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NEWSPAPER READERSHIP PATTERN AMONG NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: PERSPECTIVES FROM MASS COMMUNICATION STUDENTS

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Abstract

Reading newspaper informs readers' as well as enhance the readers' literacy skills. Therefore, the newspaper serves as a tool for learning, especially among communication students. However, newspaper readership among students in Nigeria has been an issue of concern. This study investigated newspaper readership among Mass Communication students in the Taraba State University, Jalingo. The research design adopted was a descriptive survey, population frame was 630 Mass Communication Students of Taraba State University, Jalingo registered in 2018/2019 session while the sample size was 242 selected via a stratified random method. It was discovered that there is low newspaper readership among the students. The student preferred general interest newspapers particularly Daily Trust and the Sun Newspapers. The manners in which the students access newspapers were majorly through borrowing and vendor stand-free-reading. The study also revealed that politics and sport are the major subjects of interest which the students often seek from newspaper while the problems militating against the newspaper readership among the students include lack of money, prevalent of online newspaper and poor supply of newspaper in the University library and the Department. Nigerian Universities should provide newspapers in the University library daily and create newspaper hub or stand within the department of mass communication to enable students to access newspapers.

Keywords: Mass Communication, Taraba state university, Newspaper, Readership, Students.

1. Introduction and Background to The Study

Reading is the heart of learning, especially in formal education settings like University system. Reading increases one's knowledge and thinking about a particular subject, and the society as a whole (Faizli, 2012). Onwubiko (2015) asserts that, reading has four intentions: reading for enjoyment and relaxation, reading for information, reading for knowledge and reading for all the above factors. He further asserts that there are various materials at the disposal of a reader; one of the major reading materials for reading is newspaper.

Newspaper is a mass medium which conveys timely information issue at regular interval of time. As a mass medium, newspapers are useful for education, information, recreation, relaxation and entertainment. This explains why Ola and Ojo (2007) remark that newspapers are important because they carry current information and they keep the readers informed of events and happenings within and outside their immediate environments. Okunna (1999) reinforces this position by asserting that the newspaper is important in that it serves as a carrier of current information or news. Obaid (2014) concurs that newspapers are the textbooks that provide up to date information on local, state, national and world affairs, the most current analysis and criticism of the executive and legislative decision making, the latest in music, theatre, television, fine arts and even column and comics to make readers laugh. Babalola (2002) asserts that newspapers facilitate literacy empowerment; it inevitably promotes critical thinking, retention of information, problem solving and the querying of information source. Furthermore, newspaper readership enables one to become a person who possesses civic-conscious values, tolerance and closeness to the community (Igwe, 2011).

The importance of newspaper, especially to students cannot be overemphasis. Indeed, students are supposed to be the most active users of newspapers. The permanency attributed to print media, including newspaper has made information recall possible, and recall capability frees the content from becoming transient and ephemeral therefore, audience of the medium like students can use the content for academic and other purposes (Ezeh, Chukwuma & Enwereuzo, 2015). According to Onwubiko (2005), newspaper is one of the most advantageous types of media especially for students. They described newspapers as "outside of the classroom teachers". This, according to them is due to the fact that newspapers are more formal and use standard forms of languages which will help students develop their language skills. They further argued that, Newspapers can provide useful information, including university admissions, jobs, and special inducements for the government that are very useful for students. Among all mass communication channels, Elmadwi (2014) observed that reading of newspaper articles is highly encouraged for students because through newspaper, students can enjoy a variety of reading and visual materials that will enhance learning.

Despite the significant place of newspaper readership in the life of students, evidence from a large body of empirical literature seems to suggest that newspaper reading among youths is declining. For instance, Dominick (2002, p. 14) notes that newspaper readership has been declining over the last couple of years. Udie (2002, p. 100) also reports that the frequency of newspaper readership among Nigerian students is less than 50%. Biagi (2003, p. 83) states that since the 1970s, the overall number of newspapers has declined due to non-readership. Business Essay (2009, p. 2) has equally reported downward trend, in the past few decades, in newspaper readership in countries of the world including Europe and America. A survey conducted by Afro barometer in 12 African

countries, including Nigeria, in 2003 indicates that only 13 per cent of the sampled population professes to read a daily newspaper (Afrobarometer, 2003). According to the 2010 study carried out by the Advertisers Association of Nigeria (ADVAN) across the country, the daily sales figure of all the newspapers was less than 300,000, meaning that only one in every 470 Nigerians buy newspapers daily (Ekeng, 2010). Putting this reality in proper perspective, Popoola (2010) said that all the newspapers in Nigeria today have combined circulation figure that is far less than 500,000 copies per day when compared to 1980 when the population of Nigeria was about half of what it is today.

There is no doubt that the conventional newspaper is passing through its hardest time ever, due to the emergence of the internet. The internet provides online functionalities and possibilities far beyond what the conventional newspaper could offer. For instance, the internet provides instant and less expensive access to news and information with interactive and multimedia features as well as easy access through very simple handheld technologies like mobile phones and personal computers (Afrobarometer, 2007). Varian (2013) argued that the internet is a more superior way to distribute and read news and information. Rajendran and Thesinghraj (2014) aptly concur that, new media and the social media has posed a challenge to the printed newspaper. According to them, Readership habits seem to be changing as users turn to the internet for free news and information. The instant feature of the social media and the online news were one of the smart options for the consumers to accept it globally. This situation above, inadvertently threatens the conventional channels of mass communication, including newspaper in their traditional stronghold of the news business; thereby forcing them to tap into the internet's huge resources.

Today, newspapers joined other mass media to also deliver their contents digitally. But as readers rush to online content, it is possible that conventional print newspapers may suffer a decline in readership (Aliagan, 2011). There is growing evidence that shows high usage of online platforms as sources of news and information among college or university students around the world (Ani, 2010; Adekunmisi, Ajala, & Iyoro, 2013, Shadrach & Abugu, 2019 etc.), thus, it is expedient to further test if such development has affected conventional newspaper readership among students. It is also clear that newspaper readership habit among audience determine the survival or otherwise of the conventional newspaper industry in Nigerian and many other countries. It is against this backdrop that this study sought to unravel newspaper readership among University students.

1.2 Aims and Objective of The Study

The aim of this study is to ascertain newspaper readership among Taraba State University students. The study is guided by the following specific objectives:

- i. To ascertain the newspapers that students of Taraba State University, Jalingo mostly read.
- ii. To determine how regular students of Taraba State University, Jalingo read the newspapers.
- iii. To determine the ways through which students of Taraba State University, Jalingo obtain the newspapers they read.
- iv. To find out the type of stories students of Taraba State University, Jalingo mostly read on the newspaper

- v. They examine the factors militating against reading of newspaper among students of Taraba State University, Jalingo.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Concept of Newspaper

Some communication scholars attempt a definition of what a newspaper means. According to Sanderman et al. cited in Okunna and Omenugha, (2012) defines newspaper as an unbound printed publication issued at regular intervals which presents information in words, often supplemented with pictures. In the same line Nwodu (2006) also describes Newspaper as a printed unbound paper that contains news about current political, economic, socio-cultural, educational, environmental, scientific-cum-technological and sundry affairs. Okunna and Omenugha (2012) simply define newspaper as “news-carrying paper” because the happenings contained in the newspaper are new and timely and therefore qualify as news.

The implication, however, is that a typical newspaper is unlike most publications that are bounded, newspapers are hardly bounded. Like every other print media mode, newspaper contents are usually permanent to the extent one can enjoy repeat exposure for as long as one is able to preserve a particular edition of a newspaper and that the newspaper covers a broad spectrum of interests ranging from politics, economics, socials, environmental, science, technology, and sundry subjects. Furthermore, the publication of a newspaper could be daily, weekly or bi-weekly (Okunna & Omenugha, 2012).

2.2 Concept of Readership

The concept of readership is central to the newspaper. Readership is an abstract concept which captures the act of reading. The concept, though difficult to define, is usually associated with newspapers, magazines and all kinds of periodicals. Thus, readership is the number or type of people who read a particular newspaper, magazine (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, 2010). Bottle PR, a UK based agency established in 2004, defines readership as "a general term that refers to the number of people reading a particular publication, including both the individual who purchased the publication and others who have read it (Bottle PR, 8th February 2011). The Huntsville Time website (8th February 2011) defines readership as "the number of adults (18+) in a specified geographic area who "read or looked into the publication yesterday" (cited in Obaid, 2013).

To read is to get ideas from printed or written materials. Reading is a way of acquiring knowledge. Oyeyemi (2005) observed that reading is a means of tapping knowledge from superior minds. Reading is a term used to refer to an interaction by which meaning encoded in visual stimuli by an author makes meaning in the mind of the reader. It involves the recognition of printed or written symbols which serve as stimuli for the recall or meaning through the intellectual manipulation of concepts already possessed by the reader. The resulting meanings are thereafter organized into thinking process according to the purpose adopted by the reader, such an organization leads to modified thought and/or behaviour, or else leads to a new behaviour which takes its place either in person or in social development.

From another perspective, reading is defined as the vocalization of words in a given passage and the process of giving meaning to materials. This definition refers to reading aloud, which beginners do quite often and enables teachers to detect and to correct errors spontaneously.

Although, reading can be done aloud, but vocalization in the course of silent reading slows down reading pace. For reading to be effective, it should be done with a good speed. Reading speed is expressed in the number of character or words read per minute. Johnson (1999) observed that there are two types of reading, namely, reading aloud and silent reading. Reading aloud involves audible vocalization of what is being read and is good for young learners because it exposes error for timely corrective measure. Reading aloud is used for speech delivery in public gatherings, and is also the format for dictation and oral comprehensive tests. In silent reading, the reader reads in the inside of him. In other words, he does not vocalize what he reads. Wide reading imposes reading silently and this is necessary for developing the reading habit, effective reading and for a profound understanding of literate and technical tests.

2.3 State of Newspaper Readership

Reports indicate that globally the newspaper is passing through its hardest time ever, especially since the Internet came to provide online functionalities and possibilities far beyond what the newspaper could offer: instant and free news, interactive and multimedia features, and easy accessibility through very simple handheld technologies like mobile phones and personal computers (Ashong & Henry, 2017). Literature is replete with materials which chronicle the monumental shifts in news consumption occasioned around the world. Examples include: “Murdoch Predicts Gloomy Future for Press” (Plunkett, 2005) “The Future of Newspapers: Who Killed the Newspaper?” (The Economist, 2006) “Goodbye to Newspapers?” (Baker, 2007), “Newspaper Circulation Continues to Decline Rapidly” (Pérez-Peña, 2008), “Newspaper Closings Raise Fears about Industry” (Lieberman, 2009).

Similar reports in Nigeria include: “Dwindling Sales: A Looming Media Challenge” in *Daily Trust* (Omoniyi, 2010) “Experts Debate Future of Print Media: Online Media, A Threat” in *Nigerian Tribune* (Ekeng, 2010) “Forget Circulation Figures, Print Media is still very relevant” (Adefaye, 2010, cited in Abdulraheem *et al.* (2012)) “The Solution to the Dwindling Newspaper Circulation in Nigeria” (Popoola, 2010) “Kaduna newspaper vendors say online publication disrupts sales” (*Daily Trust*, 2012). The decline is almost everywhere; what may differ is the degree or dimension of effect.

It is important to note that, many reports do not support the hypothesis that print media readership is going extinct. For instance, Ahlers (2006) uphold that the mass migration from printed newspapers to online sources of news is not supported by the facts. For Ahlers (2006) some migration from offline to online news consumption has occurred, but the change is not as dramatic as some sources claim and the impact on the printed newspapers is not as apocalyptic as the extent of implying the “death” of the printed newspaper. In Ahlers (2006)’s views the online news media acts as a complement rather than as a substitute. Salman *et al.* (2011) noted that Malaysian newspapers still attract advertising dollars even with the presence of online newspapers. What this implies is that, there is still some level of newspaper readership around the world, despite the outcry that online media is displacing print media.

2.4 Nigerian students Exposure to Newspaper

Exposure to newspaper among young Nigerians is said to be low. This is more so among students in tertiary institutions like Universities in the country (Abdulraheem, Adisa and La'aro, 2012). Alianga (2011) opines that Nigerian university students today do not give much attention to newspaper. According to him students, mostly access newspaper when they have a pressing need which can be assigned or vital information said to be available in a particular edition. Cooper (2009) argues that newspaper readership is in its worst state as readers are massively shifting to online sources. Ashog and Henry (2013) concur that the emerging realities in the media business, especially the newspaper, show that the paradigm is shifting. With the coming of the online newspaper, the print newspaper seems to be losing its hegemony as more readers appear to go online.

Daily Trust (2012) reported that newspaper vendors across Nigeria are complaining about drop in newspaper readership among Nigerians especially young college students. According to the report, these days college students do not fancy buying and reading the newspaper. The National Population commission of Nigeria cited in Aliagan (2011) also does not report that most Nigerians buy nor have access to newspapers, while newspaper readership is generally low in all zones in the country. Cheney, Knapp, Alan, and Czaplá (2006) specifically states that, there is a poor attitude to newspaper readership among students in tertiary institutions due to the growing presence of news on the Internet, radio, television, etc., however, they posit that convention newspaper can continue to play a vital role in the academic community. They advocate that, in order to improve newspaper readership among college-age students, libraries should provide free and unhindered access to newspapers to all library users.

2.5 Regularity of Nigerian students Newspaper Readership

Extant literature regarding the regularity of newspaper readership among Nigeria students has shown that most Nigeria students read newspaper occasionally. For instance, Igbeka and Ola (2009) explained that in most schools' libraries, newspaper section is hardly visited by students. They opined that students come around newspaper section only if there is urgent assignment which necessitates them to read or photocopy some section of the newspaper. Aliagan (2011) adds that the regularity of newspaper in Nigeria schools though very poor but it varies between age and course of students among students. He adds that older students between age 35 above are likely to access newspaper more regularly than younger students, he also opined that students of communication, journalism and languages are likely to access and read newspaper more frequently than other students especially science students.

In the same vein, Udie (2002, p. 100) also reports that the frequency of newspaper readership among Nigerian students is less than 50%. Biagi (2003, p. 83) states that since the 1970s, the overall number of newspapers has declined due to non-readership. This phenomenon is not only in Nigeria but globally, Business Essay (2009) reported downward trend, in the past few decades, in newspaper readership in countries of the world including Europe and America. The report shows that young people rarely read newspapers. A number of studies have reported some differences between male and female students and their habits of reading (Uusen & Muursepp, 2012). The studies show that male students are likely to read newspapers more than female students.

2.6 Newspaper Content Preference among Nigerian Students

Ashong and Henry (2017) explained that newspaper readership is determined by content preference. This implies that the newspaper that lacks the ability to meet the information need of its target customers stands the risks of losing such readers. It is believed that content preferences among varies among readers. Some readers enjoy sport stories while others go for politics, celebrity, gossip, health and many others. As posited by the Uses and Gratification Theory, audiences make use of the media to meet certain need rather than remain passive to media selection (McQuail, 2004), based on this, scholars often seek to determine the gratification different group of people seek from giving medium.

In respect to students' preferences of newspaper contents, there seems to be consensus among scholars that the most preferred newspaper content among college students is sport and entertainment. Edegoh, Ezeh and Samson (2015) posit that students and young people once they collect newspaper rush to last pages where sport and entertainment stories are contained. Similarly, Aliagan (2011) posits that though newspaper readership is drastically low among students, the few who exposed to the medium do so to access entertainment and sport information. However, Eamin and Haque (2013) show that female students who access print media like newspaper are more interested in fashion styles. This implies that, newspaper stories preferences of students are majorly influence by their desire for entertainment and fashion sense rather than any educational purpose.

2.7 Ways Nigerian students Access Newspaper

Access to newspaper is diverse. Newspapers can be access through direct purchase from road side vendors, monthly subscription such that it can be delivered to one's house or office on regular basis and it can be made available in public offices and hostels and libraries. It is important to state here that, with development in new media, which led to the development of online newspaper, newspaper readers access content directly through their Smartphone (Talabi, 2016). However, the focus of this study is not online newspaper, but a conventional hardcopy newspaper.

Reports indicated that the major means by which students' access conventional newspaper is through direct purchase and use of the library (Ashong & Henry, 2017). They further revealed that though, there is a poor attitude among students toward accessing newspaper, the libraries over the years have continued to play significant role in providing newspaper for students and the university community. Layefa, Johnson and Taiwo (2016) avers that h pattern of newspaper access among most people, especially young adults in college is "borrowing" and free reading groups, they opined that, young newspaper readers struggled to comment their resources toward the purchase of a newspaper. They preferred to borrow it for a few minutes and then return it or patronize their free reading groups close to them.

2.8 Challenges against Newspaper Readership among Nigerian Students

Newspaper readership generally is faced with some challenges; however, as it relates to this study, which is on students' newspaper reading culture, there are certain unique challenges that militate against students' newspaper reading culture. According to Talabi (2016) students' newspaper reading habit is limited by excessive use of new media technologies like Smartphone in which the students use to access online stories free of charge as well as spend time in social media. Ashong and Henry (2017) adds that, newspaper is not fanciful in the sight of the student considering the

flexibility new media technologies and the convergence process which enables a students' o access all newspapers on one device are low cost.

In his submission, Aliagan (2011) link poor newspaper reading to socio-economic factor. He posits that, each edition of a newspaper cost Two Hundred Naira (N200) this means every week a student is expected to dedicate at least One Thousand Naira (N1, 000) to have a week's editions of just one brand of newspaper. This, according to him is not realistic considering the poor economic condition plighting Nigerians today. Another challenge militates against students' access to newspaper is a poor supply of newspaper in most universities' libraries. According Salaam (2002), consistent supply of newspaper in most libraries in Nigeria is lacking due to issues of under-funding. The problem is more so in schools or universities in Nigeria where there has always by issue of poor funding. In this case, the management might not be able to provide a newspaper for students' readership consistently.

2.9 Empirical Studies

Many researchers have undertaken to study newspaper readership among different audiences and in several societies. The works of some of these scholars are reviewed. A Latin American Kids study (1998) on newspaper readership among Latin American Kids reported that only 20.8% of Latin American Kids between the age brackets 7-11 years read a week day newspaper and 18.1% read a Sunday newspaper. From the foregoing, there is strong research-based evidence of declining newspaper readership among people of different ages. There are also enough empirical data showing that youths do not read newspapers. However, at present newspapers are available in both hard copy and electronic form and are accessible through the Internet using all kinds of devices which are at the disposal of youths, particularly students. All these innovations are meant to improve readership of newspapers and attract young readers.

Similarly, Amankwah, Adwoa Sikayena (2010) in their study of the newspaper readership habits of the residents of the Adenta Flats, Adenta, Accra examines particular newspapers residents read as well as the subject items that they considered most important in a newspaper. It also looked at the factors that influenced newspaper reading as well as which newspapers respondents considered credible and those they regarded as not credible. Credibility was matched against the level of readership of the selected newspapers to determine whether there was a correlation between the two variables. The results indicate that most respondents bought the newspapers they read or accessed them through supplies at work, from public libraries, universities and colleges, co-tenant and friends because primarily, they considered them informative and credible sources of information. It was obvious from the study that respondent buy more of newspapers they consider credible and less of those considered not credible. The study also discovered that physical features such as headlines, well written stories as well as even newspaper review programmes boosted newspaper reading.

In another study, Aliagan (2011) investigated the pattern of newspaper readership in Ilorin metropolis using 150 respondents in a survey. The study revealed that an average of 4,800 newspapers is sold in Ilorin on daily basis, with some newspapers selling as low as 80 copies. This is a poor showing for a city of half a million people. This revelation confirms the general appraisal on low newspaper patronage and readership in the country. The study identified poor economic background of most people as a challenge to newspaper patronage in Ilorin. In addition, the reason

for low newspaper patronage was also being attributed to shallow reports of activities in the metropolis. Majority of the newspapers devote their pages on reporting the rest of the nation to the metropolis and have scanty reports about the local readers and their activities.

Likewise, Akanda and Haque (2013) surveyed newspaper reading habits of the graduate students of Social Science faculty of University of Rajshahi in Bangladesh. The study demonstrates that the majority of the graduate students read Bengali and English newspapers. Moreover, the research reveals that international section of the newspaper is the most preferred section. This paper also highlights that a majority portion of respondents prefer hall library to read printed newspaper while a large number of them prefer computer center of the university central library to read online newspapers. The study also highlights the barriers and attempts to provide the suggestions to overcome the hurdles of reading both printed and online newspapers. This study shows a positive attitude to newspaper readership among students in Bangladesh, such might not be the case in other places in Nigeria like Taraba State.

Consistent with the above findings, Edegoh, Ezehand Samson (2015) examines newspaper reading habits of youths in Anambra State, Nigeria. The study uses quantitative research technique. It adopts a sample size of 300 youths, purposefully drawn from Awka, Onitsha and Nnewi. The survey is anchored on the Uses and Gratification theory of the mass media. The paper employs the simple percentage method and frequency tables as analytical tools. Findings of the study show that youths in Anambra State read newspapers a lot and that *The Sun*, *The Guardian*, *Complete Sports* and *The Vanguard* are the newspapers they mostly read. Findings also reveal that sports, political and economic news, are the major stories the youths read and that they obtain the newspapers they read mainly by going to newspaper stands (to read without paying) browsing newspapers with their cell phones, borrowing from friends and neighbours and by visiting the public library.

In a more recent study, Isyaku and Azmi (2018) investigated the extent of readership preferences for both print and online newspapers in northwestern Nigeria. Daily Trust, being the largest circulating newspaper in the study area was selected for case study. The study employed quantitative approach, in which descriptive survey method was used to gather and analyse data from print and newspaper readers in the study area. Structured questionnaire was used as a data - gathering instrument. The questionnaire was distributed to a sample of 330 newspaper readers using simple random sampling. The findings revealed a moderate (Mean=3.38) readers' preference for the online version of the newspaper to its print counterpart. Further analysis of the findings revealed that the majority of the readers (Mean=3.49) find themselves reading less print copy of the newspaper because they have access to the free online versions. The majority of the readers (mean=3.37) will continue to read the print version, despite the availability of its free online counterpart. Also, the majority of the readers (Mean=3.08) spend less time reading the print copy of the newspaper due to the availability of its online versions. Meanwhile, the majority of the readers (Mean=3.51) are confident that the newspaper will continue to survive despite the availability of its free online versions. This shows that there is a decline in newspaper readership in the study area.

2.9 Theoretical Framework: Uses and Gratification Theory

Uses and Gratification theory was first theorized and tested in Elihu Katz's article in 1959. The theory proposed two inferences about audiences of media. First, audiences are active in the selection of media and their messages. Second, audiences are mindful of their reasons for choice

of a particular medium vis-à-vis both information and entertainment. They consider these reasons as they ardently search for media messages for information needs and gratification. Therefore, not only the content defines media preferences, but also audience's characteristics and their relationship with the media content.

According to Potter (2012), the basic tenets of Uses and Gratification theory formed five claims: 1) communication behaviour is purposive, motivated and goal directed; 2) individuals initiate the choice and usage of communication medium; 3) communication behaviour is mediated or guided by a host of psychological and social factors; 4) in the gratification of needs, the media contend with other forms of communication; 5) people are naturally more powerful than the media in the course of effects. The Uses and Gratifications theory has been applied as an approach in many communication studies to understand the relationship between audiences and their media choice (Lucena, 2011).

One criticism of the uses and gratifications approach is that the audience is not always as active as was once originally thought, a valid view of audience behaviour lies between the extremes of being passive and expected to be influenced by the communicated messages and being active and expected to make decisions about what media content to accept and reject (Rubin, 1993). McQuail (2007) believes that the theory suffers from lack of theoretical coherence. He thinks that some of the theory's terminology need to be further defined. He notes that the theory relies too heavily on the functional use of the media, because there are times when the media can be reckless. Regardless, these criticisms, uses and gratification theory have some practical in explaining media choice among the audience.

The Uses and Gratification theory is relevant to the study in that it will help in explaining the newspaper and content choice of students as well as help to explain the benefits or gratification the students seek from newspaper and various content. In a general sense the theory will help to explain the fact that, students are passive in their media selection and the factors that influence their choices as the select media (newspaper) of their choice.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted descriptive quantitative survey approach. Survey design is a technique that entails gathering data about opinions, attitude and behavior from portion of a population as the representative of the population (Asika, 2004). Baran and Davis (2004) explained that, survey method is preferable when the population under study is too large for a researcher to realistically study.

3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in Taraba State University, Jalingo. Taraba State University was established in 2008 with the primary aim of widening access to University education for Taraba State indigenes and promotes economic development in the country (TSU Student Handbook, 2011) cited in Vakkai and Shadrach (2018). Though the process of establishing the university was

started earlier than 2008, academic activities in the university started in 2008/2009 session with remedial programmes.

The above was followed with Full Time Degree Programme in the 2009/2010 academic session with only Faculties (Arts & Social Science, Education, Agriculture and Science) and less than five hundred registered Degree students in various departments. Since then, the University amidst several challenges like under-funding from relevant authorities leading to cases of incessant strike actions have thrives in so many areas. The university is tagged one of the fastest growing state university in the northeast region of Nigeria. This is evident in the growing number of programmes and caliber of lecturers available in the school.

As of today, there are eight faculties in the university which are: Law, Engineering, Health Sciences, Education, Sciences, Agriculture, Arts, Social and Management Sciences). The school also runs postgraduate studies (Postgraduate Diploma, Master, and Doctoral degrees in several courses). There is also part time programme under the sandwich programme as well as Interim Joint Matriculation Board (IJMB) programmes. With this development, the Taraba State University has become one of the most sorts after school in Taraba State and in neighbouring states.

3.2.1 Brief Profile of Mass Communication Department

The Mass Communication Department Taraba State University, Jalingo is one of the few pioneer departments of the University when it started a full-time undergraduate programme in 2009/2010 academic session. The Department started with twenty-four students who graduated in 2013/2014. The pioneer Head of department of the department was Professor Joseph Rishate. In 2015, Dr. Ishaya Suntai was the head of the department after him emerged Mrs. Sarah Gambo, Mrs. Fatma TankoVakkai, Dr. Thomas Alemoh, Dr. Atando Agbu and the current Head of Department is Dr. Chiakaan Gbaden.

In 2013, the Department opened its multi-media studio, which house radio and television studio, adverting and Public Relations unit as well as Graphic and design section. The multimedia studio also provides venue for lectures and offices for some of the lecturers. Today, the Department runs both postgraduate and undergraduate programmes. Over the years, the department used to provide newspaper for students in the departmental library within the studio and there is also community newspaper produce locally within the department. These acts helped to promote newspaper readership among the students.

3.3 Population of Study

Population is an entire group of individuals, events or objects under study (Nwodo, 2006). The population of this study was the entire undergraduates of Taraba State University, Jalingo. The total number of the students is said to be about 15,000 (TSU-Registry, 2018/2019). However, the population frame of this study was Mass communication students. The students are considered more appropriate for this study based on the fact that their course of study in particular requires that they read newspaper, hence investigating their newspaper readership pattern became very important. The total number of the students of the department at the moment was 630 (Administrative Office, Mass communication Department, 2019).

3.4 Sample Size and Techniques

A sample is precisely a part of a population that will represent the population in a given study (Orodho, 2005). Sample must be carefully selected to be the true representative of the under-study population. The sample size for this study is 242 respondents. This sample size was determined based on Krejcie and Morgan sampling Table. According to the Table, a sample of 242 is valid enough to represent a population of 600-700. Thus, since the population of this study was 630, the recommended sample size (242) was considered appropriate. In this work, the researchers adopt stratified and random sampling methods. In this regard, the population frame (Mass communication Department, Taraba State University, Jalingo) was stratified into four strata based on levels (1-4). In each level a number of respondents was allocated proportionally. The essence is to ensure representation of all levels according to their numerical strength. After the allocation, random sampling method was employed to select respondents. This is so in order to eliminate any form of bias in selecting respondents.

3.5 Research Instrument

The instrument is what researchers use to gather data. In this study questionnaire was adopted as the instrument for data collection. Mugenda and Mugenda (2009) defined questionnaire as a written set of questions to which the subject responds in writing. They further explained that, questionnaire is a research instrument in form of document with set of questions or statement in line with the research objectives, which the respondent is expected to respond to by selecting from set of optional responses given or comment in his/her words. The questionnaire for this study was closed-ended format and will have two parts; the first seeks relevant respondents' demographic data while the second part seeks to evaluate the respondents' newspaper reading pattern. The instrument (questionnaire) used was given to two experts. They were requested to evaluate and appraise the questionnaire regarding content accuracy, clarity, length, and overall presentation. Besides, a pilot study was conducted among 30 students with the purpose of measuring the reliability of the instrument. Based on the comments and the results of the above procedures the questionnaire was modified.

3.6 Method of Data Collection and analysis

The primary data in this study was obtained through face to face method of questionnaire administration. This regard, the researchers after seeking permission and ethical clearance from the management of the school embarked on data collection by personally visiting the respective respondents and administering the questionnaire; effort was made to retrieve the questionnaire on the spot. The study adopted descriptive statistical method of data analysis. Simple percentages and frequencies were used in the analysis while tables and charts were used in presenting the data before discussion of the findings will be made toward answering the research questions.

4. Presentation and Analysis

Results from table 1 showed more male (58.2%) respondents than female (42.3%), and majority of respondents were between 20 – 30 years of age. All the classes or Levels in Mass Communication Department were represented in the study. Of the 239 respondents, 12.6% were in 100 Level, 18.8% were in 200 level and 18.8% were in 300 Level.

Table 1: Biographical data of the study participants ($n=239$).

Variable	Number in sample	Percent of sample (%)
Gender		
Male	139	58.2
Female	101	42.3
Age		
20 – 30	122	51
30 – 40	117	49
40 – Above	0	0
Level		
100	30	12.6
200	45	18.8
300	81	33.9
400	83	34.2
Anticipated Monthly Income		
Less than N5000	96	40.2
N5000-N1000	86	36
Above N10, 0000	57	23.8

Furthermore, 34.2% were in 400 Level. A large number of the students (40.2% and 36%) reported low anticipated income which might affect the extent they acquire or buy newspaper to ready.

Table 2: The regularity of students of readership of newspapers ($n=239$).

Question	Response	Number in sample	Percent of sample (%)
How often do read newspaper?	Frequently	11	4.6
	Once in a while	198	82.8
	Rarely	30	12.6
	Not at all	0	0
How frequent do you read your preferred Newspaper?	Every day	0	0
	At least once a week	0	0
	Monthly	57	23.8
How many hours do you think you often spend on newspaper?	Occasionally	182	76.2
	Less than 30 minutes	129	54
	About an hour	110	46
	Above one Hour	0	0

The table 2 shows that majority (82.8%) of the student read newspaper once in a while. The respondents were further asked to explain the extent they read their most preferred newspaper. None of the respondents read his or her preferred newspaper every day or at least once a week. Specifically, 57 (23.8%) read their preferred newspaper monthly while 182 (76.2%) read their paper occasionally. It means that majority of the respondents do not frequently read their preferred newspaper. It was also observed that 129 (54%) indicated that they read newspaper less than 30 minutes while the remaining 110 (46%) said the read newspaper about an hour. Suggesting that majority of the respondents do not spent much time while reading newspaper.

Table 3: The newspapers the students mostly read ($n=239$).

Question	Response	Number in sample	Percent of sample (%)
Which form of Newspaper do you prefer most?	General interest paper	239	100
	Special Interest Newspaper	0	0
Which of the Newspapers do you preferred most?	Daily Trust	72	30.1
	The Sun	62	25.9
	Guardian	23	9.6
	Vanguard	5	2.1
	Thisday	11	4.6
	Others	66	27.6

Table 3 above revealed that all (239) respondents preferred general interest newspaper than special interest newspaper which cover only one issue like sport or fashion. Majority of the respondents considered Daily Trust newspaper as their most preferred newspaper.

Table 4: Ways through which the students obtain the newspapers they read ($n=239$).

Question	Response	Number in sample	Percent of sample (%)
Do you often use your money to buy the newspaper you read?	Yes	12	5
	No	227	95
	Can't say	0	0%
Do you access Newspaper from the School library?	Yes	0	0
	No	239	100%
	Can't say	0	0%
Do you use to borrow newspaper to read from people?	Yes	67	28
	No	172	72
	Can't say	0	0%
Do you visit vendors' stand just to read newspaper for free?	Yes	19	7.9
	No	220	92.1
	Can't say	0	0%

Table 4 reveals that 12 (5%) of the respondents often use their money to buy newspaper while 227 (95%) do not often buy newspaper with their money. It therefore means that the majority of the respondents do not buy or purchase newspaper with their money. None of the respondent indicated that they access newspaper from the school library. As such, 67 (28%) of the respondents borrow newspaper and read from people while 172 (72%) do not use to borrow newspaper from people to read. It implies that majority of the students do not borrow newspaper to read. It was found that only 19 (7.9%) visit vendors to read newspaper for free while 220 (92.1%) do not visit vendors. It therefore means that there is poor access to newspaper from "free-readers club" at the vendors' stand.

Table 5: The type of stories students mostly read on the newspaper ($n=239$).

Question	Response	Number in sample	Percent of sample (%)
Which topic or newspapers content do you like most?	Politics	109	45.6
	Sport	27	9.5
	Fashion	98	41
	Science and Technology	0	0
	Health	2	0.8
	Education	3	1.3
	Others	0	0

As shown in table 5, general interest newspaper covers different subjects which are designed to meet the choice of readers. The Table above shows that 109 (45.6%) preferred subject of politics, 98 (41%) goes for sport, 27 (11%) said they go for fashion stories. Furthermore, none indicated that they go for science and technology stories, those that go for health made 2 (0.8%) and those that go for education made 2 (1.3%).

Table 6: Factors militating against reading of newspaper among students ($n=239$).

Question	Response	Number in sample	Percent of sample (%)
Do you think lack of money discourages you from buying and reading newspapers?	Yes	201	84
	No	38	16
	Can't say	0	0%
Will you say that your ability to access news online militates you from reading hardcopy newspaper?	Yes	239	100
	No	0	0%
	Can't say	0	0%
Do you think poor supply of newspaper in the school library and the department discourages you from reading newspapers?	Yes	239	100
	No	0	0%
	Can't say	0	0%
Do you think contents of most hardcopy newspaper are responsible for poor newspaper reading habit among students?	Yes	116	48.5
	No	101	42.3
	Can't say	22	9.2

The table 6 above shows that 201 (84%) believed that lack of money discourages them from reading newspaper while 38 (16%) do not link their low newspaper readership to lack of money. The result shows that lack of money or low income impedes newspaper readership among the respondents. It was revealed that all the respondents (239) believed that availability of online newspaper is discouraging their access and readership of hardcopy newspaper. Additionally, poor supply of newspaper in the University Library and Mass Communication Department of Taraba State University, Jalingo also limit the students' level of access to a newspaper. All the respondents uphold the assertion. It therefore means that inconsistent supply of newspaper in the library and the department negatively affect newspaper readership of the students. The respondents were further asked to indicate if contents of hardcopy newspapers are also responsible for their poor newspaper readership. 116 (48.5%) agreed that contents of hardcopy newspaper discouraged readership among the students, however, 101 (42.3%) do not agree, while 22 (9.2%) could not comment on the matter. It means that the majority of the respondents were of the opinion that the contents of hardcopy newspapers do not encourage newspaper readership among students of the Taraba State University. This also support responses from the open-ended questions where

students were further asked to state other factors militating against their newspaper readership. Most of them argued that hardcopy newspapers do not carry stories that appeal to them or their needs. Others revealed that to carry newspaper is always cumbersome while others opined that they do not have time considering that they have several school materials to read.

4.1 Discussions of Findings

The result of this study shows that the type of newspaper based on contents which the students preferred the most is the generalized newspaper which carries different subjects. Furthermore, among the plethora of newspapers in Nigeria, the study identified *Daily Trust* and the *Sun* Newspaper as the most preferred newspaper among the students. The findings support the assertion of Jibril (2015) which holds that *Daily Trust* and the *Sun* newspaper are among the top read newspapers in the country. He added that the newspapers have over the years enjoyed massive followership among young and adult readers across the nation.

The study also revealed poor newspaper readership among the students. Majority (82.8%) of the students indicated that they read only newspaper occasionally and that they only spent less than an hour on newspaper. This finding opposed the postulation by Babalola (2002) who opined that newspapers are the most sought written documents to the largest proportion of people of all categories, young and old, students and workers. He further asserts that due to the way people gather daily to discuss contents of newspapers, it inevitably promotes critical thinking, retention of information, problem solving and the querying of information source.

On the type of subject or stories preferred by most students, the study revealed that politics and sport stories are majorly followed by students. The findings concur with the assertion by Eamin and Haque (2013) who asserts that newspapers are collection of diverse contents ranging from politics, health, fashion, celebrities among others and that the readers choices diverse based on age and needs, however, they agree that politics have become one of the most preferred content readers both young and adult consume.

Finally, the study revealed some barriers that pose great challenge to newspaper readership among the students. These include poor economic status of the students, prevalent online news and lack of provision of newspaper in the University library. The findings contrast Abdulraheem et al. (2012). They opine that although the new media now provide various platforms of communicating, a lot of Nigerians are not sophisticated enough to take full advantage of the new technology. Talabi (2014) shares similar sentiments thus: "Looking at the digital divide, everyone is not online-compliant. Not everyone is connected, and among those who are, there are vastly different skill levels. Some people are clearly less comfortable with this new technology than others, so this has to be acknowledged and respected – this does not simply relegate people who are not Internet adept as a new breed of slow learners. Notwithstanding, hardcopy still has its place in news gathering". However, the finding in the area of cost of a newspaper is in consonance with Salaam (2002) who posits that the cover price of Nigerian newspapers was 20 Kobo per copy in the 1980s, thus the average Nigerian was able to purchase a minimum of three newspapers per day.

The result of the study is also in agreement with Afrobarometer (2007) reports which indicate that globally the newspaper is passing through its hardest time ever, especially since the Internet came to provide online functionalities and possibilities far beyond what the newspaper could offer:

instant and free news, interactive and multimedia features, and easy accessibility through very simple handheld technologies like mobile phones and personal computers.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study investigated newspaper readership among university students with a focus on Mass communication students. The study basically sought to find the type of newspaper the students preferred, the extent the students are read their most preferred newspapers and the manner in which they access the papers. Furthermore, the study looked at the subject of interest which the students sought from newspapers as well as the challenges militating against newspaper readership among the students. It was discovered that there is low newspaper readership among the students. The student preferred general interest newspapers particular *Daily Trust* and the *Sun* Newspapers, however, the extent the students read the newspaper is occasionally or once in a while. Furthermore, the work found that the manner in which the few students access papers include through borrowing and vendor stand-free-reading. A very minute portion of the respondents purchase newspaper with their money.

In addition, the study revealed that politics and sport are the major subjects of interest which the students often seek from newspaper readership. The study further identified problems militating against newspaper readership among the students and these problems include lack of money, prevalent of online newspaper and poor supply of newspaper in the University library and the Department.

The findings of this study as seen above support the assertion of the Uses and Gratification Theory, which served as the theoretical framework of this study. According to the theory, audience of Mass media are very active they deliberately select and exposed themselves only to media channels that would provide certain gratification or reward such as information reward, leisure or entertainment among others. Apt to this study is the fact that hardcopy newspaper is not receiving significant attention due to the fact that the medium has not lack capacity to provide needed gratifications to the students in the manner that they would be motivated to access and read the papers despite all challenges.

Newspaper is a viable tool for the dissemination of information, enlightenment and shaping of public opinion and so its readership important and educative to students. This study established that there is low newspaper readership among Mass communication students, Taraba State University, Jalingo. Most of the students read newspaper occasionally which might be related to issues of assignment common to Mass Communication studies. This attitude to newspaper readership might deny the student's privilege to useful information contain in various newspapers as well as the opportunity of learning to see that newspaper on their own enhance students' reading and comprehension skills.

As Mass Communication students, the need to read the newspaper is high, this is because the act would significantly help student improve their writing skills as well as get informed with news and current happenings in the society. However, the current status of newspaper readership in Taraba State University and in particular among Mass Communication students is worrisome and which need serious attention by all stakeholders in the department and the University as a whole.

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study.

1. The Management of Taraba State University, Jalingo should provide daily newspapers in the University libraries to enable willing students and other readers gain access.
2. Similarly, the department of Mass communication should collaborate with the Mass Communication Students Association (MACOSA) to create newspaper hub or stand within the department in which students can have access to the papers.
3. The department can also establish a resource centre in which several contents, including newspapers can be kept for references and research purposes.
4. Leading newspapers like *Daily Trust* and the *Sun* which are the most preferred among the students should establish a newspaper stand in the university in which the students can have access to the papers on daily business at subsidized rate.
5. The students of the department should be encouraged to form newspaper reading club in which members would be contributing less among weekly to provide newspapers for the club members at others who care for newspapers.
6. The students should also sensitize on the importance of reading read hardcopy newspapers despite the prevalent of online newspapers.

5.1 Limitation of The Study

The study was limited to investigating Mass Communication students. This means that only a very few sections of the students of Taraba State University were studied; hence, the outcome of the study cannot be generalized to the entire University students. Yet, this study findings have been able to call on the management of the Taraba State University, Jalingo to provide newspapers in the University library daily, as well as encourage the Department of Mass Communication to collaborate with the Mass Communication Students Association (MACOSA) to create newspaper hub or stand within the department in which students can have access to the papers. The findings of this study serve as an eye to newspaper proprietors. Through this study, they will be able to gauge the readership rate and challenges leading to decrease in readership of their newspapers. This will help them develop strategies to improve readership base as well as survive the current new media revolution forcing the audience to online platforms. The study also contributes to the existing body of knowledge in mass media studies and in particular newspaper production and readership in Nigeria. Future studies could expand sample size that would touch all Faculties and Departments in the University as only mass comm students were examined.

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