

ASSIMILATION OF POLITICAL AND OTHER ONLINE NEWSPAPER CONTENT CATEGORIES AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN UYO, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This survey work investigated the pattern in which undergraduate students residing in Uyo City Centre in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria assimilate the political contents of online newspapers in relation to other contents of such newspapers. The University of Uyo students, situated at the centre of Uyo Urban, were used as the representative respondents. The objectives were to ascertain the extent to which undergraduates assimilate online newspaper political contents; find out other online newspaper stories mainly assimilated by respondents; identify which of the politically inclined online newspapers is mostly preferred by respondents; and examine whether respondents' Departmental backgrounds were a factor in their online newspaper assimilation pattern. A significant finding is that the students assimilated political stories much more than other content categories in online newspapers. Others, in their order of importance, were: celebrity/gossip news, sports, crime news, human interest, and education.

Keywords: *Assimilation, Pattern, Extent, News, Political News, Content Categories*

Introduction

The arrival of online newspapers a few decades ago in the Nigerian clime to play the much-needed complementary role with the then reigning offline versions of the traditional mass medium, has, observably, gone a long way in modernizing, popularizing and expanding the frontiers of the pen profession. The welcome development has, among other things, provided the newspaper industry with an innovative facility to compete with the broadcast industry in presenting news and its ancillaries in an interesting and timelier manner. Significantly, this relatively new development in the communication and newspaper industry has not only helped reduce newspaper production costs but has also intensified the creativity among practitioners as more readers now have access to newspaper content and can react instantly to media content. For instance, with online newspapers, the reading population of traditional newspapers is retained and expanded as online newspapers can recapture or rekindle reader interest, especially the interest of youths, who might have found the reading and assimilation of hard copy newspapers boring or expensive.

However, it is pertinent to point out that newspapers, whether in their hard or soft copy, are generally classified under the print media industry. In other words, a newspaper reporter is generally called a print journalist. This is because newspapers primarily contain printed words, pictures and sundry graphics; they contain news, events and information written down for the eye, even as

newspapers appear to contain more detailed information than other media. They reach many people with news and appeal to different population segments. They are permanent in nature and in their hard copy format and portable enough to carry about. Aside from being detailed, newspapers are among the most widely read periodicals that are available and accessible to the majority of people of all ages and walks of life. This is because every category of readers can find some critical, current and exciting information in newspapers.

Students are active users of the newspaper since they are supposedly considered information-seeking members of society. This is because they do not just read but often assimilate the medium's content. Unlike the hardcopy versions, online newspapers are very interactive, user-friendly and free in terms of purchase, except for the cost of data and gadgets used.

From the above premise, it would not be out of place to say that the reading and assimilation habit of online newspapers by any reading population can conform to specific patterns and be influenced by certain factors. Therefore, this research study investigates the assimilation pattern of online newspapers among select undergraduate students in Uyo Urban of Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. Put the other way around, the study is concerned with the pattern or extent to which the respondents go beyond the widespread practice of newspaper reading. Instead, it investigates newspaper assimilation – the act of reading for learning and application purposes – by the respondents who are undergraduates.

The Problem

Of all the traditional mass communication media, the newspaper seems very prevalent and popular online. This, among other things, is a result of the numerous roles of the newspaper, both in its hard and soft copies, in the life of the literate. Perhaps, in recognition of the presence of a broad spectrum of options available not only to the readers but also to the assimilating public, online newspaper publishers, observably, invest enormous resources at making their publications the preference of the reading public, and many of these assimilating publics are students and other young people.

Observations, particularly in societies that accommodate institutions of higher learning, reveal that some students who go online often check certain information in newspapers that appear online. This means that despite the many options available to students and other members of the newspaper-reading public, an online newspaper still stands out as the preferred media platform. However, given the availability of an even broader spectrum of other content on the internet, it is not sure whether a reasonable percentage of students still choose to read and assimilate certain online newspaper content, mainly politically related content. Also, it is not sure which politically inclined online newspaper they choose to assimilate most and why. From the above, the pattern in which the students read to assimilate such newspapers and their political contents becomes a concern to this study. The above premise, therefore, gives rise to the question: to what extent do undergraduate students in Uyo Urban read and assimilate certain online newspapers and their political content?

Objectives

This work sought to:

1. ascertain the extent to which the undergraduate students in Uyo Urban of Akwa Ibom State of

- Nigeria assimilate online newspaper contents;
2. find out political stories are a priority to the respondents;
 3. identify which of the online newspapers is mostly assimilated and preferred by respondents;
 4. examine whether respondents' academic disciplines are a factor in their online newspaper assimilation and patronage.

Literature

The term “newspapers” has never meant the same thing to everybody at any time. It has equally not meant the same thing to people of different eras and areas. Uwakwe (2010) sees a newspaper as a publication containing news and information, usually with advertisements. He also defines it as a mechanically or electronically produced publication containing various news-worthy information on diverse spheres of the (such as economics, politics, arts, entertainment, sports, etc.) published daily, periodically and readily available for the consumption of willing and able readers.

Apart from the hard copy-oriented definitions, newspapers can be defined in other formats. Specifically, an online newspaper, according to Search Mobile Computing, is a self-contained news-able and refreshable version of a traditional newspaper that acquires and holds information electronically. In several ways, online or digital newspapers are much like hard copy newspapers and have the exact legal boundaries and determinants, such as laws regarding libel, copyright, piracy, and plagiarism. Also, going online has created more opportunities for newspapers, such as competing with broadcast journalism in presenting breaking news in a timelier manner, thereby enabling readers to access information at the click of a mouse (Brandahaw & Rohumaa, 2011).

In Nigeria, several mainstream newspapers exist that daily and periodically present online versions of their printed newspaper copies to the public. Several Nigerian newspapers enjoy a continuous online presence, including *the Sun*, *Punch*, *Guardian*, *Vanguard*, and *the Nation*. Additionally, an increasing number of newspapers, for example, *Sahara Reporters*, and *Premium Times*, operate as web-based-only newspapers in Nigeria. Even in Akwa Ibom State, *Ibom Mobile* is an example of an Akwa Ibom-focused web-based newspaper. This is why Senam (2014, p. 296) stated that “journalism is a profession in transition which can be compared to a chameleon that changes its colour according to its natural surroundings. The natural surroundings here represent the internet.”

However, Amobi (2010) observes that though these newspapers maintain an online presence, they still lack many features of ideal online media. To him, *The Sun* has only a discussion forum entitled: “Free Kick”. Chat room called “Sun Chat Room” and a site for conducting online polls, <http://sunnewsonline.com>. Also, *The Punch* does not produce original videos, but it offers a link to videos on YouTube and provides a platform for blogging where visitors can post their comments and maintain a presence on Facebook and Twitter for increased social interactivity. Photo gallery, polls, and weather forecasts are other features on <http://www.punchng.com/blog-read.aspx?read=222>.

According to Dominick (2001), the uses and preferences people give to the media and the functions they derive from such uses can be broadly classified under four-cognition, diversion, social utility and withdrawal. By implication, people use the mass media to gain information and knowledge, to divert attention from boring or unwanted activities, to sustain and enrich social relationships, and to

create a gap between themselves and others.

However, scholars at different points in time and space have raised different views and opinions on a particular research subject, object or issue. Similarly, there are varying opinions as to the reading pattern of online newspapers among undergraduates or young folks at large. Also, generally observable opinions indicate a newspaper readership pattern among people of all ages in Nigeria. While Dominick (2011) notes that newspaper readership has been declining over the last couple of years, Udu (2002) observes that the frequency of newspaper readership among Nigerian students is less than 50%; and, writing in the same vein, Aliagan (2011) observes a downward trend in newspaper readership, in the past few decades.

Though it is a near-unanimous opinion that young people go online more for social utility than for news, it is also a new unanimous opinion that young people read online newspapers today than they did years ago (Edegoh, Ezech & Sampson, 2015).

Nonetheless, there is a general opinion that online newspaper readers do not have the diverse reading repertoire that their offline counterparts do. Along this line, Krogh and Anderson (2015) say that because online newspaper readers are more likely to screw through only major highlights of interest to them, offline newspaper readers would want to spend more time on a more diverse group of stories.

There are several benefits derived by the readers of online newspapers because of the peculiar characteristics of the new media, which, according to Brandaham and Rohuman (2011) and Senam (2014), include the instantaneousness of Digital Media. There is also the factor of interactivity, which has to do with the opportunity the readers have to access other related information via hyperlinks (the click-through connections that flow information across networks). However, Hasan (2013) opines that with newer technologies and faster processors flooding the markets, the cost of online machine publishing (blogs and forums, etc.) will keep reducing while the human costs may remain the same or become lower than similar costs incurred by the print media.

Looking at the credibility of online information, public opinion research has generally found that members of the public rate online news the same way they rate other media (Olu and Chile, 2015). However, the Online News Association (2002) reports that 60% of journalists believe only news sites do not meet the same standards as more traditional sources. Also, Olley and Chile (2015) explain that journalists tend to rate online news sites in credibility more than the public, adding that the competition to be the first to report breaking news stories is heightened by the internet, thereby creating room for unnecessary errors. Furthermore, Deuze (2001) believes technological factors affect traditional journalistic storytelling. This is why Anderson (2001), Kperogi (2012) and Ohaja (2015), in their different opinion surveys, hold that nearly half of online editors reported that less time was spent verifying information before a story was posted. The Online News Association (2002) explains that the credibility of online news has been questioned. Online readers of news information grapple with the issue of the credibility of the news sources and the identification of the internet/online reporters' stories.

It is pertinent, too, to say that while some scholars highlight the negative impact of online newspapers, others enumerate their potential in assisting journalists, especially the budding ones, in carrying out their duties. This is evident in the growing number of journalists who use the Wide Web as a reporting tool because of the depth of information available and the speed at which the information is

retrieved (Olley & Chile, 2015) and Marshall (2012). Journalists and other persons, such as students, can use online resources to become informed about current events while verifying facts and improving their journalistic skills. Similarly, Traub & Lindner (2004), in their internet and print newspaper readership study, hold that younger persons consist of online-exclusive newspaper readers and are more highly educated than print-exclusive newspaper readers.

Edego & Sampson (2015) seek to ascertain the newspapers that youths in Anambra State read most, determining how regularly they read online newspapers, finding out the type of stories they mostly read, and ascertaining the affordability of newspapers among youths in Anambra State. The study adopted the survey research method and used a quantitative research technique. The sample size for the study was 300 youths, purposively drawn from Awka, Onitsha and Newi. The work employed the simple percentage method and frequency tables as analytical tools.

The study's findings revealed that youths in Anambra State frequently read newspapers such as *Sun*, *Guardian*, *Complete Sports*, *Punch* and *Vanguard*. It was found out, too, that sports, political and economic news were the major stories read by such youths. Interestingly, the study also concluded that the youths read a newspaper mainly by going to newspaper stands to read without paying, borrowing from friends, visiting public libraries or browsing online newspapers with their cellular phones. Therefore, the study concluded that most youths in Anambra State did not buy the newspapers they read, meaning that the youths could not afford the cover price of the newspapers available to them. The findings of this study also revealed that youth in Anambra State read newspapers often. Accordingly, the researchers recommended the government's massive empowerment of youths through employment and other poverty alleviation strategies.

It is essential to state that the findings of the above study are germane to the present research. Although their study areas are different, both studies focus on newspaper readership patterns among youth groups in the same geographical environment - Nigeria. The conclusion in that study, that more youths are generally reading more newspapers but buying less and that their sources of the newspapers they read are essentially from newsstands or their cell phones, is particularly relevant to the present study. This is because it suggests that declining newspaper purchases do not necessarily mean declining newspaper readership, as most Nigerian youths (students mainly) increasingly read online newspapers.

In a similar study, Krogh and Anderson (2015) sought to determine whether reading patterns differ between printed and online newspaper readers. Such a question is hardly new but has increased in importance as more readers seem to be switching from print to online newspapers. The study compared data collection from a readership study focused on the printed local Swedish newspaper *VestmanlandLans Tidning*.

The study used the survey research method. The data were obtained during the same two-week period through the questionnaire, seeking to know those who read the printed version of *VestmanlandLans Tidning*, *VLT* (a local Swedish newspaper and through computation of automatic registration of the number of unique page views of the online version of *VLT* on its website).

The study's findings showed apparent differences as online readers focus on the first page of the online edition. In contrast, print readers focus on the broad editorial sections inside the newspaper. The study also submitted that though the reading pattern of online newspapers is close to that of conventional

newspapers, print readers display a more reading repertoire, while online readers concentrate more on a limited number of subjects. The study discussed the importance of focusing on 'clicks' and the time factor when selecting what kind of news to publish online.

Olu and Chile (2015) assessed the state of Nigerian newspapers published online. It mainly focused on awareness and utility in readership and response to feedback services of online newspapers among readers. The study had four objectives: to ascertain how Nigerians are exposed to online newspapers and how Nigerians perceive Nigerian online newspapers. The methodology for the study was the survey. The respondents for the study were purposively sampled from the population of newspaper readers (both online and conventional) in some selected cities in South-South Nigeria via research instruments such as the printed questionnaire, online questionnaire, interviews, etc.

The findings of the study revealed that a large percentage of respondents in South-South, Nigeria (62%) had access to the internet, (79%) of them said they do read online newspapers, while (48%) said they usually read online newspapers daily. The study revealed some of the problems encountered by online newspaper readers, including the in-accessibility of continuing pages, no frequent updates of the news with necessary details, and the high rate of internet airtime advertisements, which obstruct easy reading of news stories, were yet another drawback facing readers of online newspapers.

Three-prong mass media theories considered apt to this study were the Uses and Preference Theory, the Theory of Selectivity, and the Individual Differences Theory. Elihu Katz, Jay Blumber and Michael Gurevitch propounded the Uses and Preference theory in 1974. The theory, as adopted by Anaeto, Onabajo and Osifeso (2008), postulates that people prefer the media that would seemingly fit their expectations, leading to ultimate satisfaction. The theory assumes that when an audience actively seeks out media, they typically seek them to meet their need. For instance, a person may seek the media to fulfil a need to be informed. The theory takes an audience-centred approach to mass media communication.

For the Uses and Preference theory, Dominick (2001) affirms that people use the mass media primarily to be proactive and seek media that satisfy their want to see or read and different media needs. The theory is relevant to this study because its postulations help explain students' possible reading patterns of online newspapers. This theory assumes a scale of preference. It sheds some light on understanding why they choose to read what they choose to read. It explains that their reading pattern of online newspapers is based significantly on the expected satisfaction derivable from such readership. This means that the better the satisfaction the students think they stand to derive from their exposure to online newspapers, the higher their patronage of such online newspapers.

Otherwise called the Selective Influence Theory, the Theory of Selectivity was propounded by Berenson and Steiner in 1964. The basic assumption of the theory is that despite the powerful effect of the mass media, the audience retains the right to selectively choose what they want to be influenced by. According to Daramola (2003), there are four rings of defences in the concept or phenomenon called "Selectivity". These four dimensions are (i) Selective Exposure, (ii) Selective Attention, (iii) Selective Perception, and (iv) Selective Retention. Selective Attention explains that a person's individual selectivity exposes him or her to only those communications that agree with the person's existing attitude and interest and makes him or her avoid communications that do not. Selective Attention explains that

even when exposed to mass media communications, the mass media audience selectively attends to what he or she chooses to attend to. By Selective Perception, media communications can never create the same meaning and effect on all exposed to them as individual audience members selectively perceive the messages based on some individual psychological and social factors. Selective Retention further explains that people retain more messages favouring their attitude, choices and interests than those that do not.

The Individual Difference Theory was propounded in 1970 by Melvin DeFleur. The theory postulates that each member of the mass communication audience has unique psychological traits that usually result in their reacting differently to media messages. The theory further explains that though audience members could come from the same social group or academic environment, they differ significantly in how they view media messages based on specific individual peculiarities.

It is further elaborated that from a multitude of available contents, each member of the audience will selectively attend to certain messages if the messages on media carrying such messages are related to their individual interest, consistent with their attitude or supportive of their values and benefits, and mediated by their psychological peculiarities. The explanation is that there is no single audience but a different and diverse audience, and so perceptions, needs, desires, aspirations and goals of the mass media audience differ as the individual differs Folarin (2002). By implication, what is considered positive by an audience member may be considered harmful by another.

From the postulations of this theory, Folarin (2002) draws out two basic assumptions. The first, which is a universal truth, is that no two individuals are the same. No two persons share the same set of personal characteristics. The second, according to him, is that no individual is exactly the same all the time. Individuals, for the most part, are subject to an object of time, place and situation. He further asserts that the psychological framework of every individual is not the same all the time but is constantly changing. The people vary significantly in their socio-psychological make-up. Because they have different experiences and perceptions of things, their attention or influence patterns over a certain mass media message differ from one person to another. From the foregoing, it is evident that there is a nexus between the Individual Differences theory and this research.

The Design

This study deployed the survey as its research technique. Although the study focused on undergraduates residing in Uyo Capital City, otherwise known as Uyo Urban, it became more practicable to draw the respondents from the only university and most popular higher learning institution in that urban area - the University of Uyo. The institution was selected because it is the rallying point of undergraduates residing in Uyo Urban and contains a dependable population figure of undergraduates. Also, since the word 'undergraduate', according to the BBC English Dictionary, originally means a student studying for their first degree in a university system, the choice of the institution was apt. Therefore, the population of this study was drawn from the institution's undergraduates.

According to the Admission Unit of the University, the population of undergraduates as of the 2021/2022 academic session is 17,671. Therefore, the population of this study was 17,671 respondents. The sample size for this study was 374, which was determined using the Taro Yamane sample size

determination formula.

Furthermore, respondents were selected using the multi-stage sampling procedure. The respondents were divided into strata. The strata, which were the academic Faculties in the institution, were determined using the proportionate allocation formula, which uses a sampling fraction in each stratum - a fraction that is proportional to that of the total population) Neville and Sidney (2001).

Having determined the sample size for each stratum, it behoved the researchers to select the determined number of respondents from each stratum. This was done using the simple random sampling technique, which involved choosing representative subjects from a sample size such that each individual has the same probability of being chosen during the sampling process. Going by this technique, the researchers wrote out the names of the Departments in each Faculties and put them in baskets, each representing a Faculty. The researcher arrived at the following Departments, which represented their different faculties through balloting. The departments include Communication Arts, Political Science and Public Administration, Accounting, Guidance and Counseling, Medicine and Surgery, Human Anatomy, Law, Pharmacy, Agriculture, Economics and Extension, Urban and Regional Planning, Computer Science, and Civil Engineering. After selecting the Departments, the researcher purposively gave out the questionnaire to the respondents based on their readership of online newspapers. The questionnaire was used to elicit information on the patronage of online newspapers by undergraduate students residing in Uyo Capital City.

Data Presentation

This study had a total of 374 respondents. Below are the respondents by Departments

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Departments

Departments	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Agric-Economics and Extension	18	5
Communication Arts	70	19
Human Anatomy	17	5
Accounting	22	6
Medicine and Surgery	8	2
Guidance and Counseling	52	13
Urban and Regional Planning	22	6
Law	18	5
Pharmacy	11	3
Computer Science	36	10
Political Science and Public Administration	42	11
Civil Engineering	58	15
Total	374	100

The above table presents the number of respondents who correctly filled out and returned their questionnaires to the researcher.

Table 2: Extent of assimilation of online newspaper contents

Frequency of Exposure	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Average	126	34
High	83	22
Very high	165	44
Total	374	100

In Table 2, out of the 374 respondents which read online newspapers, the majority 165(44%) said they learn very much after reading online newspapers.

Table 3: Assimilation of political and other online newspaper content categories

Type of News Stories	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Celebrity Gossip News	63	17
Education	26	7
Sports	61	16
Health	26	7
Politics	70	19
Human Interest	38	10
Finance/Economy	24	6
Crime	40	11
Foreign	15	4
Agriculture	11	3
All of the above	-	-
None of the above	-	-
Total	374	100

According to Table 3, the most assimilated news categories in their order of readership are politics, celebrity/gossip news, sports, crime news, human interest, and education.

Table 4: Most Preferred Online Newspapers

Preferred Online Newspapers	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
<i>The Sun Online</i>	39	10
<i>The Guardian Online</i>	40	11
<i>The Nation Online</i>	45	12
<i>The Punch Online</i>	29	8
<i>The Vanguard Online</i>	38	10
<i>This Day Online</i>	20	5
<i>Sahara Reporters</i>	70	19
<i>Premium Times</i>	76	20
<i>Nigeria Tribune Online</i>	10	3
All of the above	7	2
None of the above	–	–
Others (please, specify)	–	–
Total	374	100

Data from Table 4 above that out of the 374 respondents, the majority of them (i.e. 76, which is 20%) said they preferred *Premium Times*.

Table 5: Relationship between respondent's Department and assimilation of online newspapers

Departments	Frequency	Percentage
Agric-Economics and Extension	15	5
Communication Arts	69	19
Human Anatomy	15	5
Accounting	24	6
Medicine and Surgery	9	2
Guidance and Counselling	52	13
Urban and Regional Planning	22	6
Law	21	5
Pharmacy	11	3
Computer Science	40	10
Political Science and Public Administration	42	11
Civil Engineering	54	15
Total	374	100

Table 5 shows that Communication Arts students are mostly exposed to online newspapers; hence, the massive patronage.

Discussion

For a systematic discourse, the discussion of findings in this study was based on the four research objectives on which the data analyses, as tabulated, were based. The first research objective sought to know how much the respondents assimilate online newspaper content. The extent to which respondents assimilate newspaper content depends on how much or how little they benefit from such newspapers or their contents. In the present circumstance, 'extent' examines the levels of assimilation or understanding exhibited by the respondents once they were exposed to online newspapers as students.

In Table 2, the respondents were accordingly expected to state their levels of learning from, understanding of or assimilation of the contents of what they read in the online newspapers. These options became necessary because, according to the theory of selectivity, apart from selecting the contents of their choices, newspaper readers may choose or freely decide how often they expose themselves to newspapers and their contents and how they absorb the contents of such newspapers.

Findings from the field (Table 2) show that 34% of the respondents, representing 126 respondents, read and assimilate the contents of online newspapers averagely, while 22%, representing 83 respondents, assimilated online newspapers highly. However, 44%, representing 163 respondents, said their assimilation of online newspapers and their contents was very high.

The finding is supported by research as Edegoli, Ezeh and Samson (2015) point out that some students and youths in the 21st century enjoy staying online frequently, or otherwise, all because of how they assimilate the contents of such newspapers. While the study identified several other means by which students and youths access the newspapers they read, it was abundantly established that one of such access methods is through online sources, with the aid of mobile phones, laptops, I-pads, etc.

On the whole, the submission of this study, as corroborated by previous research, is that many Nigerian undergraduates very highly read and assimilate online newspapers, but such assimilation would have been regular and consistent if there were no troubles of cost, power shortage, etc.

The second objective sought to find out the content category assimilated mainly by the respondents. The content category here concerns the broad types of stories carried in the select online newspapers. Again, the theory of selectivity comes into play here. The basic assumption of the theory of selectivity is that despite the powerful effect of the mass media (particularly the newspaper), the audience (reader) retains the right to selectively choose what they want to read, attend to, or be influenced by. Selectivity, therefore, is a strategy employed towards removing or ignoring unwanted communication messages. In this case, it involves ignoring certain online stories and attending to or reading others.

From the data presented in Table 3, it was observed that of the vast options provided by the researcher, the respondents read and assimilated more political stories, as 70 respondents (19%) said their interest was mainly in political stories. However, some persons may choose what to read based on the individual differences theory cited in Daramola (2003), which may depend on the uses and gratifications they derived from such content. Therefore, as earlier reviewed in this work, the Individual Differences and the Uses and Gratifications theories also apply in answering or discussing the above research question.

The next objective was that online newspapers is mostly preferred and assimilated by the respondents. In other words, the respondents were asked to identify the specific newspapers that carried their main choice's content category.

Naturally, there is no way that all the respondents would prefer all the newspapers listed in the same manner and simultaneously. Table 4 provides analytical information to this above question. From the findings, it is clear that *Premium Times* was the most preferred and assimilated online newspaper among undergraduate students in Uyo Urban. This, however, may not be unconnected with the widespread belief that *Premium Times* is generally perceived not only as an objective, aesthetic, flexible newspaper but also politically minded in content. In the order of preference, other online newspapers trailed behind *Premium Times* were *Sahara Reporters*, *Nation Online*, *Guardian Online*, *Sun Online*, *Vanguard Online*, *Punch Online*, *ThisDay Online* and *Nigeria Tribune Online*. Opinions sampled during the research showed that the aforementioned were among the top online news sources for Nigerian young persons.

However, it must be stated here that though preferences for newspapers may be similar among members of a given group, individuals have their personal preferences. The Individual Differences theory aptly supports this position. Again, the Individual Differences theory, as cited in Anaeto *et al* (2008), posits that each member of the mass communication audience has unique psychological traits that usually result in their reacting differently to media content. The theory further states that mass media audience members differ significantly in how they view media messages and channels based on certain individual peculiarities. This implies that while some respondents would find *Premium Times* as their best online newspaper, others would naturally prefer other online newspapers. Their individual preferences manifest as they selectively choose which online newspaper to be exposed to, pay attention to, how to perceive what they come across and how to retain memories of what they read.

The fourth and last objective sought to determine the relationship between respondents' Departmental background and their online newspaper assimilation pattern. In other words, the study sought whether respondents' departmental background had a hand in their newspaper and newspaper content assimilation pattern.

An average of 12 Departments in the University were available for the study. The essence was to determine whether the students' mother Departments had a hand in the respondents' frequent visits to online newspaper sites or platforms. Of course, some demographic factors must indeed contribute to media patronage. Therefore, it was proper to investigate Departmental backgrounds as contributors to certain readership and assimilation patterns.

From the analysis in Table 5, it is clear that the highest number of respondents from the Department of Communication Arts agreed that their Departmental demand prompted their frequent visits to online news and related story sites and platforms. It must be pointed out that Communication Arts covers a wide area of media practices: journalism, broadcasting, advertising, public relations and so on. Therefore, it may not be out of place for the respondents who are potential candidates for these professions and practices to attribute their online news access presence to their Departmental underpinning.

According to informal information from the students, some derivable benefits and gratifications

that their Department demands include information, entertainment, and education tips and principles that would help them write well for their Departmental media. The highlighted benefits and gratifications are similar to those enumerated by Uwakwe (2010, p.25), including “entertainment, relaxation, habit, convenience, social utility and advice”. For instance, Dominick (2001) explains that when faced with sensory overload, people tend to seek relief, thereby deploying media channels, including online newspapers, as pleasant means of escape and diversion from the frustrations of everyday life. Similarly, Uwakwe (2010) mentions these gratifications to include information, education, entertainment, socialisation, motivation, status conferral and cultural promotion.

Studies have also supported this study's outcome vis-à-vis the gratifications the respondents derive from exposure to online newspapers. A study by Hassan, Latiff and Atek (2015) showed that personal interaction, relaxation, entertainment, utility and surveillance, and timely updates were identified as benefits derived from online newspaper readership.

However, the whole of this is supported by the theoretical framework of the Uses and Gratifications theory propounded by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler and Michael Gureitch and cited in Anaeto *et al* (2008) and Asemah (2013). The theory explains that people use the media primarily to satisfy their needs. People choose what they want to read and see from different competing media sources to satisfy their individual needs.

It is pertinent to say that the discussion has covered the four objectives of the study. For instance, it is established that most respondents read online newspaper reports occasionally, meaning that they do not spend their whole days online, but when there is a need, particularly departmental needs. Also, it is essential to note that most respondents go online for politics-related stories. This, perhaps, is attributable to the political situation in the country at the time of this research. Importantly, it is also discussed that the most widely accessed online newspaper is *Premium Times* widely regarded as balanced, credible and authoritative in its reportage. Lastly, it is the discussion of this section that all respondents from the Department of Communication Arts said that the demands inform their online presence for news and other stories of their media-related courses. This proves that a student's academic background could influence their frequent media presence and patronage.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the findings, the respondents assimilated online newspaper content at a very high rate and preferred and assimilated political stories to other types of stories. Also, the online newspaper most preferred and assimilated by the respondents is *Premium Times*, while Communication Arts students accessed and assimilated online newspapers more than respondents from sister Departments. Based on this, it is hereby concluded that while the respondents assimilated online newspapers and their contents very highly, they mainly assimilated and preferred and political stories to other stories; and while they preferred a particular online newspaper (*Premium Times*) to others; students of a media-related Department were overwhelming in their routine access to and assimilation of online newspapers that: students should explore other online newspaper contents, if they want to be all-round in their academic endeavours; develop the reading and assimilation pattern of accessing as many online newspapers as possible; instead of confining themselves to one newspaper; and take newspaper assimilation importantly as this is vital in the Internet age in which they all find themselves.

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