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## Readers' Perception and Preferences for Online and Print Newspapers in the University Library

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# Readers' Perception and Preferences for Online and Print Newspapers in the University Library

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**Abstract:** This study determines the readers' perception and preferences for both online and print newspapers in the university library. The study employed quantitative approach, in which descriptive survey method was used to gather and analyze data from the students on Rhema University, Nigeria. The population of the study comprises 252 registered students in the library who regularly read newspapers, while structured questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection. The questionnaire was distributed to a sample size of 100 newspaper readers using simple random sampling while 90 copies were returned and used for the study. The findings revealed that a greater number (52.2%) readers prefer the online version of the newspaper to its print counterpart. Further analysis of the findings revealed that majority of the readers (48.9) find Online newspapers more convenient for reading compare to print newspapers. Greater number of readers (60.0%) revealed that both print and online newspapers are reliable and can be trusted. Also, majority of the readers (40.0%) agreed that "ease of access" is what determines their preference for either print newspaper or online newspaper. Meanwhile, majority of the readers (42.2%) indicated that readership level of online newspapers is greater than that of print newspapers.

**Keywords:** Preferences, perception, print newspaper, online newspaper, newspaper readership

## 1. Introduction

University libraries remain a vibrant hub for both staff, students and faculty members who congregate daily to get updated with current happenings in the society through newspaper publications – either print or online. Print newspapers are published on a daily or weekly basis, and are meant to inform the general public about recent events, especially public affairs. In addition to local, national or international news, newspapers also carry sports and entertainment features, opinion columns and advertising. Print media industry experiences changes as a result of advancement in technology especially new media [1]. The revolution witnessed in the print media industry has been more conspicuous now than any time in the print media history globally [2]. New technologies have brought myriads of challenges to print newspapers in the 21st century.

Newspaper is referred to as one of the periodical or serials publication issued at regular and usually close intervals, especially daily or weekly containing news, comment, features, and advertising. In the modern age, newspaper can take the form of print and online. The print

newspaper has been existing for decades before the advent of online news occasioned by the Information Communication Technologies. Print newspaper refers to newspapers that are produced in hard copies using ink and paper [3].

On the other hand, an online newspaper, also refers to as a web newspaper, is a daily newspaper that is published and read over the World Wide Web or Internet. It can be an individual daily that is available online only or it could be an online version of a printed periodical [4].

Readers, in the context of this study, include individuals or group of people who read a particular newspaper. In the university library, readers include the students, staff, faculty and members of the university Community. [5b] asserted that online newspapers are among the resources that a university library provides for the users.

With the advent of Information Communication Technologies, newspaper publications are no longer limited to print edition but also made available online. This new phenomenon must have untold consequences on the preference of readership among the users. Currently, newspaper agencies make use of the World Wide Web (www) among other services of the net to create and maintain web servers in which they publish contents of their papers. The increased use of the World Wide Web in universities is a vital component of the Information Communication Technologies. Through this, the library subscribes to online news sources which are made available to users [6], [7b].

The flourishing of newspapers and magazines online may not be unconnected with some possible secondary reasons- including enthusiasm for new technology and the general sense that one wishes to be part of the new wave at the moment not minding the adverse consequences. In a study conducted in [8], it was discovered that media technologies which is more impressive and efficient in dissemination of information have continued to replace print methods of information delivery more rapidly. It was also discovered in [1] that in the digital age, online news is instantly disseminated, posing challenges to print news. As a result, most newspapers integrated the Internet for more quicker and accessible news.

The surge in the introduction of new and better information tools, courtesy the advent of Information Communication Technology has increasingly complemented and replaced older print tools of mass information. New media delivery systems, new information processing, storage and retrieval systems, and readership pattern have irresistibly dominated the communication scene. An online newspaper is the online version of a newspaper, either as a stand-alone publication or as the online version of a printed periodical. Going online created more opportunities for newspapers, such as competing with broadcast journalism in presenting breaking news in a timelier manner. However, the advent of the Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) has changed the patronage level of the mainstream media (Newspaper, Radio and Television), especially the Newspaper, which has been the oldest among the trio. The average age of today's newspaper reader is 53, and that newspapers are making frantic efforts to connect with today's increasing distracted and time-pressed younger readers [9].

The current struggle between the two formats of newspaper production brought a question as to whether newspapers are losing gross audience, or the audience is simply shifting online; or whether the online and print audiences differ. Another question is whether newspaper sites are performing relative to other online news outlet [10].

It was observed that print editions of newspapers struggle with declining readership and advertising revenue. On the other hand, the online newspapers, while growing modestly, fails to fill the void on the more important metric of revenue. While examining the growth in online newspaper site visitors relative to the decline in print readership audiences, and to what degree readers of the print edition, it was observed in [11] that the accessibility of online newspaper content has declining impact on the readership of its print counterpart, as the online version satisfies readers' needs for information. A number of related studies have conducted in Nigeria, mainly in the west, south, and north regions of the country. But little or no scholarly attention is given to the readers' perception and preferences for print and online newspapers, particularly in the Southeast, which is the focus of this study. This study aims to examine the readers' perception and preferences, and determine the extent to which online newspaper reading affects the readership of its print versions in Rhema University Library, Nigeria.

### ***1.1 Statement of the problem***

Newspapers have since the advent of online newspapers, courtesy the platform provided the technology of Information Communication Technology (ICT) has been undergoing some salient challenges, as far as readers' patronage is concern. This scenario is capable of forcing the print newspaper out of circulation if concrete steps are not taken. It has been observed in the university library that the number of readers of print newspapers across the world is declining rapidly in the past year, while the total number of visitors to the online newspapers sites is increasing. However, the decline in the number of print readers is far higher than the increase in the number of online newspaper readers in the university library. With the state of readership of both newspaper versions, it is imperative to examine the preferences and perception of readers for improved service delivery in the university library.

### ***1.2 Objectives of the Study***

The general objective of this study is to determine readers' perception and preferences for online and print newspapers in the university library. Specifically, the study is intended:

1. To determine readers' preference between online newspaper and print newspaper
2. To determine the convenience is online newspaper compare to print newspaper
3. To identify the most reliable and trusted source of news between print newspaper and online newspapers.
4. To examine what determines readers' preference for either print newspaper or online newspaper among readers.
5. To ascertain readers' perception on the readership level of one news source against the other.

### ***1.3 Research Questions***

The following research questions were designed to guide the study:

1. What is the readers' preference between online newspaper and print newspaper?
2. How convenient is the online newspaper compare to print newspaper?
3. What is the most reliable and trusted source of news between print newspaper and online newspapers?
4. What determines readers' preference for either print newspaper or online newspaper among readers?
5. What is the readers' perception on the readership level of one news source against the other?

## **2. Literature Review**

Related literature to the current study is reviewed on the following subheadings:

Concept of Print Newspaper and Online Newspaper

Newspaper Readership in Nigeria

Causes of Shift from Print to Online Newspaper Readership

### ***2.1 Concept of Print Newspaper and Online Newspaper***

Print newspapers are news sources physical forms. They are newspapers that are produced in sheets of paper bound together. print newspaper is durable and can last for a long period of time. Online newspapers are web version of news sources, published and read over the World Wide Web or Internet. It is easily accessible and convenient. If you are running late to class or work but you want to take a look at the news, you probably aren't going to make a trip to the library to read the print newspaper when you can look at the online version right away.

Online newspapers are one of the information sources available in a digital or virtual form, retrieval or access using computer technology and the Internet which may possess the same information contents as in print [12a]. It was posited that online newspapers might slightly substitute their print counterparts, but they do not seem to replace the entire potentials of the print versions vis-à-vis news and information contents [13]. In a study conducted in Salman, It was discovered in [14] that print newspapers remain an important source of information despite the availability and interactive nature of the internet, which becomes the most prevalent means of communication in recent years. Studies also show that the internet becomes the most effective and preferred medium for information [15]. Most of daily readers still prefer print newspapers to their online counterparts in terms of local popularity [16].

The influence of Internet on Nigeria news media has continued to grow wide such that one does not need to struggle to access information. Nigeria media organizations have already established a strong presence in cyber space amongst the pioneers are the Guardian Newspapers ([www.ngrguardiannews.com](http://www.ngrguardiannews.com)), the This Day Newspaper group ([www.thisdayon-line.com](http://www.thisdayon-line.com)) the

Independent Newspaper ([www.newageon-line.com](http://www.newageon-line.com)) and so on. It can be said therefore that the Nigerian media are measuring up with their counter parts in other parts of the world by maintaining strategic presence on information super high way [17].

Some Nigerian Universities have managed to set up an e-library to provide facilities and resources for accessing online newspapers such as computers with mobile internet access, digital recording devices, open access mobile telephones etc. Adoption of university e-library facilitates information dissemination and enables researchers, students, faculty members and the university to be more research driven. University e-libraries in Nigeria provide electronic and online resources for staff and students in order to enhance educational development and build formidable information society. Electronic library achieves its objectives by creating opportunities for the users to access and retrieve appropriate information that cater for their information needs with relative ease [18].

With availability of newspapers on the internet, which is viewed as a single system, consisting of interrelated systems; people can easily have access to news at a click [19]. The Internet World Stats of 2017 apparently clarifies that Nigeria, having 91.6 million internet users, is ranked the largest Internet country in Africa [1]

Most readers of the newspaper dailies are keying into this new trend and enjoying the luxury of being informed from any part of the world even at the comfort of their beds. In order to maintain their brand loyalists most of the well-known national dailies have established their presence in cyber space so as to always satisfy their yearning readers that are scattered across the globe.

## ***2.2 Newspaper readership in Nigeria***

Given the continued quest for information, the average Nigerian reader looks up to the media in terms of the dissemination of news information, adverts and other related forms of print materials. The print, one of the forms of news sources has a dynamic way of attracting readership loyalist by its style of news reporting, judging from the past the newspaper industry in Nigeria has contributed immensely to the growth of the nation. It is the earliest form of journalism in which nationalists and the country's founding fathers used to agitate their followership which led to the country's independence.

However, the print media has always had a great readership size compared to the other forms of print papers in the country, because the citizenry or the average man in the country craves for information and newspaper being the oldest form of journalism still appeals to both the old and the young mostly the old. It was revealed in [20] that since the Internet was introduced, readership of print newspapers has slightly changed in Sweden and most obviously in Denmark, Norway and Finland. In the same vein, readership of online newspapers has significantly increased in the Western world. Despite the increase in online newspaper reading, some findings predicted bright future for print newspapers [21]. Studies also showed that print newspaper reading might considerably decline, especially at a time when people make internet the most relied-on source of information, but it is doubtful for online newspapers to absolutely

replace or displace their print versions [22]. It seems to be true that those who heavily relied on the internet for information still read print newspapers.

Most elderly citizens prefer to get their news information from the national dailies other than the television or the radio because they are used to the trend due to the fact that during their early years in life, it was a trend. Notably the press has had to grapple with the challenges of globalization, the internet especially as an emerging trend. Many readers in the Nigerian context don't really take note of the attitudinal changes that occur within them they only look out for the information that is derived from the news source itself.

The online trend is now receiving much attention in the Nigerian society especially from the well to do citizens of the country. It is true that the new trend is fast gaining raves amongst the people of Nigeria, but the conventional newspapers still receive good attention from the readers that are not able to get close to any of the devices used in gaining access into the internet. Several studies conducted to examine the print and online newspaper readership in Nigeria. One of the studies include [23] who discovered that more than half of newspaper readers in Nigeria read online newspapers. This reveals that online newspaper accounts for more readers than the print newspapers in the country. In fact, online newspapers are gaining popularity in Nigerian [1]. On the contrary, it was revealed in [24] that print version of newspapers satisfy the information need of readers more than their online counterparts, adding that readers of online newspapers also read print versions. The cause of low readership of print newspapers in Nigeria may likely to be connected with the introduction of online newspapers, which provide news content to the readers for free [1].

Online news readership is fast becoming a growing trend. The findings in [25] show that newspaper publishers strive not to publish news only in online platforms as they realize that print is where is where attention of readers is more captured. Findings in [17] revealed that the internet is still evolving in Nigeria and is yet to reach the adoption levels already achieved in the western countries, as such online newspapers and their readership is yet to be fully embraced. More so, it is pertinent to note that the readership level of the print newspapers in Nigeria is fast declining based on the fact that the readers of this generation not only seek the content of the newspaper these days, they want more in terms of deriving comfort while reading.

The average Nigerian reader can now afford to go on-line to check his or her mailbox and still has the time and space to login into any of the available newspaper platforms and gather whatever information needed without spending much or exerting his or her strength towards getting the same information. For example, in Rhema University, personal observation shows that students seem to prefer getting information from the internet than reading a print newspaper copy. The number of internet users in Rhema University may have direct relationship with online newspaper readership. University students are becoming more enlightened and conversant with the internet, thereby increasing their flair in accessing news sources through it.

### ***2.3 Causes of Shift from Print to Online Newspaper Readership***

Publisher do not completely focus on the online since print generate them good revenue. It was identified that the factor limiting the power of the internet to greatly expand the newspaper audience associate with socioeconomic reasons, which means the people who read the newspaper online are largely the same people who tend to read the paper in print [26].

In recent times, there is a significant shift from the newspaper readership towards online, this is attributed to a number of factors include the following:

***Cost:***

The cause of low readership of print newspapers in Nigeria may likely be connected with the introduction of online newspapers, which provide news content to the readers for free [1]. Print newspapers have relatively high fixed costs, costs associated with the press and the press operators are the same whether you are printing 100,000 newspapers or 150,000 newspapers as long as you have the capacity. This means that if you see a 10% decline in the costs of printing and delivering the newspaper. Newspapers generate most of their income advertising not subscription fees, advertisers decide how much to spend with whom based on the audience they are able to reach through the medium. As print newspaper readership declines, advertisers aren't spending much money [26].

In recent times, there is an obvious tussle between online newspapers and print newspapers for a greater chunk of the reading population, it is however pertinent to note that according to Lorraine Lee (2008: 01). Though the decline in newspaper readership is most acute among the younger generations. Still, the older generation grew up with print newspapers and has for the most part stayed consistent in news consumption habits, on-line news consumption as with other types of online information is naturally and culturally appealing to generation x. not only is our generation going on-line for news but the internet has made converts out of core older generations as well [27].

***Timeliness and Convenience:***

Lee further noted that with new technology comes an impatient society in which people can source their news on their own terms, meaning when and where they want it. However, timeliness and convenience have become one of the key factors in people's preference to read news online. People do not want to waste their time reading an article that is a day or even hours old, or have to go out of their way to find the closest news stand or wait for the morning paper to arrive. In addition to people's busy schedules, reduced interest in news generally may also have contributed to the drop in print readership.

***Interactivity:***

The internet has led to a whole new wave of interactivity that print newspapers are unable to offer, this generation has become more outspoken and is looking to exchange and debate ideas rather than accept what news is given to them by the media. With newspapers the only interactivity readers have would be writing letters to the editor in hope of getting them published.



With the internet, users can directly post comments on articles and electronically send in comments to the editor to generate discussion. When on-line users post the views on a topic, their ability to express their opinions make them feel like they are part of what shapes the presentation of news [26].

***Lack of Multimedia features:***

Multimedia features, lacking in print newspapers are another significant reason why readers go online for their news. Online stories provide readers with the opportunity to watch videos on the scene, and hear audio clips as well as experience first-hand other interesting visual that print newspapers cannot offer. Audience also seemed to have lost faith in print newspapers when compared to other media like television, where consumers can see the news. Multimedia online news is a step towards alleviating this problem [26].

**3. Research Method**

The study adopted descriptive survey method. The population of the study involved registered library users of the Rhema University Library, Nigeria, for 2019/2020 academic session which comprises 252 undergraduate students. A total sample size of 100 students was selected using simple random technique. A structured questionnaire was used to get the desired information from the students. The administration of the questionnaire was carried out by the researcher, and a total of 100 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to facilitate responses from the respondents on the spot by the researcher, and 90 copies were completely filled and used for the study. Data collected through the questionnaire were analyzed using frequency counts and percentage.

**4. Results**

A total of 100 questionnaires were distributed and 90 were returned and used for analysis.

**Table 1: Distribution of respondents according to faculty.**

<b>College</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Basic and Applied Sciences	50	50
Management and Social Sciences	25	25
Medical Sciences	25	25
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

The table shows the distribution of students from the colleges as follows: Basic and Applied Sciences 50(50%), Management and Social Sciences 25(25%), Medical Sciences 25(25%).

**Table 2: Distribution of respondents based on Sex**

<b>Sex</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Male	55	55
Female	45	45
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 3: Distribution of respondents based on Age**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
16-20 years	60	60
21-25 years	40	40
26 years and above	0	0

**Table 4: Distribution of respondents based on Class Level**

<b>Respondent Class Level</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
100	10	10
200	23	23
300	27	27
400	30	30
500	10	10

The table 2, 3 and 4 show the demographic data of the respondents. Table 2 shows that 55 representing (55%) of the respondents were male and 45 representing (45%) were females. Table 3 reveals that 60(60%) of the respondents were between 16-20 years; 40(40%) were between 21-25 years and no respondent was between 26 years and above. Table 4 shows that 10 (10%) of the respondents are from 100 level, 23(23%) from 200 level, 27(27%) from 300 level, 30(30%) from 400 level, and 10(10%) from 500 level.

**Table 5: What is the readers' preference between online newspaper and print newspaper?**

<b>Items</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Print Newspaper	41	45.6
Online Newspaper	47	52.2
Undecided	2	2.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>100</b>

The table 5 above shows that out of 90 respondents, 47(52.2%) prefer online newspaper to print newspaper; 41(45.6%) prefer print newspaper to online newspaper and 2(2.2%) was undecided on their preference. The study found that readers in the university prefer the online newspapers to the print newspapers. This is in line with the findings of several studies conducted in Nigeria such as Hassan and Azmi, 2018 and Matthew et al., 2013 which revealed that readers prefer online versions of newspapers to their print counterparts to a moderate extent. According to the findings of the above-named researchers, the reading preferences lends itself to a shift towards the online versions. The readership surge of the online newspapers among students is related to proliferation of the internet.

**Table 6: How convenient is the online newspaper compare to print newspaper?**

<b>Items</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Online newspapers are more convenient for reading compare to print newspapers	44	48.9
Online newspapers are not convenient for reading compared to print newspapers	36	40.0
Both print and online newspapers are convenient for reading	10	11.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>100</b>

The table 6 above shows that out of 90 respondents, 44(48.9%) indicated that online newspapers are more convenient for reading than print newspaper among students; 36(40.0%) indicated that print newspapers are not convenient for reading while 10(11.1%) revealed that both print newspapers and online newspapers are equally convenient for reading. The study found out that online newspapers are more convenient for reading compare to print newspapers. This is in line with the findings in [27] who discovered that timeliness and convenience have become one of the key reasons readers prefer to read online newspapers over print newspapers. Analysis showed that people do not want to waste their time queuing on the news stand or wait for the morning paper to arrive.

**Table 7: What is the most reliable and trusted source of news between print newspaper and online newspapers?**

<b>Items</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Online newspaper publications are more trustworthy	15	16.7
Print newspaper has been tested and trusted	21	23.3
Both news sources are reliable and can be trusted	54	60.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>100</b>

The table 7 above shows that out of 90 respondents, 54(60.0%) indicated that both news sources are reliable and can be trusted; 21(23.3%) indicated that print newspapers have been tested and trusted more than online newspapers while 15(16.7%) indicated that online newspapers are more trustworthy. The findings of the study show that both online newspaper and print newspapers can be trusted. This is in line with [13]. Analysis showed that though online newspapers might generate higher readership that their print counterparts they do not seem to replace the entire potentials of the print versions with regards to news and information contents

**Table 8: What determines readers’ preference for either print newspaper or online newspaper?**

<b>Items</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Ease of Access	36	40.0
Cost factors in terms of subscription of data	29	32.2
Interest factor	25	27.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>100</b>

The table 8 above shows that out of 90 respondents, 36(40.0%) indicated that ease of access is what determines readers’ preference for either print newspaper or online newspaper; 29(32.2%) indicated that cost factors in terms of subscription and data while online newspaper publications consume data and more money than conventional newspapers and 25(27.8%) indicated that Interest determines their preference for reading either of the news sources. The findings of this study show that the major factor that determines readers’ preference for either print or online newspapers is “ease of access”. This is in line with [1] which discovered that in the digital age, online news is instantly disseminated, which makes it easier for internet users to have quicker access news. In the same vein, research findings in [28c], [29a] show that online newspaper provide users with up-to-date information, speedy and easy access to information.

**Table 9: What is the perception of readers on the readership level of one news source over the other?**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Readership of online newspapers is greater than that of print newspapers	38	42.2
Readership of print newspapers is greater than that of online newspapers	36	40.0
Both news sources have equal readership	16	17.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>100</b>

The Table above shows that out of 90 respondents, 38(42.2%) indicated that readership of online newspapers greater than that of print newspapers; 36(40.0%) indicated that readership of print newspapers is greater than that of online newspapers while 16(17.8%) indicated that both news sources have equal readership. The findings of this study revealed that the readership of online newspapers is greater than that of print newspapers. In line with this finding, [20] revealed that readership of online newspapers has significantly increased in the Western world. In the same vein, [23] discovered that more than half of newspaper readers in Nigeria read online newspapers, indicating that online newspaper accounts for more readers than the print newspapers in the country.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study examined the readers’ perception and preference for online and print newspapers in the university library. From the result, online newspapers will continue gain more readership but will certainly not replace their print versions. In as much as the news contents of both sources are reliable and trusted, some readers still prefer print newspapers due to the feeling they derive from it. As rightly said by various researchers, proliferation in information technologies may increase patronage of online news sources but may not lead to total annihilation of the print newspapers. In Nigeria universities, print newspapers will continue to thrive especially among the older users since most of the old people are less conversant with Information Technologies compare to younger people.

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