

Online News Platform Preference Among Communication and Performing Arts Undergraduate Students from Three Selected Universities in South-East, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The internet is here to stay, and news consumption is a daily activity for men. Information must satisfy the eternal curiosity of the human mind. The readily available information online, its ease of access, and its constant and speedy updates serve to satisfy man's constant search for information. The researchers surveyed 4435 students enrolled in Mass Communication, Fine Art, Theatre and Film Studies at three universities from South East, Nigeria during the 2023–2024 academic session: University of Nigeria Nsukka, Imo State University, and Gregory University in Uburu. The researchers determined a sample size of 383 using the Taro Yamane formula and used proportionate sampling to identify the respondents for each group. The researchers analysed the collected data using mean and standard deviation. The research found that students visit multiple platforms for online news. Entertainment news was the content that most captivated the students. Students prefer Premium Times for its meticulous attention to detail, their social media handles for their convenient accessibility, and Arise TV for its comprehensive analysis. The study suggests that, given the respondents' consistent preference for Premium Times' online news stories, their social media handles' news stories, and Arise TV's news stories across various online media platforms, all media organisations should consider posting their news stories online to cater to the majority of youths who prefer online reading.

Key Words: Online news, Platforms, Preference, Youths, Universities

Introduction

News consumption has changed significantly since the advent of the internet. Gone are the days when the majority of people bought a paper in the morning, watched the TV news in the evening, and had little or no exposure to news in between. Today, news is constantly breaking and updating quickly in real time, while online news consumption is now widespread. However, the platforms where young adults prefer for online news consumption are not widely known or understood – which is what prompted this research.

Measuring how people trust news emanating from the internet might be a difficult thing to do, but according to

Russmann and Hess (2020), “In the European Union, people’s trust in the media as a whole is at an all-time low (Eurobarometer, 2017, 2018), and the emergence of online media and social media has contributed to this (Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, Levy, & Nielsen, 2018)”. The aim of this study is to measure the news platforms mostly preferred by university undergraduates but we know that one will first of all trust something before making use of it. In other words, the platform mostly used by students must be a trusted platform. Studies (Kalogeropoulos et al., 2019; Tsifti & Ariely, 2014) show that the content of media systems influence a population’s trust in the news media.

Objectives of the study

1. Determine the online news platforms students from the three selected universities utilize for news consumption
2. Determine the kinds of contents that mostly command the attention of the students from the selected universities
3. To ascertain the news platform undergraduate students from the three selected universities prefer for online news consumption

Hypotheses

H1. Online news preference will be significantly dependent on the age of the Undergraduate Students

H2. Undergraduate Students' preference of news platform is significantly dependent on the sources of news

Literature Review

Trust in the Medium, the Message, and the Source

In relation to media, trust “informs us how individuals perceive and evaluate news media” (Kohring & Matthes, 2007, p. 231). Trust reduces complexity for media consumers; it replaces knowledge, and, thereby, the media fulfils its role in providing a need for orientation (Kohring & Matthes, 2007). The media faces significant challenges in fostering confidence in their information and orientation functions due to the digitalization process and the proliferation of diverse information. Based on a review of interdisciplinary literature published over the past 80 years, Fisher (2016) concludes that what is found is a diversity of conceptions of trust that have evolved alongside changes in media technology and will yield different responses depending on which aspect of trust is being measured, therefore, the message, the medium, or the source, or all three at once. (p. 459). In the current study, trust in the media is conceptualized as including all three layers: trust in the channel or the medium used to disseminate the message, trust in the content's source or journalist, and trust in the message or media content itself (Fisher, 2016; Kohring & Matthes, 2007; Otto & Köhler, 2018). Each layer influences people's assessment of trust in the other layers (Kiouisis, 2001), and the three layers can be seen as overlapping—particularly in relation to online and social (news) media (Fisher, 2016).

Trust in media channels refers to perceptions of the various channels used to transmit content, such as radio, television, press, the Internet, and social media (Kiouisis,

2001). Trust in traditional media is generally higher than trust in online and social media. For instance, Tsfaty and Ariely (2014) found in their cross-country comparison across 44 countries that exposure to television news and newspapers positively correlates with media trust, while exposure to online news and education levels negatively correlates with trust. For Europe, the Eurobarometer (2018) shows that trust in radio (59%) today is higher among Europeans than trust in television (51%), followed by trust in the written press (47%). Over time, trust in radio has remained stable, and trust in television and the written press has increased slightly since 2009.

Trust in newer media channels and institutions is lower than that in traditional media and institutions. About a third of Europeans (34%) trust the Internet, although this has decreased slightly since 2009 (37%). Only one fifth of Europeans (20%) trust social media, and this has remained stable since it was measured in 2014. Examining the relationship between different types of news use and trust in news across 35 countries, among them Austria (using data from the 2017 Reuters Institute Digital News Report survey), Kalogeropoulos and colleagues (2019) confirmed that “using social media as a main source of news is associated with lower levels of trust in news” (p. 3673). In contrast, people who use traditional news sources such as TV, radio, and their respective websites, as well as nonmainstream news sources such as digital-born news websites, trust the news media to a greater extent.

Journalists, as providers of information, actively shape the media landscape by selecting certain content (Fisher, 2016; Otto & Köhler, 2018). Thus, Kohring and Matthes (2007) demonstrate that perceptions of trust in news media were based on people's trust in specific selection processes applied by journalists. This journalistic selectivity is assessed across four dimensions: “trust in the selectivity of topics,” “trust in the selectivity of facts,” “trust in the accuracy of depictions,” and “trust in journalistic assessment” (p. 238). To ensure the high quality of reporting in Austria, journalistic norms such as balance and diversity of opinions are part of the self-imposed guidelines of Austrian quality newspapers, the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF; ORF-Gesetz, 2019) and, partly, the Private Radio Act (Privatradiogesetz, 2019). Despite this, people take on a certain risk when trusting the media because journalists select some information over other information. People therefore have to trust that journalists will follow professional standards such as objectivity, fairness, and balance, or tell the whole story (e.g., accuracy; Kohring & Matthes, 2007; Tsfaty,

2010; Tsfati & Cappella, 2003). A recent study shows that the qualifications and expertise of journalists, as well as their position, are also central determinants of trust in a source (Otto & Köhler, 2018); each of these is positively associated with people's perceptions of journalists as competent communicators. People have to trust in journalists' specific selections on issues, events, and so on (Kohring & Matthes, 2007). By gaining their trust, news media enables their public to fulfill their need for orientation to their social environment and to adjust their expectations regarding other social actors (e.g., politicians). Trust in news media is therefore a necessary condition for trust in other social actors. (Kohring & Matthes, 2007, p. 238)

The perceived trust in a source is positively associated with evaluations of trust in the content it provides (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; the authors actually evaluated source credibility). Hence, trust in a source influences the selection of news to which individuals are exposed and the way they evaluate that content. Once a content is perceived as trustworthy, people seem to orient themselves toward the same content across media channels, "triggering parallel opinions of credibility" (Kioussis, 2001, p. 398). A recent eye-tracking study examining the credibility of news posts on social media reported similar findings, revealing that users use the news post's source as an information criterion when deciding whether to read or skip it. "Findings revealed that users spend more time looking at news posts from sources with high credibility compared with sources with low credibility" (Sülflow, Schäfer, & Winter, 2018, p. 184). It must be kept in mind, however, that the source of a news story in a news feed is typically a media channel rather than a journalist identifiable to the reader as a person.

The Media you use is the Media you Trust

Previous research has investigated the relationship between media use and media trust by primarily focusing on two effects: the selection effect (Kioussis, 2001; Tsfati & Cappella, 2003) and the media effect (Tsfati & Ariely, 2014). In this study, we adopt the observation by Hopmann, Shehata, and Strömbäck (2015) that both effects influence the correlation between media use and media trust. People need to trust a particular media outlet or type to select it in the first place, and the use of a particular media outlet or media type over time increases the trust in it (Hopmann et al., 2015). Trust grows from the experience of not being disappointed, whereby different individual (e.g., background, attitudes, behavior), media (e.g., media content, format, type), and contextual (e.g., macro-level political and economic factors [Tsfati & Ariely, 2014], social context) factors predict

generalized media trust (Ognyanova, 2019). In this qualitative study with young adults in Austria, among the different individual factors of interest are people's personal experience with media and habitual media use, as well as age and education. Findings of previous studies are inconsistent concerning the role played by age and education as predictors of trust in media (Tsfati & Ariely, 2014). For instance, in the studies by Gronke and Cooke (2007) and Tsfati and Ariely (2014), education was a negative predictor of trust, whereas in the study by Bennett, Rhine, Flickinger, and Bennett (1999), education was a positive predictor of trust. Concerning media factors, we follow Ognyanova (2019) in emphasizing news content characteristics, the medium (print, broadcast, or digital), and organizational characteristics. In terms of their impact, Tsfati and Cappella (2003) notes, "trust in journalism is based on our belief in the professionalism of journalistic practices" (p. 506). Considering the long history of public service media, normative approaches, and legal regulations (see, for example, ORF-Gesetz, 2019, and Privatradiogesetz, 2019), news media in Austria should follow high quality standards such as objectivity, accuracy, and fairness. Among contextual factors of interest is the social context, which has so far received less attention, but was highlighted in a recent study by Ognyanova (2019; the study was published after the interviews of this study were conducted). Using longitudinal network data from 13 residential student communities, Ognyanova (2019) found that our social contacts, both offline and online, function to promote or suppress our confidence in various media and to serve as benchmarks (see also Media Insight Project [MIP], 2015). Social contacts include our parents and grandparents (media socialization) as well as our peers online.

Youths and Trust in Media

Studies on young adults and trust in media are scarce. A recent study demonstrates that traditional news sources continue to have great value and weight among young adults (Carr & Bard, 2017). However, studies also find differences between young adults' media use and that of older cohorts. Young adults generally "have exhibited decreasing levels of news usage but increased consumption of news via social media" (Carr & Bard, 2017, p. 3). The Media Insight Project found in a representative study that American millennials 18–34 years of age have a very nuanced news consumption (MIP, 2015). Many of them (60%) explain that news comes as part of a social flow, such that they encounter news incidentally as they engage with their online networks or community of friends. Just 39% say that news is something they actively seek

out on their own. Young adults are often drawn into news by recommendations from their peers in their social networks, as well as through group texts and instant messaging. This is supported by a study of 102 young adults showing that online information seeking and evaluation are influenced by others in one's online network (as well as the search context and search routines; Hargittai, Fullerton, Menchen-Trevino, & Yates Thomas, 2010). Recommendations by peers also boost trust in content; young adults actively follow word-of-mouth direction toward good stories (MIP, 2015). Regarding the notion that social media creates polarizing filter bubbles, "70 percent of Millennials say that their social media feeds are composed of a relatively even mix of similar and different opinions to their own" (MIP, 2015, p. 28). Just 12% of millennials say that opinions and viewpoints they see in social media are mostly similar to their own and 16% of them say they are different than their own. Spurgeon and colleagues (2012) found that young adults in Australia "turn off media that are perceived as irrelevant or negative" (p. 912)—a trend that is fostered by niche media, new media, and proliferating entertainment choices.

An important fact for the present study is that 2018 was the first year in which more Austrians 18–24 years of age were found to distrust the news (in general) than trust it (Gardinger et al., 2018). A lack of trust in the media indicates uncertainty regarding whether journalists actually follow their professional standards or tell the whole story. Tsfatı and Cappella (2003) found that media skepticism decreases the use of mainstream media (traditional media such as television, radio, and print news). People who mistrust or are skeptical toward the mainstream media will be more likely go online to seek alternative information sources (non-mainstream media) and hence have a more diverse media diet (Tsfatı & Cappella, 2003).

However, Tsfatı and Cappella (2003) highlight that "even the most skeptical audience members watch the national and local news on television and read the daily newspaper" (p. 518). With the media habits of young adults focusing on online and social media, this might be set to change in the future. Tsfatı (2010) notes that a result of online, nonmainstream news exposure might be that people become more aware of the manipulative power of news and thus more skeptical toward mainstream news. Because "non-mainstream sources tend to present more point-counterpoint argument and discussion and stronger challenges to prevalent interpretations than is characteristic of mainstream news, their audiences might learn that the same event can be

presented, framed, and slanted differently" (Tsfatı, 2010, p. 39).

Research Method

The research design for this study is survey. A study that tends to elicit information about the usage and the gratification of a product is disposed towards using constructed questions to find out the answers. Qualitative research allows us to investigate and discover processes of communication and to answer the how and why questions that must be addressed to advance our understanding of how young people use online platforms for news (Karpf, Kreiss, Nielson, & Powers, 2015).

Population of Study

The study surveyed 4435 students enrolled in Mass Communication, Fine Art, Theatre, and Film Studies programs at three universities from South East Nigeria during the 2023–2024 academic session, comprising 1205 Mass Communication, 195 Fine Arts, and 613 Theatre and Film studies students from University of Nigeria Nsukka. Then, Imo State University had 850 Mass Communication, 390 fine arts, and 348 theatre and film studies students, while Gregory University in Uturu had 564 Mass Communication and 270 Theatre and Film Studies students (*Academic Planning Unit, of the Universities, 2024*). A Sample size of 383 was determined using Taro Yamane formula with a population size of 4430 and a margin of error of 0.0488 (or 4.88% as a decimal). The following steps were taken to arrive at a sample size. The formula for calculating the sample size is:

Taro Yamane Formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

Where:

Population size $N = (4435)$

Margin error (e): (0.0488)

Firstly the error margin was calculated which is $= e^2$

$$e^2 = (0.0488)^2 = 0.00238$$

substitute e^2 and N into the formular

$$n = 4435 / 1 + 4430 * 0.00238$$

$$4435 * 0.00238 \approx 10.56$$

$$1 + 10.56 \approx 11.56$$

$$\therefore n = 4435 / 11.56 \approx 383$$

Sample size = 383

To use the proportionate sampling technique with a total sample size of 383 and 4,435 total respondents, calculate the proportion for each group as follows:

Proportion = $\frac{\text{Number of Respondents in Group}}{\text{Total Number of Respondents (4435)}}$

Total Number of Respondents (4435)

Therefore to determine the Sample Size for each group:

Proportion for each group was multiplied by the total sample size (383).

For University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Department of Mass Communication: N= 1205

$$\text{Proportion} = 1205 / 4435 \approx 0.272$$

$$\text{Sample Size} = 0.272 \times 383 \approx 104.16 \approx 104$$

Mass Communication students = 104

Department of Fine Arts UNN: N= 195

$$\text{Proportion} = 195 / 4435 \approx 0.0439$$

$$\text{Sample Size} = 0.044 \times 383 \approx 16.8 \approx 17$$

Fine Arts students = 17

Department of Theatre and Film Studies N= 613

$$\text{Proportion} = 613 / 4435 \approx 0.138$$

$$\text{Sample Size} = 0.138 \times 383 \approx 52.9 \approx 53$$

Theatre and Film Studies students = 53

For Imo State University

Department of Mass Communication: N= 850

$$\text{Proportion} = 850 / 4435 \approx 0.192$$

$$\text{Sample Size} = 0.192 \times 383 \approx 73.4 \approx 73$$

Mass Communication students = 73

Department of Fine Arts: N = 390

$$\text{Proportion} = 390 / 4435 \approx 0.088$$

$$\text{Sample Size} = 0.088 \times 383 \approx 33.7 \approx 34$$

Fine Arts students = 34

Department of Theatre and Film Studies students: N= 348

$$\text{Proportion} = 348 / 4435 \approx 0.078$$

$$\text{Sample Size} = 0.078 \times 383 \approx 29.9 \approx 30$$

Theatre and Film Studies students: N= 30

For Gregory University Uturu

Department of Mass Communication: N= 564

$$\text{Proportion} = 564 / 4435 \approx 0.127$$

$$\text{Sample Size} = 0.127 \times 383 \approx 48.6 \approx 49$$

Mass Communication students = 49

Department of Theatre and film studies = 270

$$\text{Proportion} = 270 / 4435 \approx 0.061$$

$$\text{Sample Size} = 0.061 \times 383 \approx 23.4 \approx 23$$

Theatre and film studies students = 23

To put it another way, the researchers conveniently shared the copies of questionnaire each student in the chosen department of the university received through the proportional sampling technique. Therefore, we can sum up the proportions for each

group within the universities: UNN respondents = 174, IMSU respondents = 137 and Gregory University respondents = 72.

The researchers analysed the collected data using the mean to answer research questions, compared the variability of

various datasets using the standard deviation even when the means differed, and tested the hypotheses using the chi-square test of independence.

RESULTS

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Demographic Distribution of Respondents'

S/N	Variables	Frequency (n = 383)	Percentage %
1.	Age (Years)		
	16-20yrs	118	30.8
	21-25yrs	229	59.8
	26-30yrs	35	9.1
	36-40yrs	1	0.3
2.	Institution		
	University of Nigeria	174	45.4
	Imo State University	137	35.8
	Gregory University	72	18.8

Result from Table 1 also show that majority (59.8 %) of the respondents were within the age group 21 – 25 years, 30.8 % fall within the age group 16 - 20 years, 9.1 % of the students fall within the age group 26 - 30 years, while the least in the distribution were students who were within the age group 36 - 40 years (0.3 %). The analyses revealed that majority of the

students were youths. It was also observed in Table 1 that majority (45.4 %) of the students were from the University of Nigeria Nsukka, 35.8 % of the students were from Imo State University, while only 19.1 % were students from Gregory University.

Research Question 1: What platform do you utilize most for news consumption?

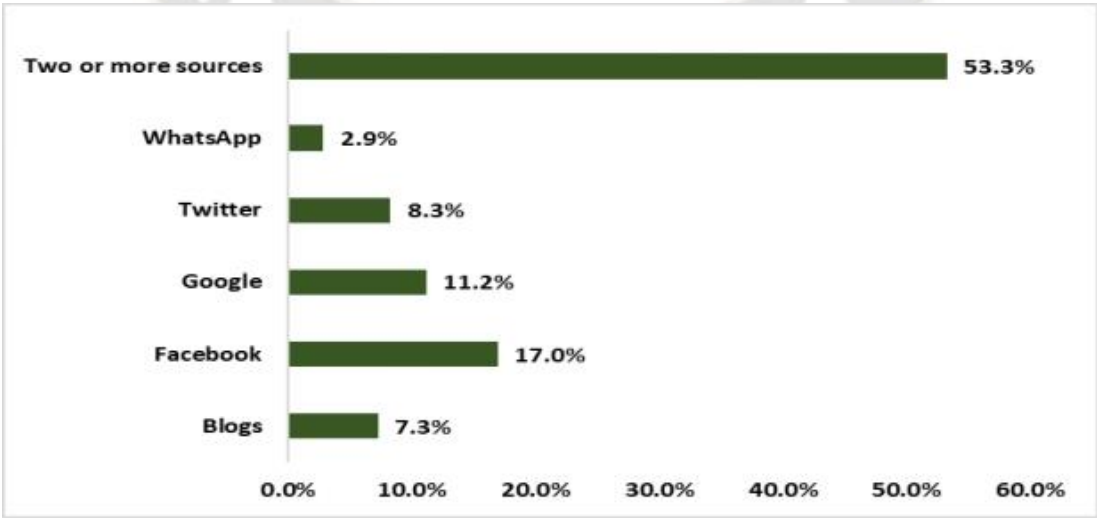


Figure 1: Platforms mostly visited for online news stories

Data in Fig 3 show that students often visit multiple platforms (53.3 %) for their online news.
Research Question 2: What kinds of news contents mostly command your attention?

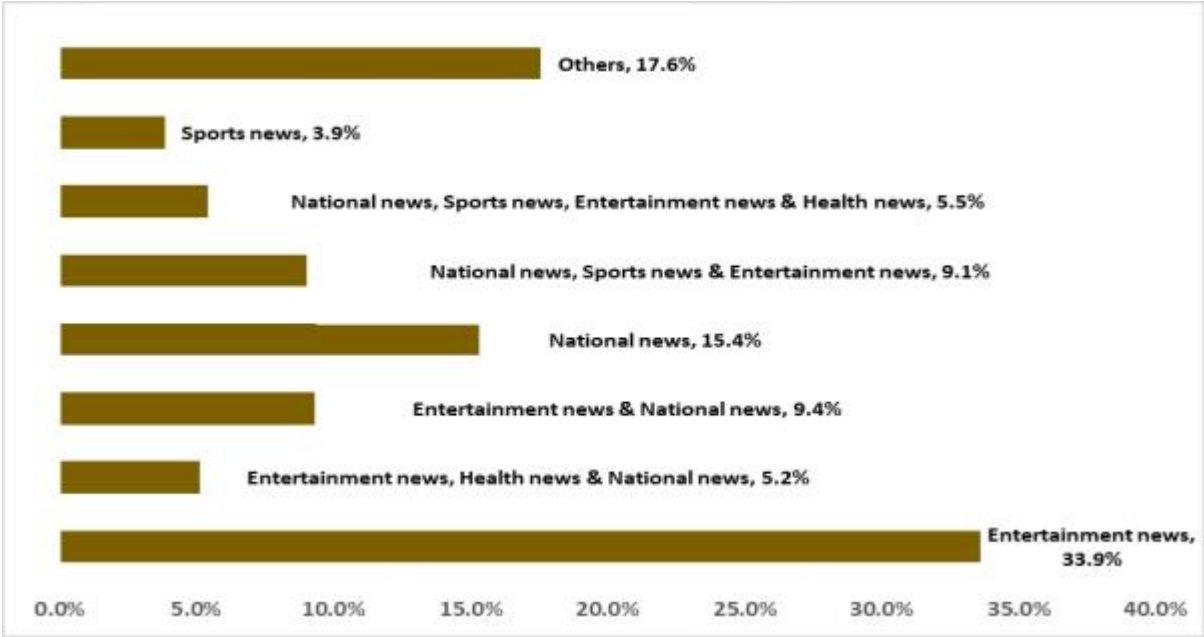


Figure 4: Kind of news often looked for online

The kinds of online news contents that students often look out for were mainly entertainment news stories, national news stories and a combination of entertainment news stories and other kinds of news stories (Fig 4).

Research Question 3: Which news platform do you prefer for online news consumption?

Table 3: Platform preference for online news stories

S/N	Item statements	$\bar{X}$	SD	Decision
1.	I prefer online news stories on Arise TV news platform because of their in-depth analysis	3.59	1.20	A
2.	I prefer news stories on from my social media apps on my phone because of ease of access	3.90	1.05	A
3.	I prefer mainstream media online news stories due to its credibility	3.45	1.09	A
4.	I prefer online news stories from Premium Times because it pays attention to details	4.23	0.80	SA
Grand Mean		3.50	1.06	SA

Note: $\bar{X}$ =Mean, SD=Standard Deviation, N= Number of Respondents=383, SA= Strongly Agreed, D=Disagree.

The results presented in Table 3 showed the mean and standard deviation of respondents on their preference of online news stories platforms, which the grand mean is 3.50. The results showed that item statements 4, 2 and 1 had the highest mean scores above 3.50 (4.23, 3.90, and 3.59 respectively). This observation suggests a prevailing preference among respondents for online news stories presented on Premium Times and from their social media handles and online news stories on Arise TV as opposed to conventional mainstream online media news stories.

However, respondents would prefer to listen to news stories on Arise TV because it gives in-depth analysis to news stories. Other reasons why respondents may choose mainstream media online news stories are that they are credible and pay attention to details.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses One

H₀₁: Online news preference is not significantly dependent on the age of the reader

Table 6: A cross tabulation of the dependency of online news stories on respondents' age (n = 383)

S/N	Variables	Preference to online news stories			p-value
		Yes	No	Freq.	
1.	Age Group				
	16-20yrs	111 (29.0)	7 (1.8)	118	0.23
	21-25yrs	222 (58.0)	7 (1.8)	229	
	26-30yrs	32 (8.4)	3 (0.8)	35	
	36-40yrs	1 (0.3)	0 (0.0)	1	

* Indicates significance at 0.05; □ □ Indicates significance at 0.01

Data on Table 6 shows a cross tabulation depicting the dependency of online news stories on respondents' age. The preference of online news stories was ascertained based respondents easy access to online news stories. From the Table, it can be seen that among the 118 respondents that falls within the age group 16-20yrs, 29.0 % of them indicated that they preferred online news stories relative to 1.8 % that indicated otherwise. Among the 229 respondents that fall within the age group 21-25yrs, 58 % of them indicated that they preferred online news stories as against the 1.8 % respondents that indicated otherwise. Among the 35

respondents that fall within the age group 26-30yrs, 8.4 % of them preferred online news stories to those (0.8 %) that indicated otherwise. Among the respondents that fall within the age group 36-40yrs, all of them preferred online news stories. The analysis revealed that respondents irrespective of their age, prefers online news stories. This result is in agreement with the Chi-square probability value of 0.23 indicating that the preference of online news stories is not dependent on age ($p > 0.05$). This suggests that even the older population is getting more inclined to online news stories.

Hypotheses Two

H₀₂: Undergraduate student' preference of news platforms is not significantly dependent on the sources of news

Table 8: A cross tabulation of readers' preference of news platforms on sources of news (n = 383)

S/N	Variables	Preference to online news stories			p-value
		No	Freq.		
1.	Sources of online news				
	Blogs	26 (6.8)	2 (0.5)	28	0.33
	Facebook	62 (16.2)	3 (0.8)	65	
	Google	39 (10.2)	4 (1.0)	43	
	Twitter	30 (7.8)	2 (0.5)	32	
	WhatsApp	10 (2.6)	1 (0.3)	11	
	A combination of 2 or more sources	199 (52.0)	5 (1.3)	204	

* Indicates significance at 0.05; □ □ Indicates significance at 0.01

The findings presented in this Table indicate that a predominant proportion (96 %) of respondents who sought news from online media exhibit a sustained preference for the news stories acquired through this medium. Further findings from the Table show that respondents combine two or more of the online media as sources for news stories. In addition, it was revealed that Facebook, Google, Twitter, Blogs and WhatsApp were the major online media for sourcing for news stories. The analysis in Table 8 shows that readers' preference to online news stories is independent of online media source.

Simply put, there preference to online news stories does not matter whether it is been sources from Facebook, Google nor any other online media. This result is in consonant with the Chi-square probability value of 0.33. Indicating that readers' preference of news genres is not dependent on the sources of news ($P < 0.05$).

Discussion of Findings

From the data analyzed, the following findings in relation to the research questions emerged.

1. Results from the platform the students often visit showed that respondents often visit multiple online platforms for their news stories with 53.3%. The findings is supported by Nwagwu and Akosile (2021), "Online newspaper is interactive and has the possibility of constant updates. They carry many stories at a time; they have no permanent content and they highlight their content colourfully, and provide links to them".
2. On the kinds of news contents that mostly command their attention, results show that respondents often look out for entertainment news stories (33.9%), national news stories (15.4%) and a combination of entertainment news stories and other kinds of news stories (29.2%)
3. On the news platform students prefer the most, respondents prefer Premium Times the most because it gives attention to details followed by preference from social media platforms on my phone because of ease of access, followed by Arise TV because of in-depth analysis

Conclusion

A number of valuable conclusions can however be deduced from the findings of this study. From a theoretical point, uses and gratification reveals the progression of learning and decision-making users experience because of exposure to online news. Online news creators cash in on this to capture the attention of their readers. Therefore, by their very nature, the internet and the social media are not difficult to use and new users necessarily do not need to spend days learning how to use them. Thus, getting to see news items online is very easy. The concept of Internet connectedness and its theoretical origin was proposed in media dependency theory (Ball-Rokeach, 1985, 1998; Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976; Jung, 2008) cited in Jiang, Huang, & Tao, (2017).

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Since majority of the respondents often visit multiple platforms in search for news, news media should endeavour to put their news stories online before the mainstream.
2. Links to entertainment news should be infused into the news stories of the day on different social media platforms since most of the youths visit these platforms for news. When they click the link, they see the entertainment news websites.

3. Since respondents exhibit a sustained preference for Premium Times online news stories, news stories from their social media handles, and news stories from Arise TV respectively from multiple online media platforms, every media organisation should put their news stories online for the majority of youths who prefer reading them online.

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