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Newspaper Reading Patterns in the Era of Social Media Among Mass Communication Students of Chukwu Odumegwu Ojukwu University (COOU) Igbariam, Anambra State

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Abstract

This study investigates the newspaper reading patterns of Mass Communication students at Chukwu Odumegwu Ojukwu University (COOU), Igbariam, with particular emphasis on frequency of readership, gratifications sought, preferred formats, and the influence of social media on newspaper consumption. Employing a descriptive survey research design, data were collected from a sample of 192 students using a structured online questionnaire. The findings reveal that newspaper readership among the students is generally infrequent, with most respondents engaging in occasional reading of traditional print newspapers. Key motivations for newspaper consumption include entertainment, relaxation, and the desire to stay informed. However, a notable shift toward online newspaper formats was observed, driven by factors such as convenience, accessibility, and ease of navigation. The study also establishes that social media platforms significantly

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influence students' information-seeking behavior, often serving as alternatives to traditional and online newspapers. These trends suggest a growing reliance on digital platforms for news consumption among university students. In light of these findings, the study recommends that newspaper publishers adopt integrated social media strategies to strengthen their digital presence, diversify content to address both entertainment and in-depth news preferences, and that communication curricula be enhanced with media literacy components to foster critical engagement with news content across platforms.

Keywords: Newspaper Readership; Social Media Influence; Digital News Consumption; Mass Communication Students; Media Literacy

INTRODUCTION

Reading is key human mental development especially among students. In schools like University, reading enhances one's understanding of specific subjects and broadens perspectives on societal issues. One of the major materials for reading is the newspaper. As a mass medium, the newspaper plays a vital role in disseminating timely information at regular intervals. Newspapers are not only valuable sources of education and information but also serve as tools for recreation, relaxation, and entertainment. Ashong and Henry (2017). emphasize that newspapers are crucial as they carry up-to-date information, keeping readers informed about events within their immediate surroundings and beyond. Okunna and Omenugha (2012) reinforces this by highlighting newspapers as essential carriers of current news. Obaid (2014) further argues that newspapers are akin to textbooks, providing the latest news on local, national, and global affairs, along with analysis, critiques of government actions, and entertainment such as music, theatre, and comics.

The importance of newspapers, particularly for students, cannot be overstated. Students, in particular, should be the most avid readers of newspapers. The permanence associated with newspapers, makes information more accessible and less transient, allowing students to use content for academic and other purposes (Edegoh, Ezeh, & Samson, 2015). Onwubiko (2005) argues that newspapers are among the most beneficial forms of media for students, likening them to "outside the classroom teachers." The formal nature and standardized language of newspapers help students develop their language skills, while

also offering useful information on university admissions, job opportunities, and government incentives. Abbas et al (2020) note that reading newspaper articles is highly encouraged for students as it exposes them to a wide range of reading materials, enhancing their learning experience. For mass communication students, reading newspaper has additionally benefits as it helps students difficult reading skills which will be helpful in their career if their choose to practice journalism.

Despite the significant role that newspapers play in students' lives, research suggests a decline in newspaper readership among youths. Dominick (2002, p. 14) observes that newspaper readership has been on the decline for several years. Udie (2002, p. 100) reports that less than 50% of Nigerian students regularly read newspapers. Biagi (2003, p. 83) points out that the overall number of newspapers has decreased since the 1970s due to reduced readership. Similarly, Business Essay (2009, p. 2) reports a global downward trend in newspaper readership, including in Europe and America. A 2003 survey by Afrobarometer across 12 African countries, including Nigeria, revealed that only 13% of the population reported reading a daily newspaper (Afrobarometer, 2003). In 2010, a study by the Advertisers Association of Nigeria (ADVAN) found that daily newspaper sales in the country were under 300,000 copies, meaning only one in every 470 Nigerians bought a newspaper daily (Ekeng, 2010). Popoola (2010) also highlights that the combined circulation of all Nigerian newspapers is less than 500,000 copies per day, a stark contrast to the 1980s when the population was much smaller.

The decline in newspaper readership can be attributed to the rise of the internet and in particular social media. Social media platforms offer instant, low-cost access to news with interactive and multimedia features, making it a more appealing alternative to conventional print media (Afrobarometer, 2007). Corroborating, Rajendran and Thesinghraja (2014) note that social media platforms have posed significant challenges to traditional newspapers, as more users turn to the internet for free news and information. The instant nature and accessibility of online news have made it a popular choice globally, threatening the dominance of print media in the news industry.

In response to this shift, newspapers have begun delivering their content digitally, but as readers flock to online platforms, print newspapers may continue to see a decline in readership (Aliagan, 2011). Evidence suggests that university students around the world increasingly use online platforms for news and information, raising the question of whether

this trend has impacted the readership of conventional newspapers among students. This study, therefore, seeks to examine the newspaper reading patterns among students of Chukwu Odumegwu Ojukwu University (COOU), Igbariam, Anambra State, in the context of the rise of social media and digital news consumption.

Statement of the Problem

For students of Mass Communication, newspapers hold particular significance. They serve not only as a source of current affairs but also as a practical resource for understanding the structure, style, and ethics of journalism. Reading newspapers equips Mass Communication students with critical insights into media content creation, reporting techniques, and the application of journalistic principles. It also provides them with examples of investigative reporting, editorial writing, and audience engagement strategies that are essential for their academic and professional growth. However, the advent of the internet and the rise of social media platforms have radically altered the way information is consumed, especially among younger audiences, including university students. Digital platforms provide instant, free, and interactive access to news, making them more appealing to students who are increasingly reliant on mobile devices and social networks for information. As a result, traditional newspapers face declining readership, particularly within the student demographic, which poses significant challenges to their relevance and survival.

For Mass Communication students, this shift raises important questions. While they are expected to engage with newspapers as part of their academic training and professional preparation, the lure of digital platforms may be altering their reading habits and reducing their reliance on traditional print media. This trend not only threatens the sustainability of conventional newspapers but also raises concerns about the depth and quality of media literacy among future media professionals. Existing studies have extensively documented the global and national decline in newspaper readership, yet few have focused on how this phenomenon specifically affects Mass Communication students in Nigeria. Even fewer studies have examined the interplay between traditional newspaper use and the growing preference for social media among this group. In the context of Chukwu Odumegwu Ojukwu University (COOU), Igbariam Campus, there is a need to explore how Mass Communication students balance the use of traditional newspapers and

digital platforms. This study, therefore, aims to address this gap by investigating the newspaper reading patterns of Mass Communication students at COOU.

Objectives of the Study

The study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine the frequency newspaper readership among Mass Communication students at COOU.

2. To determine the gratifications students of Mass Communication at COOU seek from reading newspaper.

3. To identify the types of newspapers (print or online) preferred by Mass Communication students at COOU.

4. To ascertain the extent social media impacts the newspaper reading habits of Mass Communication students at COOU.

Theoretical Framework: Uses and Gratifications Theory

The Uses and Gratifications Theory, first conceptualised by Elihu Katz in 1959, provides a framework for understanding how audiences actively engage with media to satisfy specific needs. The theory posits two key assumptions: first, that audiences are active participants in selecting media and content; and second, that audiences are aware of their motivations when choosing particular media for information, entertainment, or other forms of gratification. Consequently, media preferences are influenced not only by content but also by the individual characteristics of the audience and their relationship with the media. Potter (2012) summarises the core principles of the Uses and Gratifications Theory into five claims:

1. Communication behaviour is purposive, motivated, and goal-directed.

2. Individuals actively initiate the choice and use of communication media.

3. Communication behaviour is shaped by various psychological and social factors.

4. In fulfilling their needs, audiences weigh media options against other forms of communication.

5. People exercise greater power than media in determining the effects of media content.

The theory has been widely applied in communication studies to explore the interaction between audiences and media, particularly in explaining how and why

individuals select specific media to meet their needs (Lucena, 2011). However, the theory is not without its criticisms. Rubin (1993) notes that audiences are not always as active as the theory assumes, and their behaviour often falls between passivity and active decision-making. McQuail (2007) critiques the theory for its lack of coherence, arguing that its terminologies require further refinement and that it overemphasises the functional use of media while overlooking instances where media content can have negative consequences. Despite these critiques, the theory remains practical in explaining media choices and audience motivations.

The Uses and Gratifications Theory is particularly relevant to this study as it provides insights into the newspaper reading patterns of Mass Communication students at Chukwu Odumegwu Ojukwu University (COOU). It helps to explain why students choose certain newspapers (traditional or online) or contents, highlighting the gratifications they seek, such as academic information, entertainment, or social awareness. Moreover, the theory underscores how students' media preferences are shaped by both individual and external factors, especially in the era of social media, where digital platforms compete with traditional newspapers. This perspective will aid in understanding the dynamics of newspaper readership among Mass Communication students in the context of evolving media consumption trends.

Concept of Newspaper

The newspaper, as a print medium, has been defined in various ways by communication scholars. Sanderman et al., cited in Okunna and Omenugha (2012), describe it as an unbound printed publication issued regularly, presenting information in words and pictures. Similarly, Nwodu (2006) defines it as a printed, unbound publication containing news about current political, economic, socio-cultural, educational, and other affairs. Okunna and Omenugha (2012) simplify this, calling a newspaper a "news-carrying paper," emphasising the timeliness and relevance of its contents. MacDougall and Reid (cited in Ogbiten, 2007) view newspapers as institutions developed by modern civilisation to inform and influence public opinion. Typically, newspapers include editorial content (news, features, articles, and letters), advertorials, and pictorials, making them a versatile source of information and public discourse. Unlike most bound publications, newspapers are unbound, allowing for easy repeat exposure. Their publication frequency varies—daily,

weekly, or bi-weekly—and they cover a wide spectrum of topics, including politics, economics, science, technology, and social issues (Okunna & Omenugha, 2012).

Newspapers hold significant importance as carriers of news and information. Akanda and Haque (2013) argue that newspapers remain the most comprehensive source of current information, surpassing television in news coverage. Despite criticisms of being elitist due to their reliance on literacy, newspapers possess unique advantages. According to Alianga (2011), these include offering in-depth stories, flexibility in time and place of exposure, ease of storage and retrieval, and fostering literacy by encouraging reading habits.

Edegoh, Ezeh, and Samson (2015) describe newspapers as the "first draft of history," influencing politics, shaping public opinion, and recording human life comprehensively over centuries. Ola and Ojo (2007) underscore their utility in education, entertainment, and relaxation, while Cheney et al. (2006) highlight their continued relevance in academia despite competition from digital media. They advocate for libraries to provide free and unhindered access to newspapers to boost readership, particularly among students. In essence, newspapers remain an essential tool for mass communication, education, and historical documentation, maintaining their relevance amidst evolving media landscapes.

Concept of Readership

The concept of readership is central to the study of newspapers. Although difficult to define precisely, according to Bottle PR, a UK-based agency founded in 2004, readership is a "general term that refers to the number of people reading a particular publication, including both the individual who purchased it and others who have accessed it" (Bottle PR, 8th February 2011). The Huntsville Times 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). Ashong and Henry (2017) explained that newspaper readership is determined by content preference. 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 determined the gratification different group of people seek from giving medium.

Reading, at its core, is the process of extracting ideas from printed or written material. It is a primary way of acquiring knowledge. Oyeyemi (2005) observed that reading allows individuals to access knowledge from more knowledgeable sources. Reading is an interactive process where meaning is encoded in visual stimuli by the author and decoded by the reader's mind. It involves recognizing printed or written symbols, which serve as stimuli for recalling meaning through the intellectual manipulation of concepts the reader already possesses. The resulting meanings are organized into thought processes according to the reader's purpose, potentially leading to modified thoughts and behaviors or the development of new ones, influencing personal or social growth.

From another angle, reading can be defined as the vocalization of words in a given passage and the process of ascribing meaning to written materials. This definition pertains to reading aloud, which beginners often use, as it helps teachers detect and correct errors in real-time. Although reading aloud can be effective for young learners, it may slow down the reading pace during silent reading. For reading to be effective, it should be done at a good pace. Reading speed is usually measured by the number of characters or words read per minute. Johnson (1999) categorized reading into two types: reading aloud and silent reading. Reading aloud involves the audible vocalization of the text and is beneficial for young learners, as it allows for immediate error correction. It is also used in public speech delivery, dictation, and oral comprehension tests. Silent reading, on the other hand, occurs when the reader processes the material internally without vocalizing the words. Silent reading is crucial for developing reading habits, enhancing reading effectiveness, and gaining a deeper understanding of both literary and technical texts.

Era of Social Media

The "Era of Social Media" refers to the period marked by the widespread use and integration of social media platforms into everyday life. Social media, defined as digital platforms that enable users to create, share, and exchange content, has become a dominant force in communication, marketing, and social interactions (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). This era, which gained momentum in the early 21st century, is characterized by an exponential rise in the number of users and platforms, fundamentally altering how individuals, organizations, and governments engage with each other (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

In the early stages, social media was primarily used for personal communication and networking. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace provided users with the

ability to connect with friends, share life updates, and engage in online discussions (Duggan et al., 2015). As the popularity of these platforms grew, they began to incorporate features such as video sharing, messaging, and marketplace functions, creating more dynamic and interactive experiences for users. The expansion of social media networks and the integration of multimedia elements further enhanced their appeal and utility, turning them into essential tools for both personal and professional engagement (Shirky, 2008).

A critical aspect of the Era of Social Media is its influence on information dissemination and media consumption. Unlike traditional media outlets, which typically relied on one-way communication, social media platforms allow for real-time, interactive, and decentralized sharing of information. This shift has led to significant changes in how news is consumed, as social media platforms often serve as the first point of access for breaking news and events (Hermida, 2010). Moreover, social media has played a key role in the rise of citizen journalism, where individuals share firsthand accounts and news stories without relying on traditional media sources (Gillmor, 2004).

The Era of Social Media has also had profound effects on marketing and business strategies. Social media platforms provide companies with direct access to a vast audience, enabling them to engage in targeted advertising and customer interactions (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Influencer marketing, where individuals with large social media followings promote products or services, has become a powerful tool for brands looking to tap into specific demographic groups. As businesses increasingly rely on social media for customer engagement and promotion, it has become essential for organizations to understand and adapt to the unique dynamics of these platforms (Tuten & Solomon, 2017).

Review of Empirical Studies

Several studies have explored newspaper readership across different demographics and countries. Amankwah and Sikayena (2010) examined the newspaper reading habits of residents in Adenta, Accra. The study revealed that most respondents accessed newspapers either by purchasing them or through other means such as work supplies or public libraries. Credibility was a key factor influencing newspaper choice, with respondents preferring newspapers they considered informative and trustworthy. The study also highlighted the importance of physical features, such as catchy headlines and well-written stories, in boosting readership. Aliagan (2011) investigated the patterns of newspaper

readership in Ilorin, Nigeria, and discovered low readership levels despite a population of about half a million. The study noted that only 4,800 newspapers were sold daily, with some titles selling as few as 80 copies. This low patronage was attributed to economic constraints and a lack of locally relevant content in many newspapers, which predominantly focused on national rather than regional news. This points to a significant challenge in engaging local readers effectively.

In Bangladesh, Akanda and Haque (2013) surveyed graduate students at the University of Rajshahi and found a positive attitude towards newspaper readership. Most students read both Bengali and English newspapers, with a preference for international news sections. The study also identified the preferred locations for reading, such as the hall library and the computer center of the university library for online newspapers. Similarly, Isyaku and Azmi (2018) focused on readership preferences for print and online newspapers in northwestern Nigeria, using Daily Trust as a case study. The findings indicated a moderate preference for online newspapers over print versions. However, despite the availability of free online versions, many readers expressed a continued interest in the print edition, suggesting a decline in print readership but also a resilience of traditional media. This highlights the evolving nature of newspaper consumption, where digital platforms are influencing but not entirely replacing print media.

Furthermore, Apuke and Omar (2020) investigated newspaper readership among Mass Communication students at Taraba State University, Jalingo. The study employed a descriptive survey design with a population of 630 Mass Communication students registered for the 2018/2019 academic session. A sample of 242 students was selected through a stratified random sampling method. The study found low newspaper readership among the students, with a preference for general interest newspapers, particularly *Daily Trust* and *The Sun*. Students primarily accessed newspapers by borrowing or reading for free at vendor stands. The study also identified politics and sports as the main subjects of interest to students. Factors hindering newspaper readership included financial constraints, the prevalence of online newspapers, and insufficient supply of newspapers in the university library and department. In the same vein, Lucas, Dahiru, and Adebisi (2023) examined students' preferences between hardcopy and online newspapers in selected state-owned tertiary institutions in Taraba State. The study was guided by four objectives and research questions, including determining students' preferred reading format, investigating factors influencing their preferences, examining the role of course of study in shaping their

preferences, and exploring methods for sustaining these preferences. A survey research design was used, with data collected through a structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics, such as frequency and percentage, were used for data analysis. The findings revealed that 71% of respondents preferred online newspapers over hardcopy versions. The study also indicated that students' course of study influenced their newspaper preferences. Overall, the research concluded that students from state-owned tertiary institutions in Taraba State preferred online newspapers to hardcopy ones.

While several studies have explored newspaper readership in various contexts, there are notable gaps that the study on newspaper reading patterns among Mass Communication students at Chukwu Odumegwu Ojukwu University (COOU) in Anambra State aims to fill. Many of the reviewed studies, such as those by Amankwah and Sikayena (2010) and Aliagan (2011), focus on specific areas like Adenta and Ilorin, without providing a comprehensive comparison of factors influencing readership in diverse Nigerian or regional contexts or academic setting like University. Additionally, while Apuke and Omar (2020) and Lucas, Dahiru, and Adebisi (2023) focus on students in tertiary institutions, they primarily explore preferences between print and online formats without addressing the emerging role of social media as a competing source of news. Furthermore, most studies emphasize the role of economic factors and content relevance, but few examine how social media's growing influence might be reshaping traditional newspaper readership among students, particularly in an environment like Anambra State. By focusing on COOU, this study will contribute to understanding the evolving patterns of newspaper consumption in an era where social media plays a dominant role in shaping the information-seeking behaviors of students.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive survey research design. The population for this study consisted of Mass Communication undergraduate students at COOU, Igbariam, with an estimated population size of 400 students. The study targeted a sample size of 242 based on the Krejcie and Morgan Table, but only 192 students agreed to participate. A structured questionnaire was used to gather data, which was administered online using Google Forms to facilitate easy and convenient access for the participants. A stratified random sampling technique was applied to ensure that students from different academic levels (100, 200,

300, and 400 levels) were proportionately represented in the study, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were used to analyze the quantitative data.

RESULTS

Table 1: Demographic information of Participants

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	109	57%
	Female	83	43%
Academic Level	100 Level	38	20%
	200 Level	44	23%
	300 Level	50	26%
	400 Level	60	31%
Age Range	17-20	72	38%
	21-24	90	47%
	25-28	20	10%
	29+	10	5%
Access to Newspapers	Print	50	26%
	Online	120	63%
	Both	22	11%

Source: Online Survey, 2025

Note: N=is 192.

The demographic data of the participants as provided in Table 1 above reveal that of the 192 respondents, 57% were male, and 43% were female. In terms of academic level, the majority (31%) were in their 400 level, followed by 300 level students (26%), 200 level students (23%), and 100 level students (20%). The age distribution showed that the dominant group (47%) fell within the 21-24 age range, while 38% were between 17-20 years old. Only 15% of the participants were aged 25 and above. Regarding newspaper access, a significant majority (63%) preferred online newspapers, while 26% relied on print newspapers, and 11% accessed both formats.

Table 2: Frequency of Newspaper Readership among Mass Communication students at COOU

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I read newspapers daily.	25 (13%)	50 (26%)	40 (21%)	50 (26%)	27 (14%)
I read newspapers several times a week.	30 (16%)	55 (29%)	48 (25%)	40 (21%)	19 (10%)
I read newspapers once a week.	15 (8%)	40 (21%)	60 (31%)	45 (23%)	32 (17%)
I rarely read newspapers.	10 (5%)	30 (16%)	50 (26%)	60 (31%)	42 (22%)
I read newspapers only when I find interesting news articles.	28 (15%)	63 (33%)	55 (29%)	40 (21%)	6 (3%)

Source: Online Survey, 2025 *Note: N=is 192.*

The data from Table 2 highlight the frequency of newspaper readership among Mass Communication students at COOU. The result shows that the majority of students do not engage in daily or even weekly newspaper reading, with 26% and 31% of students respectively disagreeing with the statements on daily and weekly readership. However, a significant portion of the respondents (33%) read newspapers when they find interesting articles, indicating that interest in content rather than frequency drives readership. Additionally, while 21% of students read newspapers once a week, a considerable 31% rarely read newspapers. This suggests that newspaper readership is not a regular habit among the students.

Table 3: Gratifications students of Mass Communication at COOU seek from reading newspaper

Gratification Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
To stay informed about current events	40 (21%)	80 (42%)	50 (26%)	15 (8%)	7 (4%)
To gain knowledge about local and national issues	30 (16%)	70 (36%)	60 (31%)	25 (13%)	7 (4%)
To keep up with political developments	25 (13%)	40 (21%)	70 (36%)	35 (18%)	22 (11%)
To follow entertainment and celebrity news	50 (26%)	85 (44%)	35 (18%)	17 (9%)	5 (3%)

Gratification Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
To improve my academic knowledge or research	10 (5%)	25 (13%)	65 (34%)	60 (31%)	32 (17%)
To relax and enjoy reading the newspaper	45 (23%)	75 (39%)	40 (21%)	25 (13%)	7 (4%)
To stay updated on sports news and scores	50 (26%)	80 (42%)	35 (18%)	20 (10%)	7 (4%)
To learn about social issues or causes that affect society	20 (10%)	50 (26%)	80 (42%)	30 (16%)	126%)

Source: Online Survey, 2025 *Note: N=is 192.*

From the table above, it is clear that Mass Communication students at COOU prioritize entertainment and celebrity news the most, with 70% (50 strongly agree and 85 agree) of respondents indicating a preference for this type of content. Following this, sports news comes second, with 68% (50 strongly agree and 80 agree) showing interest. The third highest gratification sought is relaxation, with 62% (45 strongly agree and 75 agree) enjoying the newspaper for leisure reading. Staying informed about current events also holds significant importance, with 63% (40 strongly agree and 80 agree) of students acknowledging its importance. Political developments, while still relevant, attract comparatively lower engagement, with only 34% (25 strongly agree and 40 agree).

Table 4: Types of newspapers (print or online) preferred by Mass Communication students at COOU

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I prefer reading printed newspapers over online newspapers.	15 (75)	30 (120)	50 (150)	45 (90)	52 (52)
I read online newspapers more frequently than printed newspapers.	120 (600)	55 (220)	10 (30)	4 (8)	3 (3)
I find printed newspapers more credible than online newspapers.	20 (100)	40 (160)	50 (150)	30 (60)	52 (52)
I prefer online newspapers because they are more convenient to access.	110 (550)	60 (240)	15 (45)	4 (8)	3 (3)
I mostly access news through online platforms (websites or mobile apps) rather than traditional print media.	125 (625)	50 (200)	10 (30)	5 (10)	2 (2)

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I still enjoy reading print newspapers, especially for local news and in-depth stories.	15 (75)	35 (140)	50 (150)	60 (120)	32 (32)

Source: Online Survey, 2025 *Note: N=is 192.*

The data in Table 4 reveals a strong preference for online newspapers among Mass Communication students at COOU. A significant majority, 120 students (62.5%), strongly agree that they read online newspapers more frequently than printed ones, with only 15 students (7.8%) preferring print newspapers. Additionally, 110 students (57.3%) strongly agree that online newspapers are more convenient to access. When it comes to credibility, the data shows a more balanced view, as 20 students (10.4%) believe print newspapers are more credible, but many remain neutral or disagree. Overall, students predominantly access news through online platforms (125 students, or 65.1%), highlighting the increasing reliance on digital media.

Table 5: Extent social media impacts the newspaper reading habits of Mass Communication students at COOU.

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I spend more time on social media than reading newspapers.	85 (44.3%)	65 (33.9%)	20 (10.4%)	15 (7.8%)	7 (3.6%)
Social media provides faster access to news compared to newspapers.	90 (46.9%)	70 (36.5%)	15 (7.8%)	10 (5.2%)	7 (3.6%)
I rely on social media platforms for breaking news rather than newspapers.	88 (45.8%)	72 (37.5%)	18 (9.4%)	8 (4.2%)	6 (3.1%)
Social media has reduced my interest in reading newspapers.	80 (41.7%)	75 (39.1%)	20 (10.4%)	10 (5.2%)	7 (3.6%)
I use social media to follow news outlets instead of reading their newspapers.	84 (43.8%)	70 (36.5%)	18 (9.4%)	12 (6.3%)	8 (4.2%)
Social media provides a wider variety of news than newspapers.	87 (45.3%)	65 (33.9%)	25 (13.0%)	10 (5.2%)	5 (2.6%)
I only read newspapers for in-depth analysis not available on social media.	50 (26.0%)	60 (31.3%)	35 (18.2%)	30 (15.6%)	17 (8.9%)
The availability of free news on social media discourages me from purchasing newspapers.	85 (44.3%)	70 (36.5%)	20 (10.4%)	10 (5.2%)	7 (3.6%)

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Social media has made it easier for me to stay updated on current events compared to newspapers.	88 (45.8%)	65 (33.9%)	25 (13.0%)	10 (5.2%)	4 (2.1%)

The data on the table above reveal that social media significantly impacts the newspaper reading habits of Mass Communication students at COOU. A majority of respondents (over 70%) strongly agree or agree that they spend more time on social media, rely on it for breaking news, and use it to follow news outlets instead of reading newspapers. Most participants also agree that social media provides faster access to news, a wider variety of content, and easier updates on current events, with 44.3% acknowledging that free news on social media discourages them from purchasing newspapers. However, newspapers are still valued by some (26% strongly agree, 31.3% agree) for in-depth analysis not readily available on social media. Overall, the data indicates that social media has reduced newspaper readership among the study, offering convenience, accessibility, and variety as primary attractions.

DISCUSSION

The study was designed to investigate newspaper reading pattern of Mass Communication students at COOU, Igbariam. The first objective was to determine the frequency of newspaper readership among the students. The result revealed infrequent readership of newspapers among the students. Most of the students indicate that the occasionally read newspapers especially the traditionally hardcopy papers. This observation aligns with Aliagan's (2011) findings in Ilorin, Nigeria, where economic constraints and a lack of locally relevant content were highlighted as barriers to newspaper readership. However, unlike Aliagan's focus on physical availability, the COOU study underscores the role of digital accessibility in reducing reliance on traditional newspapers. Similarly, the finding here corroborate that of Apuke and Omar (2020) which found low newspaper readership among the mass communication students at Taraba State University, Jalingo.

Secondly, the study identified entertainment, relaxation, and staying informed as the primary motivations behind students' newspaper consumption. Students at COOU displayed a strong preference for content such as celebrity news, sports, and leisure-focused articles. This stands in contrast to findings by Akanda and Haque (2013) in

Bangladesh, where graduate students prioritised international and academic news, indicating a more formal engagement with newspapers. The findings of this study reflect the dynamic nature of audience needs, shaped by cultural and educational environments. This is consistent with the premise of Uses and Gratifications Theory, which emphasises that media consumption is motivated by the active pursuit of specific needs.

Thirdly, the study established a strong preference for online newspapers among mass communication students at COOU. This was due to convenience, accessibility, and ease of use. Despite financial constraints being less emphasised, the digital format offers an immediate and diverse source of news compared to traditional newspapers. This aligns with Lucas, Dahiru, and Adebisi's (2023) findings in Taraba State, where students also preferred online formats over print. However, while Lucas et al. noted financial challenges and insufficient print supply, this study attributes this preference primarily to the inherent advantages of digital platforms, providing a nuanced perspective on why students are shifting towards online consumption.

The findings of this study reveal a significant shift in the newspaper reading habits of Mass Communication students at COOU, Igbariam, with social media emerging as a primary factor influencing their media consumption. The majority of participants indicated that they spend more time on social media platforms than reading newspapers. They also reported relying on social media for breaking news and using it as a primary source to follow news outlets. This behavior reflects a broader trend in media consumption, as social media platforms have increasingly become a convenient and fast source of information, which aligns with global patterns of digital media consumption. This finding is consistent with previous studies that have identified the growing influence of social media on traditional media consumption. For instance, studies by Isyaku and Azmi (2018) and Apuke and Omar (2020) pointed to the decline of traditional newspaper readership, particularly among students, due to the rise of digital platforms that offer faster, more accessible, and more diverse news content.

CONCLUSION

The study underscores the evolving nature of media consumption among Mass Communication students at COOU, shaped by the interplay between technological advancements and audience preferences. It highlights the transformative impact of digital

platforms on traditional newspaper readership and the need for media organisations to adapt their strategies to remain relevant in the digital age. The findings reinforce the significance of aligning content and delivery methods with the specific gratifications sought by modern audiences, as framed by the Uses and Gratifications Theory. By focusing on the preferences and motivations of students, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how cultural, technological, and educational factors influence media consumption in contemporary society.

Recommendations

1. Given the significant influence of social media, newspapers should integrate social media strategies to share breaking news and updates, directing traffic to their online platforms while maintaining credibility.

2. Newspaper publishers should expand their content offerings to include both entertainment-focused articles and in-depth coverage of political, academic, and international news to appeal to a broader spectrum of interests among students.

3. Print newspapers should consider adding supplementary sections focused on student-related topics, such as campus news, career tips, and youth-targeted features, to remain appealing and relevant.

4. Newspapers should enhance their online presence by integrating digital platforms and social media strategies to attract the tech-savvy student audience. This could include creating social media pages that provide breaking news, updates, and links to in-depth articles on their websites. This integration would allow newspapers to meet the demand for fast and accessible news while maintaining the quality of in-depth reporting that appeals to their readers.

5. Communication curriculum developers should encourage students to diversify their media consumption habits by integrating discussions on the benefits of engaging with both digital and print media into the curriculum, fostering critical media literacy.

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