NEWSPAPER READERSHIP IN THE DIGITAL AGE: A STUDY TO ASSESS THE ENGAGEMENT PATTERNS AMONG STUDENTS OF PLATEAU STATE POLYTECHNIC, JOS

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Abstract

Globally, newspaper readership has substantially moved from the hard copy to digital platforms as most readers' access news content using information and communication technology tools. In Nigeria, the movement from hardcopy to digital newspaper consumption has been accelerated by several factors including the growth of the telecommunication industry and access to mobile devices among Nigerians. New online publishers have emerged while traditional publications have also embraced the transition to the digital space in order to survive. As a result, the consumption patterns of students have been altered because of choices available. The study investigates how students of the Plateau State Polytechnic Jos engage with the newspaper in a digital era and also establish factor(s) that influence their choices. It also interrogates how often they go online for news; what content the focus on; and challenges they encounter in online newspaper readership. Data was generated using survey, the strata was used to determine the sample that the questionnaire was administered to. The study benefits from the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to support its propositions. The research establishes that most students of Plateau State Polytechnic have moved from hard copy to digital news consumption and rarely purchase the printed newspaper. They are motivated by several factors including easy access, convenience and easy navigation between newspapers. Students consume a variety of online newspaper contents with prominence on entertainment, sports, politics, and education matters. Some of the major challenges they encounter include high cost of data, poor internet connectivity, lack of time, device compatibility. The study recommends that there should be provision of subsidized or free internet service in schools, and there should be internet connectivity.

Key Words: Access, Newspaper, Content, Digital Era, Readership

Introduction

Printed newspapers have been around in Nigeria for a long time having been introduced in the mid-19th century through the *Iwe Irohin* in 1859 by the Scottish Reverend gentleman, Henry Townsend during the colonial days (Omu, 1978). Prior to the advent of Information and Communication Technologies otherwise referred to as ICTs, the printed newspaper was the talk of the day as it occupied a huge space in the knowledge platform in society as a means of mass communication. Undoubtedly, it played a very significant role in the dissemination of information and transmission of culture to the Nigerian society for many years.

Such roles are captured in many studies which analysed the role that the early newspapers played in the fight against colonialism and the attainment of independence for Nigeria. Omu (1978);

Ufuophu-Biri (2008), Okafor (2002); and Ajibade (2003); submit that the early printed newspapers reawakened the political and social consciousness of the people which formed the beginning of covert and overt agitation for self-determination in the country. Indeed, this supports the notion that the struggle for independence in Nigeria was fought on the pages of newspapers, magazines, and later the airwaves.

From prominent newspapers of the early days such as the Anglo African, *The Lagos Times, The Lagos Observer, The Lagos Weekly Record, The Nigerian Times (later renamed Times of Nigeria), The African Messenger, The Daily Service, The Nigerian Daily Times, The Lagos Weekly, The West African Pilot* and the *Nigerian Tribune* among others, the Nigerian newspaper industry boasts of a rich pedigree of content and readership (Ufuophu-Biri, 2008). Due to advancement in technology, more training and organisation, the successors of these early publications took the industry to another level and ensured that newspapers got enhanced production, wider circulation and more readerships over the years. For many decades, the Nigerian newspaper stands showcased newspapers such as *The Guardian, Punch, The Sun, Vanguard, Daily Independent, Daily Trust, Leadership, Blueprint, Pilot, The Nation, Daily Telegraph, The Will, Daily Times, Thisday, People's Daily, Authority, Nigeria Standard* among others. Before the advent of digital era, readership patterns were predominantly based on hard copy sales where readers either buy copies or read them in libraries, offices and even at newsstands across the country. Significantly, access to newspapers was also determined by economic factors, literacy and interest particularly among the urban population of mostly adult and working category (Macham, 2019).

However, as Aliagan (2014) notes, things have changed radically within the readership of the Nigerian Newspaper industry where newspaper circulation has declined and continues to sustain such downward trajectory for many reasons. One of the reasons adduced is the transformation of the Nigerian society within the context of the "Global Village" which is driven by Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). This has given birth to digital alternatives for dissemination of newspaper content for the readership that hitherto relied heavily on hard copy to get information. Consequently, all newspapers publish hard copies and also have online editions to make their content available to their readers. In addition to their operations, there are other newspapers that have sprung up with strictly online operations, meaning they do not publish hard copies (Aliagan, 2014).

Statement of the Problem

With the introduction of digital content of newspapers, there is the tendency to assume that readers still remain static and consume newspaper content in the manner that has been throughout the dominance of the printed version. As McChesney (2004) notes, while the printing press was a force for radical social change in the early days of the newspaper, the replacement of the print culture with the digital content is a development that deserves some level of attention because of many issues ranging from access and control. According to him, digital media technologies are worth taking seriously because of the distinct characteristics they possess in the dissemination of information.

The challenges of access therefore become prominent as one reflects on the fact that the print version of the Nigerian newspaper is either being challenged or complemented by the digital version. This is pushed further by the availability of the android phones and other digital devices among Nigerians who rather than wait for the newspaper to feed them with its content once it goes to bed, now has a choice to

follow events as they unfold real-time. Patrick (2015) asserts that Nigerian online newspapers are well-known among Nigerians and a significant number of them spend a long time reading Nigerian newspapers online. Nevertheless, the online newspapers are a major source that Nigerians use in enriching their knowledge on important issues.

It is therefore important to understand the changing dynamics of digital access to newspaper content particularly within a readership that is continuously evolving with daily technological changes among students of the Plateau State Polytechnic in Jos in the year 2024. Understanding factors behind reader's preferences will also lead to the extermination of the challenges that may arise with the digital newspaper consumption. Since the digital era of newspaper consumption has become a norm and provided options for readers to access newspaper on the go and without having to chase after a printed copy, it is important to ascertain issues surrounding the engagement patterns of the readers in the light of information-seeking by the students of Plateau State Polytechnic (Pla-poly), Jos in the year 2024. It is, therefore, the desire of this research that a study of access and engagement patterns among student newspaper readers in Plateau State Polytechnic Jos will deepen the understanding of latest developments in the subject area since the aforementioned attributes can be harnessed.

Research Objectives

The following objectives motivate the research:

1. To know the preferred platform most used by the students when they want to engage in newspaper.
2. To know how often they read their newspaper online.
3. To know the content, they prefer to engage on.

4. To know the factors that influence their choices of readership to online version of newspapers among students of Plateau State Polytechnic
5. To ascertain the challenges students encountered when reading the online newspaper

Limitation

The study is limited to only selected students of Plateau State Polytechnic Jos and their newspaper readership preferences between July and December 2024. The patterns help to compare their online reading as against the hard copy consumption. The research excludes other members of the Plateau State Polytechnic community such as lecturers and other non-academic to sharpen focus of ascertaining if there is a change in their content drive, frequency of engagement with the online newspaper and challenges especially with the new updates in digital technology.

Literature Review

When the issue of access to media content was interrogated in the UNESCO sponsored work, *Many Voices One World*, which examined communication problems in the world, the research came up with the concept of "democratization of communication" which in a nutshell talks about the diversity and choice of media content by audiences in a democratic setting (MacBride, (eds), 1982). The argument of the researchers was that people should be able to form their opinions based on full range of information content presented to them. In other words, people should not only have access to media content, but also have the capacity to decode and analyse them for their use.

From the introduction of the printed newspaper in Nigeria, many readers relied on it for information and knowledge of happenings around their immediate vicinity or in far places, making the newspaper medium a reliable medium of communication for many years. This

perhaps explains why from 1859 when the first newspaper, Iwe Irohin was published, there were many others which emerged through private enterprise and government ownership with the aim of pushing out content to the public. Onoja (2005) believes this generated some kind of anxiety and race between the government and private interests to take control of the newspaper as a tool of social consciousness and galvanizing public opinion to their advantage.

Thus, the printed newspaper continued to dominate the scene for many decades until the advent of Information and Communication Technologies which paved the way for online and digital newspaper content. From the first newspaper, *Ohio Columbus Dispatch* believed to have set the pace for making its content available to readers online, digital newspapers are common place today because of the rapid transformation in technology which has thrown up many platforms for disseminating newspaper content electronically, (Nwammuo & Nwafor, 2019). According to Patrick (2015), many (if not all) national newspapers in Nigeria now offer electronic versions through the internet in addition to their traditional hard copy versions, while some newspapers offer only online versions.

Consequently, print newspaper readership fell sharply and newspaper organizations experienced unprecedented losses in resources and staff as millions flocked to social media platforms for newspaper content. In some cases, some of the readers become their own reporters and publishers in what has become "citizen journalism" (Thornton, 2016). Despite the migration, newspapers continue to be an important component of people's lives as they are accessed and read either in print or online through various digital devices. Thornton (2016) suggests that a significant amount of news content that is shared across various social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, X (formally Twitter), Telegram, Instagram, Tik Tok, and others, has a connection with content emanating from media organizations that publish online and in print.

Among others, economic considerations are adduced as some factors that propel reliance on online newspapers. In their study of the influence of online newspaper readership on print in some South East Nigerian Universities, Ukonu, Ani and Ndubuisi, (2014), argue that economic advantage has influenced print newspaper purchase as it is cheaper and more convenient to read newspapers on-line. Online newspapers according to them have overtaken the barrier of time and space, which print newspaper accessibility and readership created. The study however noted that the reason why some readers do not buy print newspapers regularly is not necessarily their availability online but that there are several other factors which account for the decline in the purchase of print newspapers.

In understanding the factors driving changing dynamics in newspaper readership, it is vital to examine the indices which can assist in preparing for changes that are yet to come especially as technology keeps evolving on a rapid pace. Thurman and Fletcher (2019) posit that age has been found to be one of the key considerations that impacts newspaper readership. Other attributes such as level of education, economic power, gender, among others impact readership patterns of newspaper audiences.

Because most newspaper content is now available on digital platforms where readers have an expanded choice alternative, the question of time spent in consumption becomes important. Apart from official websites of newspapers, there are various social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, X, Telegram, Instagram among others which convey newspaper content to readers. This then indicates that the availability of choice can

reduce the amount of time readers spend with particular media formats and with individual newspaper brands (Thurman & Fletcher, 2019).

Again, digital newspaper distribution seems to have created various forms of engagement patterns and access such as snacking and scanning where readers spend less time on news content (Costera Meijer & Kormelink 2015). In a study conducted in the UK, Thurman (2017) found that readers on the printed newspaper spend more time consuming content than those who consume online. According to him, a UK national newspaper brand will get an average of 40 minutes of reading time per user per day with its weekday print edition, but just 30 seconds per user per day with its website and apps (Thurman & Fletcher, 2019). Similarly, the study established that younger readers spend far less time with newspaper content than adults, while younger readers seem to pay fleeting attention to newspaper content especially through PCs and mobile devices as they have other items contending for their attention.

Despite the fact that newspaper readership patterns vary due to factors including age and technology use, the fact remains that many people use their readership engagement to access information about latest happenings both domestically and internationally. Makhetha and Thamae (2018) insist that readership is a major factor that determines the fate of newspapers including circulation figures both online and offline. It is a factor that is relied on by advertisers who wish to target their market composite. However, they note that it is not all newspaper readers that are interested in the various sections of the newspaper which brings up the issue of content selection and readership preferences.

In their analysis of online newspaper readership among Facebook users, (Nwammuo & Nwafor, 2019) found that readers who consume newspaper content online are deliberate and selective, mostly concentrating on the headlines which they rely upon to form and shape their opinions as well as respond to certain happenings around them or in places beyond their immediate vicinity. Clearly, the question of agenda and gratification comes into play.

Theoretical Framework

This research benefits from the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to pursue its objectives of understanding the newspaper consumption patterns of students of Plateau State Polytechnic Jos. In order words, the choices of newspaper readership are likely shaped by their understanding of the capacity of the technology to meet their needs and their willingness to utilise it.

The concept of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) was enunciated by Fred Davis in 1985 where he examined the mediating role of perceived ease of use of technology as well as the perceived usefulness in consideration of external and internal factors (Legris, Ingham, & Collerette, 2003). The central proposition of TAM is to provide an avenue for identifying and evaluating the result of external variables on internal beliefs, attitudes, and intentions of audiences regarding technology they are exposed to. It submits that there are considerations that are very important to explaining the attitudes of audiences to technology. These include perceived ease of use (PEOU), and perceived usefulness (PU) which are at the core of the model's understanding.

Developed by Davis (1989), Technology Acceptance Model has been described as one of the most influential research models in the study of factors that determine the acceptance and use of information technology systems. TAM has therefore received considerable attention of researchers in the information system field

over the past decades (Ummuhan & Gulbahar, 2013).

After a review of fifty articles that used the TAM Model, Ummuhan & Gulbahar concluded that there is an obvious certainty that the theory goes a long way to explain and predict why users sometimes accept or reject information systems. They further submit that the model enhances the understanding that whatever the shape, color, size and property of the technology system its acceptance and adoption by users is ultimately determined by the core assumptions of ease of use, perceived usefulness, attitude towards use and intention.

Turner, et al (2010) note that Viswanath Venkatesh and Fred Davis in further review carried out in 2000, came up with a proposal for a revised TAM which they referred to as TAM2. In the proposal, they did not include attitude towards use while it brought on board additional variables such as experience and subjective norm. However, the underlying base of the TAM model was not changed.

Thus, Venkatesh and Davis (2000) also suggested that variables within the TAM are more often than not, measured using a short, multiple-item questionnaires. They averred that when incorporated, actual usage of technology as a component of TAM is measured in a similar way through self-reported variables. Therefore, the TAM theory from inception and through its various revisions has been applied to a variety of technologies, including text editors, business intranets, and the Web. It is their conclusion that TAM has been widely validated through various research applications for internal consistency and it scores very highly against whatever measure used. Consequently, the research results arising from the application of TAM are often accepted as being accurate.

Research Methodology

This study adopted the survey research method to collect data. Winmer (1983) and Sobowale (1983) described this technique as one of the most commonly used in survey research. Closed-ended questions were administered in the questionnaire format to enable the researchers gather as much as possible, adequate and accurate information from respondents. Data gathered was treated using the descriptive analysis because of its focus is on establishing what the preferences of newspaper readers on how they access content.

In selecting the sample to be used for the study, the simple random sampling method (without replacement) was adopted. This means that any unit selected is removed from the sample so as to avoid being selected again, (Bailey, 1987; Dominick and Winmer, 1983). In order words, a probability sample is selected according to mathematical guidelines whereby the chance for the selection of each unit is known.

Total population of the study area, Plateau State Polytechnic is 7500 comprising of 7500 students. There are Schools which are similar to Faculties in Universities. They are: School of Sciences (1500); School of Environmental Studies (1000); School of Engineering (1000); School of Technical Education (300); School of Information and Communication Technology (1500); School of General Studies (700); and School of Administration and Business Studies (1500), (Plateau State Polytechnic Academic Planning Unit, 2024).

Using random sampling, researchers picked 4 schools to administer the questionnaire taking into consideration those with highest and lowest population of students regardless of sentiment, only those that are picked. The selected schools include School of Science; School of Environmental Studies; School of Engineering; School of Technical

Education; and School of Information and Communication Technology. Guided by the Krecjie and Morgan sample size determinant, a sample size of 368 was selected from the 4 schools. Consequently, questionnaires were administered at random to all students captured in the sample size. Data was analysed using graphs and tables to summarize the key objectives of the research.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Section one (1) is the demographics of the respondents. The section is having 5 questions in all, this consist of the age, gender, educational level, and their marital status among other questions like their occupation as the demographics of the respondents. The data will be presented based on the work done as follows demographics and the questions that are posed to answer the questions for the research. Thus, the work will be presented on table, using simple percentage and all on descriptive basis.

Demographics

The final demographic profile for analysis was narrowed to three core variables: sex, age, and academic school (used as stratification strata). Of the 367 respondents, 66.5% were male and 33.5% female.

Fig 1: Demographic distribution by School, Gender and Age

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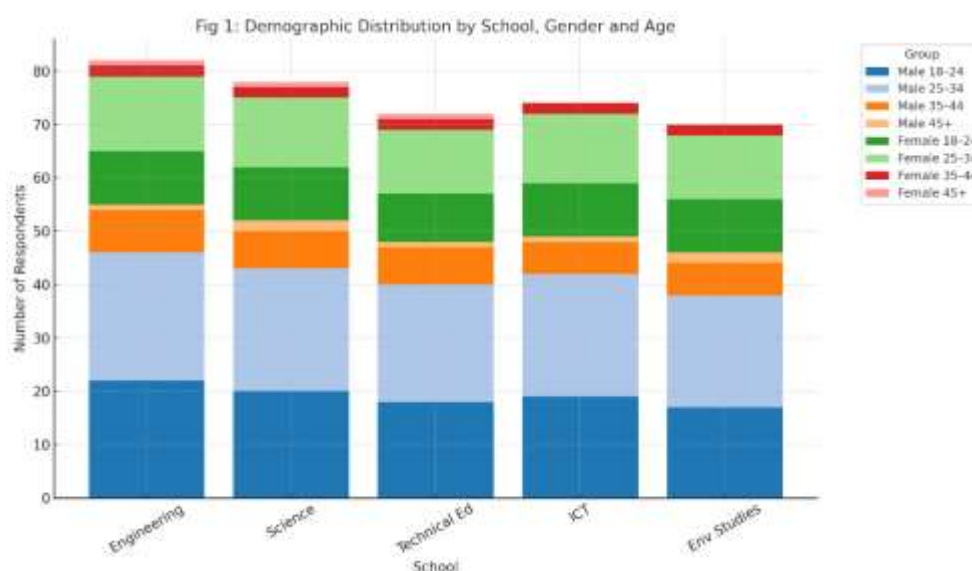
A large proportion (44.4%) were between the ages of 25–34, followed by 18–24 (40.3%), indicating a predominantly youthful and digitally active sample. Respondents were also distributed across five academic schools: Engineering (22.3%), Science (21.2%), ICT (19.6%), Technical Education (19.1%), and Environmental Studies (17.7%). These strata form the basis of the subsequent analysis.

Identifying the preferred platforms students use to access digital newspapers across various schools

Table 1: Overall Preferred Platform for Newspaper Access Among Respondents

Platform	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Social Media Platforms	194	52.9%
Newspaper Websites	119	32.4%
News Aggregator Apps	33	9.0%
Email Subscriptions	19	5.2%
Other	2	0.5%
Total	367	100.0%

Field work 2024

Table 1 reveals that over half of the respondents (52.9%) would prefer reading newspaper articles through social media websites such as Facebook and Twitter. This concurs with global trends, where high-velocity, mobile-optimized platforms are dominating news consumption among consumers of their generation and also among those technologically advanced. Newspaper websites are second most utilized source (32.4%), then news aggregation apps (9.0%) and e-mail newsletters (5.2%), reflecting low levels of adoption of curated or delayed delivery forms of news. The low "Other sources" percentage (0.5%) speaks volumes of the mainstream digital platforms' overwhelming dominance.

These aggregate tastes, however, do not extend to all student backgrounds. The nature of a student's major area of study may influence their access behavior to media, a specification explored in greater detail in Table 2, where responses are broken down by college (strata).

Table 2: Preferred Newspaper Access Platform Stratified by School

Platform	Engineering	Science	Tech Ed	ICT	Env Studies
Social Media Platforms	44 (53.7%)	39 (50.0%)	36 (51.4%)	40 (55.6%)	35 (53.8%)
Newspaper Websites	22 (26.8%)	25 (32.1%)	21 (30.0%)	24 (33.3%)	27 (41.5%)
News Aggregator Apps	8 (9.8%)	7 (9.0%)	7 (10.0%)	6 (8.3%)	5 (7.7%)
Email Subscriptions	5 (6.1%)	5 (6.4%)	4 (5.7%)	2 (2.8%)	6 (9.2%)
Other Sources	3 (3.7%)	2 (2.5%)	2 (2.9%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (3.1%)
Total Respondents	82	78	70	72	65

Field work 2024

By school, Students from School of Information and Communication Technology and Engineering used social media the most (55.6% and 53.7% respectively), as one would expect a strong correlation to technologically advanced behavior. Use at the School of Environmental Studies was most even, with 42% using content through newspaper web sites, the highest of all strata.

This stratified form means that while the use of digital news is ubiquitous, access platform is partially shaped by academic orientation, technical expertise, and possibly field-specific media orientations.

Assessing how often students read their newspapers online

This objective gives us insight into the intensity and regularity of digital news consumption, which helps gauge reader engagement levels.

Table 3: General Frequency of Online Newspaper Reading

Frequency of Reading	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Daily	118	32.2%
Once a week	97	26.4%
Sometimes	128	34.9%
Never	24	6.5%
Total	367	100.0%

Field work 2024

Table 3 shows that while digital access to newspapers is widespread among most students, with just 32.2% of them reading newspapers daily, consumption is relatively low. An additional 26.4% watch content weekly, while 34.9% do so occasionally ("sometimes"). Only a minority (6.5%) report reading newspapers never at all. These results assume that while digital access is widespread, regular consumption is still building up momentum, perhaps due to lack of time, interest, or study pressure.

Table 4: Frequency of Reading Stratified by School

Reading Frequency	Engineering	Science	Tech Ed	ICT	Env Studies
Daily	28 (34.1%)	24 (30.8%)	21 (30.0%)	29 (40.3%)	16 (24.6%)
Once a week	23 (28.0%)	20 (25.6%)	17 (24.3%)	16 (22.2%)	21 (32.3%)
Sometimes	26 (31.7%)	29 (37.2%)	27 (38.6%)	24 (33.3%)	23 (35.4%)
Never	5 (6.1%)	5 (6.4%)	5 (7.1%)	3 (4.2%)	5 (7.7%)
Total	82	78	70	72	65

Field work 2024

In comparing reading frequency with the various schools, we found that ICT students lead with the highest daily readers (40.3%), owing to the fact that they are accustomed to technology and have faster access habits. The lowest daily readers are found among Environmental Studies students (24.6%), which could be a sign of less necessity for current events in their course work. Science and Technical Education students show a tendency towards irregular reading habits ("sometimes"), with practical workloads or topic relevance being moderating factors.

Examining content preferences among students across different academic schools
Here we explored what kind of information students seek, helping to understand their motivations and media engagement drivers.

Table 5: Overall Content Preferences Among Respondents

Content Type	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Entertainment	124	33.8%
Sports	108	29.4%
Politics	76	20.7%
Academics	59	16.1%
Total	367	100.0%

Field work 2024

As Table 5 shows, the students show the highest interest in entertainment content, occupying 33.8% of all responses. News about sports is second at 29.4%, affirming the popularity of leisure-related content. Political content, as would normally be more contextual and interplaying, obtains only 20.7% of respondents, while academic content obtains the lowest at 16.1%. These findings suggest that students' use of online newspapers is driven by personal interest, escapism, and the popularity of pop culture rather than academic intent.

Table 6: Content Preferences Stratified by School

Content Type	Engineering (n=82)	Science (n=78)	Tech Ed (n=70)	ICT (n=72)	Env Studies (n=65)
Entertainment	30 (36.6%)	28 (35.9%)	22 (31.4%)	26 (36.1%)	18 (27.7%)
Sports	27 (32.9%)	21 (26.9%)	23 (32.9%)	21 (29.2%)	16 (24.6%)
Politics	15 (18.3%)	17 (21.8%)	13 (18.6%)	15 (20.8%)	20 (30.8%)
Academics	10 (12.2%)	12 (15.4%)	12 (17.1%)	10 (13.9%)	11 (16.9%)
Total (n)	82	78	70	72	65

Field work 2024

Entertainment appears as the dominant content category overall across the three schools, especially among ICT (36.1%), Science (35.9%), and Engineering students (36.6%). This suggests strong student interest in entertainment news like celebrity updates, music, and movies. Sport stands at a close second, particularly among students of Technical Education (32.9%), which is indicative of general youth interest in sports like football. Political news is followed moderately, most by students of Environmental Studies (30.8%), possibly due to issues of governance and policymaking being most pertinent to their field. Scholarly content, though relevant, stands at the lowest level across all the schools, signifying that students do not primarily use newspapers for scholarly purposes but rather for personal interest and social conversation.

Determining the factors influencing students' choice of online over printed newspapers
This objective explores the motivators behind online readership a key component in understanding user behavior and adoption of digital platforms.

Table 7: General Factors Influencing Online Newspaper Readership

Influencing Factor	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Accessibility / Availability	124	33.8%
Convenience of Time	106	28.9%
Cost (Free Online Access)	97	26.4%
Proximity	40	10.9%
Total	367	100.0%

Field work 2024

Table 7 shows availability and accessibility is the most common purpose of newspaper reading online (33.8%), followed by ease of time (28.9%) — both as a consequence of the digital advantage of on-demand content consumption. Saving money motivation is also a prominent characteristic (26.4%), which evidences the attraction of no-cost access to news. Proximity, long associated with delivery in hard copy form, is the least powerful influence (10.9%) during the digital age, since geographic limitations are eliminated for the most part online. Table 8: Influencing Factors Stratified by School Factor

Factor	Engineering	Science	Tech Ed	ICT	Env Studies
Accessibility / Availability	30 (36.6%)	27 (34.6%)	22 (31.4%)	26 (36.1%)	19 (29.2%)
Convenience of Time	24 (29.3%)	22 (28.2%)	20 (28.6%)	21 (29.2%)	19 (29.2%)
Cost (Free Access)	20 (24.4%)	20 (25.6%)	19 (27.1%)	20 (27.8%)	18 (27.7%)
Proximity	8 (9.8%)	9 (11.5%)	9 (12.9%)	5 (6.9%)	9 (13.8%)
Total (n)	82	78	70	72	65

Field work 2024

ICT and Engineering students prioritize availability and accessibility the highest (36.1% and 36.6%, respectively), likely due to exposure to devices and platforms that facilitate immediate access. Conclusively, convenience of time is a general factor across all schools (~29%), showing that students want flexibility in accessing news within their own time. Cost (free access) is slightly connected more in Environmental Studies and Technical Education, possibly due to the budgetary constraints common in those cohorts. Proximity can have the least impact usually, but Environmental Studies students (13.8%) and Technical Education students

(12.9%) exhibit greater concern perhaps due to residual behaviors or fewer installations of the internet within their classrooms.

Ascertaining the challenges students face in accessing and reading digital newspapers
We will be identifying the barriers to digital newspaper engagement, which is crucial for improving access strategies and platform design.
Table 9: General Challenges in Accessing Digital Newspapers

Challenge	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
High Cost of Data	106	28.9%
Poor Internet Connectivity	94	25.6%
Lack of Time	72	19.6%
Unavailability of Desired Content	58	15.8%
Device Compatibility	37	10.1%
Total	367	100.0%

Field work 2024

Table 9 also shows that the prohibitive price of data is the most frequently cited limitation (28.9%) to online newspaper use. This is then succeeded by poor internet connectivity (25.6%), both of which are weak economic and structural impediments common in the Nigerian setting. Unaffordability of time (19.6%) also ranks, especially among students with study loads to keep up with. Incompatibility of devices and absence of desired content are less frequently cited, suggesting that the majority of students own functional devices but may not have affordability and connectivity.

Table 10: Challenges Stratified by School

Challenge	Engineering (n=82)	Science (n=78)	Tech Ed (n=70)	ICT (n=72)	Env Studies (n=65)
High Cost of Data	24 (29.3%)	22 (28.2%)	21 (30.0%)	19 (26.4%)	20 (30.8%)
Poor Internet Connectivity	20 (24.4%)	21 (26.9%)	17 (24.3%)	18 (25.0%)	18 (27.7%)
Lack of Time	16 (19.5%)	15 (19.2%)	13 (18.6%)	14 (19.4%)	14 (21.5%)
Unavailable Desired Content	13 (15.9%)	12 (15.4%)	11 (15.7%)	12 (16.7%)	7 (10.8%)
Device Compatibility	9 (11.0%)	8 (10.3%)	8 (11.4%)	9 (12.5%)	6 (9.2%)
Total (n)	82	78	70	72	65

Field work 2024

Looking at the strata, High cost of data is the greatest barrier at each school, particularly Technical Education (30.0%) and Environmental Studies (30.8%). This suggests that financial constraints disproportionately affect these groups. Slow internet is another extremely prevalent issue, with over 25% of students in each school listing it as an issue, reflecting campus or community infrastructure problems. Time is a more behavioral/personal issue and is proportionally fairly balanced. Compatibility of devices is lowest of all measures, reflecting that most students currently use smartphones or laptops capable of accessing news websites. Notably, ICT students report fewer technical issues, perhaps suggesting better personal hardware or problem-solving skills.

Conclusion and recommendations

The growth of the online newspaper has continued to shape the readership patterns of newspaper consumers and with the speed in technological development, such patterns will continue to change. Indeed, for many newspaper readers, the online newspapers present an agenda setting platform for them to catch up with happenings in the society at all times. This research establishes that there is growing access and preferences for the online newspaper content over the printed copy in 2024. So far, the study reveals that there is no halt, stagnation or reversal in the preference for the digital newspaper today. Rather, the study shows that even older readers who traditionally patronize the printed newspaper copy seem to be adapting to the new norm as the have easy access to newspaper content digitally. Therefore, the digital newspaper helps them to set the agenda for their engagement with happenings around them and even interacting with government and its institutions is a faster and more symbiotic manner than they would, using the printed newspaper.

However, the challenges faced by digital newspapers appear to remain or even exacerbate because of issues like poor internet connectivity, lack of power and high cost of digital devices such as android phones, computers, ipads and others. In the light of current biting economic challenges masterminded by high inflation, skyrocketing dollar rates and a weak naira, newspapers in Nigeria have lesser capacity to spend on data or afford good gadgets to devour digital newspaper content. Similarly, the persistent national grid collapse with many parts of the country (including Jos, the study area) going for weeks without power, reliance on digital newspaper by readers for agenda setting is greatly threatened.

This study therefore recommends as follows:

1. Alternative source of power such as solar should be provided for powering digital devices by citizens especially in academic communities.
2. Government should provide subsidy for data to enable more access to digital newspapers readership
3. Regulatory bodies, newspaper publishers, CSOs, and professional bodies should engage in greater sensitization and education for citizens on how to have a healthier, more beneficial engagement with the digital newspaper as well as how to improve Nigerians reading culture online by sensitizing and making digital literacy a study for all.
4. Areplica of this study can be carried out in North Central Nigeria since similar research was conducted in Northwestern Nigeria and thus suggest that comparative study on readership can be carried out between Northern Nigeria and Southeastern part of the country.

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