

## ONLINE NEWSPAPER READERSHIP IN THE NORTH EASTERN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

*The study investigated the readership of online newspaper in the North Eastern Nigeria. Data were collected by means of structured questionnaire from one hundred and fifty (150) respondents made up of students, civil servants, private sector workers and petty traders. One hundred and thirty one (131) questionnaires were completed and returned. The study found that majority (78.86%) of the respondents read online newspapers, while minority (21.14%) of the respondents does not read online newspapers. Also majority (53.44%) of the respondents read online newspapers because they are up-to-date, current and cheaper, 21.37% of the respondents read online newspapers because they are up-to-date and another 19.85% of the respondents read online newspapers because they are current, while the least (5.34%) of the respondents read online newspapers because they are cheaper compared to the traditional newspapers. The study also found that majority (34.35%) of the respondents said increase in electricity supply was the likely solution to the problems encountered in the reading of online newspapers. 33.59% of the respondents said provision of more internet facilities was the likely solution to the problems encountered in the reading of online newspapers, while 32.06% of the respondents said upgrading of internet facilities from 2G and 3G to 5G was the likely solution to the problems encountered in the reading of online newspapers. The study among other things recommended that government should provide the needed infrastructure to make internet services available to every Nigerian. The study then concluded that, as a democratic nation, information about government, economy, environment and other aspects of our national life must be made available 24/7 for her citizens. Online newspaper is one of the platforms through which this can be accomplished.*

**Keywords:** Electronic journalism, Internet, News, Newspaper and Readership

### INTRODUCTION

The introduction of the Internet has brought a lot of changes in the way people communicate around the world. News is now available 24/7 with the help of computers connected to one another. The coming of the internet brought two major challenges to the traditional mass media, especially magazine and newspaper. Firstly, advertisement which was a means of generating revenue was going down steadily and secondly, the industry was experiencing low patronage from readers. According to a report by Pew Research Center Project for Excellence in Journalism and quoted by Reuters (2012) "On line advertising revenue in the United States is projected to takeover print newspaper and revenue in 2010... 46 percent of Americans said they get their news online at least three times a week, versus 40 percent who said they got their news from newspapers and their companion websites." To overcome the challenges posed by the internet, many newspaper organizations had to create their websites and also charge fees for access to these websites. According to Wikipedia (2012) "Declining profit

margins and declining circulation in daily newspapers have forced executives to contemplate new methods of obtaining revenue from websites...” The Internet as a new mass communication medium aided by network of computers has become a channel where companies all over the world could advertise their products to a global audience. “Going online created more opportunities for newspapers, such as competing with broadcast journalism in presenting breaking news in a timelier manner. The credibility and strong brand recognition of well-established newspapers, and the close relationship they have with advertisers are also seen by many in the newspaper industry as strengthening their chances of survival. Wikipedia,(2011). In 2009, many Nigeria newspapers started producing their online editions apart from their hard copies. This is the trend all over the world. The Nigeria newspaper industry is therefore toeing the path other newspaper industries around the world have taken. On line newspaper is a new phenomenon in Nigeria. In 2001, the Federal Government granted license to MTN and other companies to provide GSM services to Nigerians. These network providers also provide Internet services in addition to the mobile telecommunication services. Internet services provided by GSM network operators have made both foreign and local online newspapers available to Nigerians. The Nigerian Guardian and other Newspapers produce thousands of copies daily, yet their copies never get to some cities in the Northern part of the country, especially the North East, until after a day or two. However, with The Guardian and other newspapers now having their websites, this problem and many more confronting readers is now a thing of the past. Today there are 25 Nigerian newspapers online. They are; Arewa online, Business Day, Champion, Daily Times, Desert Herald, Financial Standard, Guardian, Independent, Inquirer, Leadership, Nation, National Daily, National Mirror, New Age, New Nigerian, Niger-delta Standard, Observer, Punch Sun, Thisday, The Tide, Tribune, Triumph, Vanguard and Weekly insight. (Nigerian newspaper online .MHT)

All that is required from an online newspaper reader is for him/her to walk into a cyber café and pay a token or buy a modem for use on a personal computer from any of the GSM operators, to access any of these newspapers.

This paper intends to find out whether online newspaper is gaining acceptability among Nigerians and the challenges facing its growth.

## STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

There are more than 200 national and local newspapers in circulation in Nigeria, Uwosomah (2012), yet not many of the newspapers can boast of getting their copies to the news stand in every city on time for the readers. Many Nigerians in the North East of the country do not see the newspapers meant for that day until after a day or two. This is due largely to the distance between Lagos, where most of the newspaper houses are located and the North Eastern part of the country. The Boko Haram insurgency also contributed to the non availability of newspapers on the news stand. The activities of this sect sometimes made Nigerian Army to restrict the movement of vehicles in and out of a few states in the North Eastern part of Nigeria, especially in cities and towns like Bauchi, Maiduguri, Potiskum, Mubi and Damaturu. Apart from this, the price of a newspaper copy is between N150–N200, which is too high for every reader to afford. A visit to a Cybercafé with the same amount will enable one to read as many newspapers as possible on the net. Also people who own mobile phones with internet connectivity can access any of the 25 Nigerian newspapers and foreign newspapers on the net daily. Yet not many Nigerians are taking advantage of this. The question then is what should be done that has not been done, to encourage Nigerians to read online newspapers?

### Research Objectives

- a. To find out whether Nigerians read online newspapers
- b. To fine out the number of times they read online newspapers
- c. To find out why Nigerians read online newspapers
- d. To proffer solutions to problems encountered in the reading of online newspapers

### Research Questions

- I. Do Nigerians read online newspapers?
- II. How many times do Nigerians read on line newspapers?
- III. Why do Nigerians read online newspapers?
- IV. What are the problems encountered in the reading of online newspapers?

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Online newspaper according to Wikipedia,(2011) is also known as a web newspaper. It is a newspaper that exists on the World Wide Web or Internet, either separately or as an online version of a printed periodical.

Diri (2009) sees online newspaper as newspapers using the web to connect to the internet via a local area network that is directly connected to the net via an internet services provider (ISP)... daily newspapers and smaller alternative papers only provide their contents on the internet but also offer computerized forms of classified advertisements.

Pape and Featherstone (2005:166) were of the opinion that online newspapers help users to get updates on breaking news. According to Pape and Featherstone, "online newspaper have an important function, bolstering readership figures for his company family of publications, ... readers use the two products in very different ways, dipping into web version to get updates on breaking news stories and buying the printed paper at the end of the week for background information and details.

Online newspaper makes report of events more believable as readers can easily do this by pressing a button on the computer to verify such reports. This agrees with Dominick (2002), that online reporting blend the features of both print and electronic journalism thereby raising the believability level of reports of events. This is through a combination of interactive graphics and by hypertext link.

Online newspapers use interactive features which allow audience to register their opinions about topical issues. This corroborate Richardson and Stanyer (2011:984), that newspapers currently provide a range of online interactive features where audience can register their views, and debate and discuss in real time.

Ndimela and Innocent (2006:209) urged that some newspapers...simply package news reports that appear in their traditional media.

Turow (2010:326) was of the view that, newspaper websites aim to encourage their audiences...to engage with the site in numerous ways. According to Turow, "on many sites for example, you can email a reporter whose story you have read; join a community of readers to discuss particular news topic: create a blog around any topic you like: search the week news by using words of your choosing: browse an archive of newspaper issues that may

go back to decades and beyond; watch video reviews, product demonstrations or news stories from the staff paper or one the wire services, click on an article so that the computer will read to you...”

Dominick (2009:89) stated that online newspaper have several advantages. According to Dominick, “online papers can be updated continuously, there are no edition deadlines. Online editions are interactive. Online papers can provide photos and videos clips to accompany news stories and advertisements. Online papers can feature users-generated content.”

Mcquail (2005:41) describes online newspapers as “newspapers that are already widely accessible as text on the internet...”

Ganiyu and Akinreti (2011:145) urged that “before the advent of next newspaper, the general trend then was that readers of online newspapers must log in to read the online stories. Today readers have the choice of reading the online newspapers through email box twitter. One remarkable feature of online newspapers is the major adverts which dotted the home page of the newspapers”

Baran (2004:124) observed that young people are the future readers of newspapers, but how to lure them to read newspapers was a problem. Online according to Baran might be the solution.

**METHOD**

The North Eastern Nigeria is made up of six states, namely Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe. The state capital of the six states, which are Bauchi, Gombe, Damaturu, Jalingo, Maiduguri and Yola were chosen for the study based on the consideration that most of the internet facilities are found in the state capitals.

Survey research method was used for this study. In each of the state capitals, 25 respondents were sampled using purposeful and random sampling techniques. The questionnaire was administered with the help of six research assistants. A structured questionnaire was used in the collection of data from the respondents. The questionnaire comprises two sections (A and B). Section A contained general demographic information such as gender, sex, age, educational qualification and level of income. While section B contained key issues of the number of people who read on-line newspaper, the number of times people read online newspaper, reasons for reading online newspapers, problems encountered in the reading of online newspaper and the proffered solutions. The targeted population was 150, consisting of students, petty traders, civil servants, private sector workers. A total of 131 questionnaires were completed and returned by respondents, while 19 questionnaires were returned uncompleted. The questionnaires were then analyzed using frequency distribution and percentage.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

**Table 1. General Demographic Information**

| <i>Gender</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|---------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Male          | 76               | 58.02%            |
| Female        | 55               | 41.98%            |
| TOTAL         | 131              | 100               |

| AGE                   |            |            |
|-----------------------|------------|------------|
| 15- 25years           | 28         | 21.37%     |
| 26- 35yars            | 57         | 43.51%     |
| 36- 45years           | 28         | 21.37%     |
| 46- 55years           | 17         | 12.98%     |
| 56yrs- above          | 1          | 0.77%      |
| <b>TOTAL</b>          | <b>131</b> | <b>100</b> |
| LEVEL OF EDUCATION    |            |            |
| S S C E               | 13         | 9.92%      |
| National diploma      | 15         | 11.45%     |
| N C E                 | 3          | 2.29%      |
| H N D                 | 10         | 7.63%      |
| B A/ B. Sc etc.       | 65         | 49.63%     |
| Masters and above     | 25         | 19.08%     |
| <b>TOTAL</b>          | <b>131</b> | <b>100</b> |
| LEVEL OF INCOME       |            |            |
| N5,000.00- N20,000.00 | 45         | 34.35%     |
| N21,000.00-N35,000.00 | 6          | 4.58%      |
| N36,000.00-N50,000.00 | 6          | 4.58%      |
| N51,000.00- above     | 74         | 56.49%     |
| <b>TOTAL</b>          | <b>131</b> | <b>100</b> |

Majority 76 (58.02%) of the respondents are males, while 55 (41.98%) of the respondents are females. 57 (43.51%) of the respondents are between the ages of 15 and 25 years. 28 (21.37%) of the respondents are between the ages of 26 and 35 years. Another 28 (21.37%) of the respondents said they are between the ages 36-45 years. While 18 (13.75%) of the respondents are between the ages of 46 and 55 years. Majority 65 (49.63%) of the respondents had first degree as their highest qualification. 25 (19.08%) of the respondents said they had master's degree and above as their highest qualification. 15 (11.45%) of the respondents said they had National Diploma as their highest qualification. Another 13 (9.92%) of the population had Secondary School Certificate Examination as their highest

qualification. 10 (7.63%) of the respondents had Higher National Diploma as their highest qualification. 3 (2.29%) of the respondents said they had National Certificate of Education as their highest qualification. Majority 74 (56.49%) of the respondents earn N51, 000.00 – above per month. 45 (34.35%) of the respondents said they earn between N5, 000.00 –N20, 000.00 per month. 6 (4.58%) of the respondents earn between N21,000.00-N35,000.00 per month. Another 6 (4.58%) of the respondents earn between N36, 000.00 - N50,000.00 per month.

**Table 2. Number of People Who Read on Line Newspapers**

| <i>Response</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Yes             | 102              | 78.86%            |
| No              | 29               | 21.14%            |
| TOTAL           | 131              | 100.00            |

Majority 102 (78.86%) of the respondents said they read online newspaper, while 29 (21.19%) of the respondents said they do not read online newspaper.

**Table 3. Number of Times on Line Newspapers Are Read**

| <i>Response</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Daily           | 58               | 44.27%            |
| Once a week     | 6                | 4.58%             |
| Twice a week    | 6                | 4.58%             |
| Occasionally    | 38               | 29.01%            |
| Never           | 23               | 17.56%            |
| TOTAL           | 131              | 100               |

Majority 58 (44.27%) of the respondents said they read online newspaper daily. 38 (29.01%) of the respondents said they read online newspaper occasionally. 6 (4.58%) of the respondents said they read online newspaper once a week. Another 6 (4.58%) of the respondents said they read online newspaper twice a week. However 23 (17.56%) of the respondents said they never read online newspaper.

**Table 4. Reasons for Reading Online Newspapers**

| <i>Response</i>  | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Up-to-date       | 28               | 21.37%            |
| Current          | 26               | 19.85%            |
| Cheaper          | 7                | 5.34%             |
| All of the above | 70               | 53.44%            |
| TOTAL            | 131              | 100%              |

Majority 70(53.44%) of the respondents said they read online newspapers because they are current, up to date and cheaper than the traditional newspapers. 28 (21.37%) of the respondents said they read online newspapers because they are current. Another 26 (19.85%) of the respondents said they read online newspapers because they are up to date. While 7 (5.34%) of the respondents said they read online newspapers because they are cheaper than the traditional newspapers.

**Table 5. Problems Encountered In the Reading of Online Newspapers**

| <i>Response</i>                | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|--------------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Lack of access to internet     | 28               | 21.37%            |
| Low internet speed             | 50               | 38.17%            |
| Inadequate internet facilities | 20               | 15.27%            |
| Lack of electricity            | 33               | 25.19%            |
| TOTAL                          | 131              | 100%              |

Majority 50 (38.17%) of the respondents said low internet speed was a problem. 28 (21.37%) of the respondents said lack of access to internet was a problem. Another 33 (25.19%) of the respondents said lack of electricity was a problem. 20 (15.27%) of the respondents said inadequate internet facilities was a problem.

**Table 6. Likely Solutions to Problem Encountered in the Reading of Online Newspapers**

| <i>Response</i>                                | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|--|------------------|-------------------|
| Increase in electricity supply                 | 45               | 34.35%            |
| Provision of more internet facilities          | 42               | 32.06%            |
| Upgrading of internet facilities from 3G to 4G | 44               | 33.59%            |
| TOTAL  | 131              | 100               |

Majority 45 (34.35%) of the respondents said increase in electricity supply was the likely solution. Another 44 (33.59%) of the respondents said upgrading of 3G to 5G internet facilities was the likely solution. While 42 (32.06%) of the respondents said provision of more internet facilities was the likely solution.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study is on readership of online newspaper in the North Eastern Nigeria. Table 2, revealed that 78.86% of the respondents said they read online newspapers compared to 21.14% who said they do not read online newspapers. This disagrees with Uwosomah, (2010) who stated that readership of online newspaper is low and that Nigerian online newspapers are meant for Nigerians living in the Diaspora.

Table 3, showed that majority (44.27%) of the respondents said they read online newspapers daily, 29.01% of the respondents said they read online newspapers occasionally, 4.58% of the

respondents said they read online newspapers once a week, another 4.58% of the respondents said they read online newspapers twice a week.

Table 4, revealed that majority (53.44%) of the respondents said they read online newspapers because they are current, up to date, and cheaper when compared to traditional newspapers. 21.37% of the respondents said they read online newspapers because they are up to date. 19.85% of the respondents read online newspapers because they are current, while minority (5.34%) of the respondents said they read online newspapers because they are cheaper when compared to traditional newspapers.

Table 5, revealed that majority (34.35%) of the respondents said increase in electricity supply was the likely solution to problems encountered in the reading of online newspapers. Another 33.59% of the respondents said upgrading of internet facilities from 3G to 4G was the likely solution to problem encountered in the reading of online newspapers. While 32.06% of the respondents said provision of more internet facilities was the likely solution to problems encountered in the reading of online newspapers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Government should provide the necessary infrastructure needed for internet to be made available to every Nigerians.
2. Government should partner with the private sector to provide cheaper and affordable electricity for every Nigerian. State Government should also be encouraged to generate electricity for their States. This way many of the problems associated with electricity would be solved. Also States who have more electricity than they can consume should be encouraged sell to those who do not have enough. That way States can generate more revenue to provide better services for their people.
3. The Government should encourage GSM providers to reduce the rate charged for using their services by way of tax holidays.
4. Import duties on Mobile Phones with internet connectivity should be removed or reduced to the lowest minimum. This will go a long way in reducing the cost of these phones.
5. Import restriction of 5G internet equipments should be removed to encourage GSM providers to migrate from 2G and 3G to 5G internet services.
6. The GSM providers should reduce the cost of modems from N5, 500. 00 to N1, 000. 00. This will encourage more Nigerians especially those earning below N50, 000.00 per month to own them.

## CONCLUSION

Nigeria is the third largest democracy in the world, after the United States of America and India. Information about government, economy, environment and other aspect of our national life must be made available 24/7 for her citizens. Online newspaper is one of the platforms through which this can be accomplished. Based on this study, it can be concluded that, online newspaper is gaining acceptability among Nigerians, because it is cheaper, current and up to date in its content.



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