment on the news they read online while 16.13 always comment.46.8 per cent of the respondents do occasionally comment on the news online.

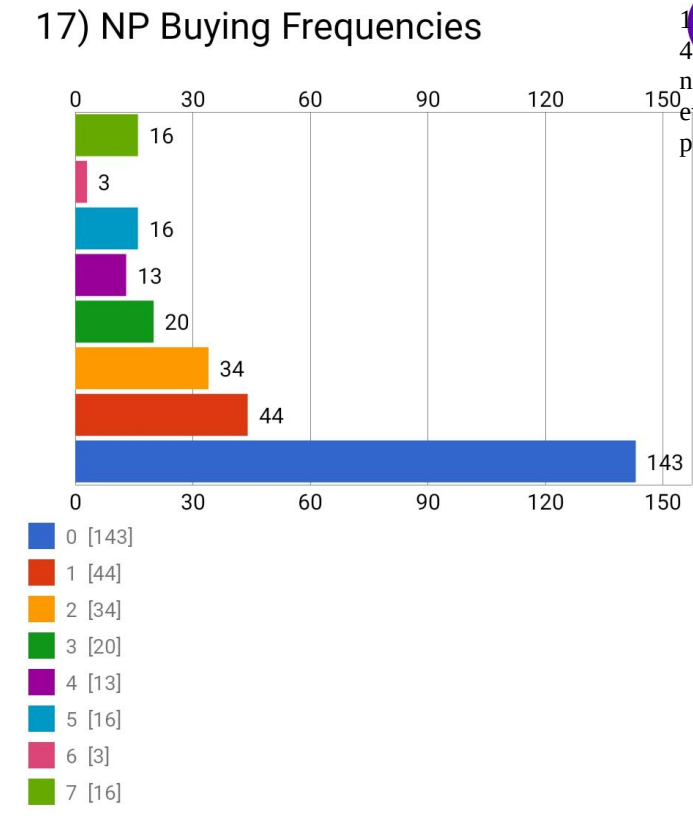


13Figure13

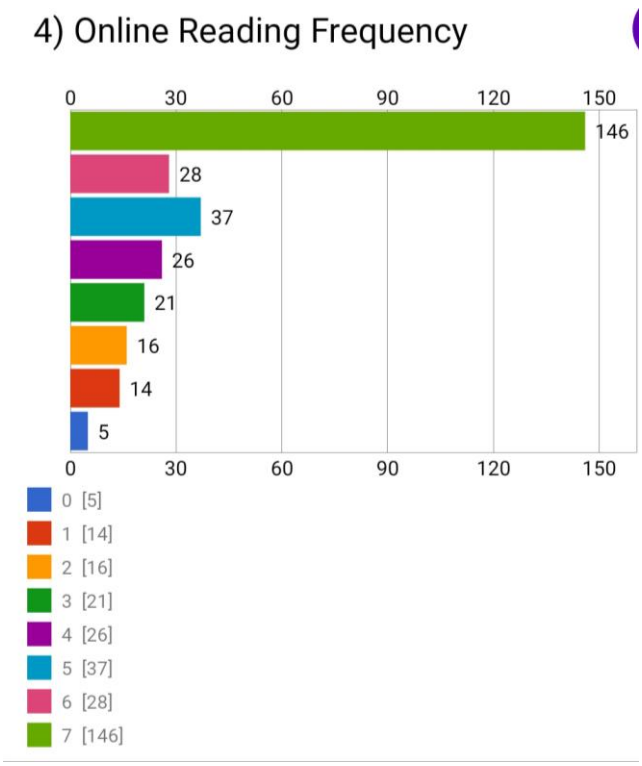
63.3 percent of the total respondents preferred online news platforms because of the easy access, while 3.7 percent opted for online news for its authentic nature. 22.22 percent chose to read news online because they considered it free, while 17.85 chose online news platforms because of the affordance of control over what, when and how they read.



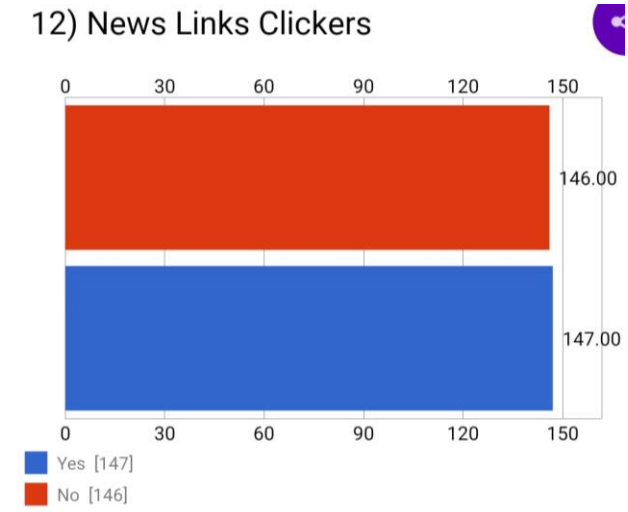
14 Figure.
36.03 percent of the total respondents preferred and considered newspapers cheap, while 14.14 percent of the respondents chose newspapers for prestige. 22.22 percent chose newspapers for the reason of access, while 16.84 chose them for control over what they read.



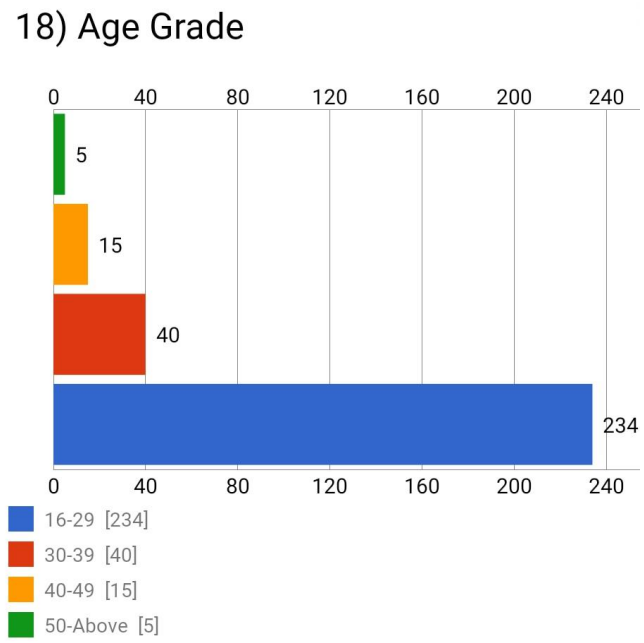
15. Figure
48.15 percent of the total respondents do not buy newspapers at all, while only 5.39 buy newspapers every day. Other respondents constituting 43.78 percent altogether are occasional newspapers buyers



16. Figure
49.16 percent of the total respondents read news online every day while only 1.68 percent do not read news online at all. Other respondents constituting 47.81 per cent also read news online at least once in a week.



17. Figure
There is almost equilibrium between those who click on every news link on social media and those who do not with 49.49 percent saying YES to clicking every news link and 49.16 saying NO.



18. Figure

Majority of the respondents, constituting 78.79 percent are aged between 16-29, while the least, constituting 1.68 percent are 50 years and above. 13.47 per cent of the respondents are aged between 30-39, while 5.1 percent are aged between 40-49.

Discussion of Findings

To what extent do people read the news (online or offline)?

45.12 percent of the respondents read news online daily through various platforms, while 36.34 percent read news online at least twice weekly. Merging this with 11.78 percent of those who read newspapers daily, it is adjudged news readership is high. Access and availability are the major factors responsible for the merging between news readership online and offline as apparent in Figure 13, Figure 15, and Figure 16. Majority of the respondents do not patronize hardcopy newspapers which is a major deterrent to news readership offline.

To what extent do people pay attention and respond to the news online

This is explicit in Figure 9 as 44.7 percent of the total respondents habitually read every text of the news items, while 26.6 percent skim through the news items. 15.4 percent read headlines alone while 14.3 skips to their favourite aspects of the news items. Figure 10 also shows the news interests of online news readers which is determine how they treat news items online. The Majority of the respondents read gist, entertainment news which they pay much attention to. Unlike vacancies, sports, and fashion news with low readerships. Political and social news also form a major news aspect the respondents read and pay attention to. So to a large extent, people pay attention to their favourite news items online while they skip or skim through others they consider not interesting.

To what extent do people pay to attend and respond to news in papers?

In Figure 15, 48.15 percent of the total respondents do not buy newspapers at all, and only 36 percent really think the newspaper is affordable daily, although, gist and entertainment news did nudge some respondents to read newspapers. There is the dearth of newspapers amongst the studied sample whose age ranges between 16 and 39. This age group find virtually everything obtainable in the newspaper online. So there is tendency of proportionate attention for news they read offline if it were to be the medium in vogue. The tempo of attention they pay to news is deducible 12.Figure – expression of comments on what they read – mostly online. The figure shows only 36.36 respondents do not comment, while others do comment which is tantamount to say majority of them pay attention to news the read.

What are the contemporary news media used by news readers

The major news media consist in the online media platforms aparrent in 12.Figure, which highlights major online news platforms used by respondents. 115 out of 297 news links on whatsApp, followed by 113 respondents who read news on opera mobile app, while 103 respondents source news on Facebook. Telegram and PunchOnline from the least got 6 per cent and 16.5 per cent respectively. Also in 3.Figure, 76.1 per cent of the respondents preferred reading news online on all these platforms as against sourcing news on mainstream media.

Conclusion

News readership is still much high on online media as against the belief that patronage in newspaper sales is tantamount to low ebb in news readership. The age grade is a major determinant of which media to adopt in reading news. Hence this study has shown that most of the respondents aged between 16 and 39 adopt virtual media and still pay much attention to what they read online and offline.

Gist and entertainment news and political news are the major categories of news that interest the respondents. And the online media afford the news readers to feedback comments on news items – this brings to the fore the tempo of attention paid to the news by the readers, who find time to always and or occasionally comment on news online. The major news media consist in the variegated online news platforms with shareable links.

Recommendation

In respect to the results of the findings, the following recommendations are made:

- To drive attention, news writers should strive to intrigue the readers by adopting feature style of writing in news presentation by complementing stories with infographs, pictures, diagrams, and charts to aid picturesque understanding while adding entertainment value to the news.

- To drive more engagement on news items, news writers should entertain the readers while delivering the facts and figures by probing into the minds of the readers through questions for discussion on the medium's online platforms.

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