

PERCEPTION OF CREDIBILITY OF INTERNET NEWS AMONG STUDENTS IN SELECT UNIVERSITIES IN DELTA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study examines students' perception of credibility of Internet news in select universities in Delta State. The Internet has widened the scope of information collection, processing and dissemination. However, its question on credibility remains an ongoing study. The study was anchored on perception theory. Among the objective of the study were; to determine the extent of students' exposure to internet news, whether students perceive the internet as credible news source relative to traditional news media. It adopted survey design with a population of 1681 of students of Department of Mass Communication of (a) Delta State University, Abraka, (b) Novena University, Ogume and (c) Western Delta University, Oghara. Using Taro Yamane's formula, a sample of 323 was randomly selected. Major findings of the study revealed significant access to Internet news; however, most users are attracted to Breaking News than other stories. Secondly, it was revealed that the credibility of Internet news is dependent on the news media especially online news versions of mainstream media. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that credibility of news is very important. Writers should ensure that they only publish credible news based on objective news coverage.

Keywords: Credibility, Internet News, News, Perception

Introduction

Advancement in new technologies has transformed journalistic practices in many ways across cultures. The result of the paradigm shift in information revolution is the use of the Internet in information collection, processing and dissemination. Obijiofor and Hanusch (2013) observe that the Internet has become an immensely significant source of news for many in the developed world. Not surprisingly, there has been a surge in scholarly attention to how news is delivered online, as well as who is producing it and

who is reading it. The Internet provides opportunity for easy access to information especially in cases of emergencies that traditional media may not carry.

Contextually, Internet news refers to online news coverage by online media. This is contrary to the traditional media that fall within either the mainstream media or emerging local media outlets. The credibility of Internet news remains an ongoing study. This is because; media regulations vary among societies of the world. Scholars such as Obijiofor and Hanusch (2013) and Mohd, Mazwani, Hamka and Muhammad (2013) agree that information revolution has increased access to information through the use of the Internet. Today, people use the internet to surf varieties of information on Internet. However, the nexus is that not all of the accessible information in the internet is true and accurate. This will lead huge impacts on society especially among the internet users which may define public perceptions of the credibility news on the Internet. The proliferation of social network sites has increased the susceptibility to access to information on the Internet with attendant questions on the credibility of Internet news sites (Ezeh & Ono, 2016). Aside the main social networks such as Youtube, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and a host of creditable sites, there is a common belief that the ephemeral nature of the Internet increases its influence on users' behaviour and their decision making.

Existing literature points to popular perceptions on students' use of Internet for news. However, Houston, Hansen and Nisbett (2011) observe that there is relationship between the influences of other internet users towards the perception on the particular information. The implication is that Internet users perceive Internet news differently and there is always a measurable degree of influence.

This study, therefore seeks to understand students' perception of the credibility of Internet news by identifying the degree of use the Internet as a news channel to satisfy their news needs in light of other traditional forms of media such as radio, television, newspapers, and magazines. For this study, students of journalism class of three universities in Delta State were selected. This is because; these are trainees in news gathering. They are relatively knowledgeable on what constitutes Internet news and by extension, the understanding of perception studies in journalism.

Statement of the Problem

The challenge with the use of Internet for news gathering and dissemination is largely affected by the way users manage information on the web. This has further affected proper application of citizen journalism. With a Smartphone, an average Internet user becomes a news source without much idea of media literacy. The result is that the Internet is easily used to disseminate both credible and incredible news. The personalised nature of the Internet use further encourages its uses in the dissemination of uncensored materials. While a number of studies have investigated how established journalists are dealing with and using new technologies in a number of countries, very little attention has been paid to how student journalists view and use the Internet as a source of news. In areas where exposure to Internet news exists, students often are not knowledgeable enough to know the credibility of certain Internet news sources. They tend to believe that all Internet materials are correct forms of reading materials. On news sourcing and dissemination, students often, believe that the Internet is immune to fake information. It is arguable that significant Internet materials do not meet up with desired standards. Users often, see these materials as correct when in reality, they fall short of standards. The aftermath is that users may depend on such lopsided information to make informed decisions. It is in the light of the foregoing that the study sought to determine students' perception of Internet news in select universities in Delta State.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study include:

1. To determine the extent of students' exposure to Internet news.
2. To determine dominant Internet news appeals to students of select universities.
3. To investigate sources of Internet News.

4. To determine whether students perceive the Internet as credible news source relative to traditional news media.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent are students exposed to Internet news?
2. What are dominant Internet news appeals to students of select universities?
3. What are sources of Internet news?
4. How do journalism students perceive and use the Internet as credible news source relative to traditional news media?

Scope of the Study

The study focuses on the way students perceive the creditability of Internet News. Contextually, Internet news refers to online news media and online news carried by both popular and local social media outlets. News credibility refers to news in the internet that is true and accurate. Here, accuracy refers to the ability of both a news source and content to report issues objectively. For the purpose of this study, journalism students of Delta State University Abraka, Novena University Ogume and Western Delta University Oghara were selected. These universities were selected because they offer Mass Communication course which equips students with knowledge of what constitutes Internet news and its credibility issues.

Significance of the study

The study is significant in many ways. First, it helps to clear some misconceptions about Internet news with attendant credibility issues. Not all Internet sources are credible as some are mere purveyors of unverified news. Secondly, the findings of this study will equip students of journalism profession with knowledge of objective reporting. It clears the misconceptions associated with citizen journalism in which everybody is a creator of news. Finally, findings of this study will provide empirical evidences and theoretical foundations for further studies on related areas. This is true, because future researchers will find this study as veritable reference material for further research endeavours.

Review of Related Literature

Understanding Internet News

Internet is a computer-based global information system which is composed of many interconnected computer networks. Comer (2008) states that the Internet has made it possible for people all over the world to communicate with one another effectively and inexpensively. Unlike traditional broadcasting media, such as radio and television, the Internet does not have a centralized distribution system. Instead, an individual who has Internet access can communicate directly with anyone else on the Internet, post information for general consumption, retrieve information, use distant applications and services, or buy and sell products.

Internet news is otherwise known as online news because it provides real-time news due to its digital format as opposed to newspapers' static versions that have to follow the newsroom's daily deadline or publishing (Kenechukwu, 2014). Due to its compatibility with digital format, it includes the use of tools such as hyperlinks that connect words and stories to related articles or audiovisual contents.

The classification of Internet news sources often poses serious problems due to different approaches to collection and dissemination of information. Basically, social media provides the anchor for access to Internet news. Ezech and Mboso (2020) observe that social media has emerged as a new platform for (news) discourses. It has no doubt provided people with easier and faster accessibility to information and has become an outlet for them to share views on sociopolitical issues. One advantage of Internet news is easy accessibility to a wide range of information and the flexibility of the use of search engine to

navigate different online news platforms. Collaborating with the above authors, Luzón (2012) states that Web 2.0 has not just increased social media and social interactivity, it has promoted the phenomenon of self-publishing or blogging. There are a growing number of academic blogs that serve as a platform for the exchange of academic- and discipline-related ideas. This has created rapid increase in the amount of information available on the Internet has created a number of problems. One that has caught the attention of educators is the increasing probability that students will use unverified information in their research (Klein, 2002).

There are however, two broad ways of categorising Internet news: mainstream online media and blogs. Mainstream media include popular media outlets that have made significant impact on news collection, processing and dissemination. They are equally traditional media that publish or broadcast through the conventional media system. These online mainstream media have significant degree of credibility. These mainstream online media include: Channels online, AIT online, sunnewsonline, BBC News on Nigeria, Business day (Online), Daily independent. (Online), Leadership (Online), PM News (Online) and a host of mainstream Internet news sources.

On the other hand, there are blogs that are created and managed by individuals or media outlets. A blog is a frequently updated website consisting of dated entries arranged in reverse chronological order so the most recent appears first (Hoffman, 2007). There are ongoing studies on credibility of blogging as news source. This is premised on the assumption that most blog sites are conduit for exercise of citizen journalism without ethical consideration. Saper (2006) argues that academic blogs that do not go through an editorial or peer review process should not be seen as contributions to a discipline's knowledge production or have any influence on scholarship. Notable blogs in Nigeria include: Linda Ikeji, Gist Vic Blog, Footy Naija, Gist Mania, Hy Naija and others.

Students' Exposure and Use of Internet News

The emergence of digital and social media platforms facilitated by the Internet revived expectations regarding the potential for the public to re-enter the public domain. The idea that new media platforms help democratize knowledge has led to research into the factors influencing how people consume news, especially young people (Benkler, 2007) and explore the mechanisms enabling the shifting news consumption, especially among youth, as a result of the democratization of information (Groshek, 2010). According to Bana (2020), students who read digitally have both benefits and drawbacks. On the one hand, it facilitates and enhances the enjoyment of reading and information accessibility. However, it is a danger to the culture of reading. One benefit of reading on the internet is that it is no longer confined to one location, is silent, and allows one to begin reading. As long as they are comfortable and enjoy it, students can now read whenever and wherever they choose. Another benefit is that reading can be greatly boosted by using a computer and media technologies connected to the internet. This fact demonstrates that students see using the internet to learn reading comprehension topics favourably.

Social networks are online services that let users create a public or semi-public profile inside a closed system, list other users they are connected to, and browse both their own list of connections and those made by other users (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). According to Olasinde (2014), people and students have been able to interact through the usage of the Internet, the World Wide Web, Facebook, Twitter, Naijapals, blogs, short message service (SMS), Naija Pings, Badoo, Pin Book, Pin Share, YouTube, 2go, Whatsapp, Smoothie, etc. The world has completely altered due to social media. Interactivity is guaranteed by these media. Humans cannot survive or engage in meaningful interactions with one another without information. They speak with each other in order to exchange knowledge, educate, convince, shape opinions, forge connections, and find out information. The usage of social media websites by today's youth has grown incredibly commonplace and clichéd. The younger generation frequents websites like Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, YouTube, gaming sites, and blogs.

Using and being accessible to online news sources are necessary for exposure to Internet news. Significant research has looked into how established journalists in various countries deal with and use new

technologies, but Obijiofor and Hanusch (2013) point out that not much focus has been placed on how student journalists perceive and use the Internet as a news medium. Many cultural changes in journalism practices have been brought about by new technologies. Particularly in industrialized nations, newspapers are facing pressure to adjust to technological advancements as their revenues decline and new internet business models are being investigated. Because of this, a large number of people in the industrialized world now rely heavily on the Internet for news. It should come as no surprise that there has been a noticeable increase in academic interest in the distribution of news online, including who is creating and reading it. Numerous studies have looked at students' use of the Internet generally, not only how they use it to get news (Anderson, 2001). The impact of other internet users is another factor that affects perception. An investigation on how user comments affect people's perceptions of media bias and third-party perception in online political news was conducted by Houston, Hansen, and Nisbett (2011).

Ogedebe (2012) asserts that the majority of pupils obtain pertinent information from the internet, including instructional resources. This suggests that pupils are utilizing the internet to raise their academic standing. Having self-learning skills and owning a computer at home with internet access are equally important for students' academic success.

According to Obijiofor and Haunsch's (2013) research, students are quite picky about the news outlets that meet their news demands and the variety of online news subjects they choose to read about. As a result, the uses and gratifications theory may account for the decisions students make about how much news to consume as well as the main way they satisfy their news demands. Since the Internet fills a void in students' news demands, choosing it over other accessible news sources implies that students choose their news sources and topics carefully. However, the study by Sahin et al. (2010) supported the usage of college students to research online sources and made the case that trustworthy online sources are essential for academic research, particularly in higher-level guides that call for a literature tutorial assessment. Students view the Internet as an additional source of information, which improves their academic achievement.

A ground-breaking research of first-year journalism students in 22 different nations was carried out more than 16 years ago by Splichal and Sparks (1994), referenced in Obijiofor and Hanusch (2013). This was done before the Internet became a commonplace source of news for many people. The Internet has actually become a vital part of most students' life in the developed world, to the point where these so-called "digital natives" have been teaching their lecturers a few things about it. Numerous studies have looked at students' usage of the Internet generally, in addition to their use of it as a news source. Because of this, a large number of people in the industrialized world now rely heavily on the Internet for news. It should come as no surprise that there has been a noticeable increase in academic interest in the distribution of news online, including who is creating and reading it.

According to Asif-Ur-Rahman, Mohammed, and Muhammad (2015), the expansion of the internet's diverse applications has transformed the internet as a communication medium. The interactive aspect of the internet environment has been especially helpful in the growth of social networks. While using social networks to connect was first only a specialized activity, with time it has become a common occurrence. These days, people utilize social networking sites for a variety of purposes, such as creating communities, conversing, blogging, connecting with close friends and family, gathering data for studies, and more. Researchers discovered that students use social networking sites for at least thirty minutes per day. However, because social networking sites can be used for a variety of academic activities, including communication with faculty and university authorities, discussing academic topics with classmates, and assignment purposes, the majority of respondents do believe that these sites have a positive impact on their academic performance.

Olley and Chile's (2015) research, however, shows that many Nigerians have a poor and limited understanding of Nigerian online publications. Because of this, viewership of international and Nigerian online newspapers is far lower than anticipated. The article comes to the conclusion that despite all of the advantages of the internet, many Nigerians—especially students—still find it unpleasant to read

newspapers online because they think that anyone, anywhere, can post anything they want for the world to see. An investigation was carried out to find out how often the academic community used the internet, why they didn't use it, how satisfied they were with the services they had access to, and what issues these institutions had with the internet that they now used. The study's conclusions demonstrated that students used the internet rarely since computers and internet access were not very important when they were studying. However, the majority of students expressed an interest in using the Internet and improving their Internet-related skills. The world is currently experiencing an information revolution that might drastically change everything. The expense of internet connectivity, power supply issues, and infrastructure issues are some of the barriers to internet usage in Bangladesh (Sujatha, 2011). Furthermore, Mustapha, Mustapha, and Abdulrauf-Salau (2020) discovered that the use and dependence on news on social networking sites were significantly predicted by perceived credibility.

Perception of the Internet as Credible News Source

The ability of a news source and its contents to be trustworthy and presented objectively is known as news credibility. Many perspectives have been used to study credibility, including message credibility, which focuses on how message features influence how credible a message or its source is seen to be. Consequently, verifiable information is synonymous with reliable information. Studies carried out in various nations have yielded varying conclusions regarding the credibility of the Internet. The main concerns have been related to privacy, accuracy, dependability, and other related issues; some observers have even forecast trouble for online news in the future (Abdulla, Garrison, Salwen, Driscoll, and Casey, 2002). Media reliance was found to be a substantial predictor of media credibility by Johnson and Kaye (2008) in their study on the perceptions of blog credibility. This result is predicted since audiences may affect the perception of media trustworthiness when they depend on a medium to satisfy their requirements. Additionally, it has been demonstrated that audience perceptions of Internet credibility are influenced by reliance on the Internet (Flanagin and Metzger, 2007). Since anyone with internet connection and computer literacy may write and post anything on the internet, whether it is true or not, many opponents of the internet have argued that it is credible, while others have dismissed it as biased and unreliable. According to Davood, Musa, and Muhammad (2009), audience members want information for a variety of reasons, most notably so they can feel more at ease, empowered, and equipped to take action. However, they do not find all information to be reliable or helpful. After that, they weed out irrelevant material, keeping only credible and helpful information. Verifiable information is typically referred to as reliable information. The results likewise demonstrate that while the Internet promotes freedom of information and information flow, it also raises the risk of information exploitation or inaccuracy. However, the capacity for user-source interaction may contribute to the reliability of information found online.

Regarding source credibility, a study on the perception of internet news information's credibility by journalists for online daily newspapers found that, overall, internet news was regarded as moderately credible, and that, compared to print newspaper journalists, online newspaper journalists rated internet news information as significantly more credible (Cassidy, 2007; Ono, Okeke and Chiaghana, 2020).

According to Cassidy (2017), research has usually indicated that people consider internet news similarly to other forms of media when it comes to reliability. Internet users with political interests were questioned by Johnson and Kaye (1998) to find out if they thought online publications were as reliable as those that were distributed conventionally. They discovered that almost two-thirds of respondents thought online newspapers, news magazines, and politically charged websites were at least somewhat credible. Furthermore, compared to their traditional equivalents, online newspapers and online candidate literature were deemed to be substantially more credible.

Review of Empirical Studies

There are numerous studies on audience perception of credibility of Internet news. Olley and Chile (2015) examined the state of Nigerian newspapers available online in a study titled *Readers' Perception of Nigerian Newspapers on the Internet*. The study examines reader awareness, reader utility, and reader response to online newspaper feedback systems. The opportunities and difficulties of Nigerian online newspaper publication are also evaluated. The survey is the study's methodology. The study's respondents were chosen at random from the population of newspaper readers in a few South-South Nigerian cities, including both traditional and internet readers. The results showed that while the internet has significantly changed Nigeria's newspaper sector, substandard services and high internet costs for internet users have a negative impact on the country's online newspaper reading. According to the study's findings, many Nigerians still dislike reading newspapers online despite the advantages of the internet because they think that anyone with an anonymous identity can post anything they want for the world to see.

In a similar vein, Nkemdilim (2015) investigated how online newspapers might serve as informational resources for self-improvement in her work, *Assessment of Patterns of Readership of Online Newspapers in Selected Nigerian Universities*. Although there is a lot of Internet usage in many Nigerian colleges, it is unclear how much staff and students are aware of and utilize online newspapers. This study uses a survey to find out which Nigerian online newspapers are popular and widely read at particular Nigerian universities, as well as what influences readership and how it advances human development. The results show that although faculty and students at the chosen Nigerian universities are familiar with Nigerian online publications, very few of them devote more than 40% of their browsing time to reading them. However, the staff and students of the chosen colleges were greatly impacted by the online newspapers in terms of improving their understanding of crucial topics, giving them the ability to educate others about crucial issues, and refuting their preconceived notions about issues. This suggests that even while many of them are forced to read online newspapers for little periods of time due to uncontrollable circumstances, their dependence on these publications is considerable. The study suggests that a consistent supply of electricity and dependable, reasonably priced Internet connectivity might boost university readers of online publications in Nigeria.

Pow and Li (2015) looked into how students perceived the quality of the material they found online and how they used it for inquiry-based learning. They discovered that a lot of the information available on the Internet is unverified and that published content might vary greatly in quality in Web 2.0 environments. Particularly for undergrads who primarily rely on the Internet for research, this unverified material impedes rather than helps student learning. As of right now, we are unsure of how students evaluate the quality of the information they are exposed to and how this influences their learning. This study makes the case that students' opinions on the quality of the information they get online affect how they use it to further their education. The goals of this study were to create an information acceptance model that accurately gauges and forecasts students' use of Internet information, as well as to better understand how students assess information by looking at how they use it for learning and how they perceive its quality. A total of 299 undergraduate students from a university in Hong Kong participated in the study. Based on Klein's (2002) 15 information quality characteristics, we created an information acceptance model using confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation models. According to our findings, there was a strong correlation between 8 out of the 15 information quality dimensions and students' use of the Internet for research purposes.

Similar research on *Students' Perception of the Effects of Online Social Networking: An Empirical Assessment* by Asif-Ur-Rahman, Mohammed, and Muhammad (2015) found that social networking sites have a significant influence on the internet-using generations of the twenty-first century, making them extremely active communication channels, especially for college students. There are concerns over how social networking sites affect academic achievement and whether or not they can be used as a useful teaching tool to raise academic achievement levels. Students' opinions on using social networking sites and

how it affects their academic performance are evaluated in this study. Ninety-six undergraduate students from seven private colleges were chosen as a sample using the non-probability convenience sampling technique. They were then asked to respond to an 18-question structured questionnaire. Adopted was a descriptive-comparative research design. Descriptive analysis was performed on the data, with a focus on frequency table counts and percentages. Summarily, the above empirical studies provide measurable pointers of credibility of some mainstream online media and marginal incredibility of some online media especially blog sites. It suggests that Internet news should reflect the basics of news writing of fairness, balance, honesty and objectivity.

Theoretical Framework

Perception Theory

The study was anchored on perception theory. Perception is simply the process of making sense out of experience and how an individual makes sense of his or her world. The theory therefore, examines the complex process by which people select, organise and interpret sensory stimulation into a meaningful and coherent picture of the world (Berelson and Steiner, 1964). It depends on a complex of variables such as psychological dispositions, past experiences, cultural expectations and social relationships (Asogwa and Esimokha, 2015).

Perception theory was propounded by Berelson and Steiner in the year 1964. The theory which is classified under “limited effect theories” explains the complexities and difficulties involved in analysing mass media messages by the audience. The foundation of perception theory was laid long ago by Klapper (1960, p.19) when he remarked that:

By and large, people tend to expose themselves to those mass communications that in accord with their existing attitudes and interests. Consciously or unconsciously, they avoid communications of opposite hue. In the event of their being nevertheless exposed to unsympathetic material, they often seem to perceive it, or to recast and interpret it to their existing views, or to forget it more readily than they forget sympathetic material.

Perception reveals the tendency for people’s view of any mass communication message to be a product of their previously formed opinions, wants and desires. The theory is related to this study in the sense that journalism students of select universities in Delta State have access to the internet for news updates such news based on their perception (previously held beliefs, attitudes and opinions) of the medium. Similarly, students would rather regard internet news as credible when they perceive the medium as one which disseminates reliable information. When the reverse is the case, then they cannot, but treat internet news with a grain of salt. The internet by virtue of its dynamic nature and inherent characteristics has been referred to as a news medium by authorities and experts in the field of communication. Rampal’s view is echoed by Biagi (2012, p. 11) when he says “the internet media have become a new mass medium, as well as, integrated delivery system for traditional print audio, video and interactive media (such as video games)”. Biagi (2012, p. 190) adds that “any type of information –video, audio, graphics and text, can travel virtually to and from anyone with a computer and access to the internet anywhere in the world.

The Internet has indisputably wrought wonders in the world of journalism (Olise, 2012; Olise and Tebekaemi 2015). Olise and Tebekaemi (2014) highlight five ways in which the internet achieves this: (a) enhanced two-way communication (b) enhanced globalisation (c) promotion of international relation (d) removal of the challenge of distance, cost and time (e) capture of timely information. From the foregoing, it can be deduced that the internet is a viable medium for the dissemination of news and other vital information to members of the public.

Methodology

The study adopted survey research design. Survey research design is a procedures in quantitative research in which investigators administer survey to a sample or to the entire population of people to describe the attitudes, opinions, behaviors, or characteristics of the population. (Tahmina 2021). This process involves the use of instruments such as questionnaire, in-depth interviews or ready-made online survey templates. The population of the study consists of a total of 1,681 Mass Communication students of (a) Delta State University, Abraka, (b) Novena University, Ogume and (c) Western Delta University, Oghara represented viz:

Level	Delta State University, Abraka	Novena University, Ogume	Western Delta University, Oghara
100 Level	298	234	189
200 Level	244	107	102
300 Level	187	39	43
400 Level	146	35	57
Sub-Total	875	415	391
TOTAL		1,681	

The sample size of 323 was determined using Taro Yamane’s (1967) formula. The study also applied simple random for the selection of 323 respondents across the select universities. Simple random was chosen to give equal chance of selection to all students of Department of Mass Communication of select universities. The sample distribution is as follows:

(a) Delta State University, Abraka:	108
(b) Novena University, Ogume:	108
(c) Western Delta University, Oghara:	107
Total:	323

The study used questionnaire as the instrument for data collection. The questionnaire was designed to address the research questions. Data were presented and analysed in tables and percentage method. 323 respondents formed the unit of analysis.

Analysis of Demographic Data

This section looks at some of the demographic data of the respondents such as their gender, age, year of study, academic sponsor.

Table 1: Gender of respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	123	38%
Female	200	62%
Total	323	100%

Table 1 indicated that 123(38%) of the respondents were male while 200(62%) of the respondents were female. It showed that majority of the respondents were the female though both sexes were given equal opportunity to participate in the study.

Table 2: Respondents age bracket

Age Bracket	Frequency	Percentage (%)
16-20 years	60	19%
21-25 years	140	43%
26-30 years	80	25%
31 and above	43	13%
Total	323	100%

Table 2 indicated that 60(19%) of the respondents were under the age bracket of 16-20yrs, 140 (43%) of the respondents were under the age bracket of 21-25yrs, 80 (25%) were under the age bracket of 26-30yrs while 43(13%) were under the age bracket of 31and above. It showed that most of the respondents were between the ages of 21-25yrs.

Table 3: Respondent’s Year of Study

Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
100	60	18.58%
200	82	25.39%
300	94	29.10%
400	62	19.19%
500	25	7.74%
TOTAL	323	100%

The Table 3 above represent the year of study distribution of respondents. The table shows that majority of the respondents 94 (29.10%), 82 (25.39%) were in year 3 and 2 respectively, while 60 (18.58%), 62 (19.19%) were year 1 and 4 while respondents in year 5 were least represented with 25 (7.74%)

Table 4: Extent of students’ exposure to Internet news

Option	Delta State University, Abraka	Novena University, Ogume	Western Delta University, Oghara
Great	30 (27.8%)	62 (57.4%)	12 (11.2%)
Moderate	50 (46.3%)	34 (31.5%)	68 (63.6%)
Little	28 (25.9%)	12 (11.1%)	27 (25.2%)
No exposure	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0(0%)
Sub-Total	108 (100%)	108 (100%)	107 (100%)
Total	323 (100%)		

Two conclusions are inferred from the above Table 4. First, all respondents are exposed to Internet news. However, there are significance differences on the extent of exposure among the respondents from different universities. Remarkably, respondents (students) of Novena University, Ogume show ‘Great Extent’ of exposure than other respondents from other universities. Also, the relative balance in the scores of ‘Moderate Extent’ across the select universities further proves that students of Mass Communication are well exposed to Internet news.

Table 5: Dominant Internet news that appeal to students of select universities

Option	Delta State University, Abraka	Novena University, Ogume	Western Delta University, Oghara
Breaking News	39 (36.1%)	42 (38.9%)	44 (41.1%)
Sports News	22 (20.4%)	14 (13.0%)	40 (37.4%)
National News	26(24.1%)	36 (33.3%)	12 (11.2%)
International News	6(5.6%)	8(0%)	5(4.7%)
Entertainment/Comedy	10(9.3%)	6(7.4%)	4(3.7%)
Games/Cartoons	5(4.6%)	2(1.9%)	2(1.9%)
Sub-Total	108 (100%)	108 (100%)	107 (100%)
Total	323 (100%)		

The general indication in Table 5 is that ‘Breaking News’ appeal most to respondents of select universities. However, respondents of Western Delta University, Oghara show great significance against ‘National News.’ There is also even concentration of scores across ‘National News and Sports News.’ The implication is that respondents get information about national and sports event from the web. Remarkably also, data show that all respondents do not deprive significant appeal from ‘International News, Entertainment/Comedy and Games/Cartoons.’

Table 6: Sources of Internet news vis-à-vis its credibility

Option	Delta State University, Abraka		Novena University, Ogume		Western Delta University, Oghara	
	Credible	Not credible	Credible	Not credible	Credible	Not credible
Mainstream online news	60 (55.6%)	12 (11.1%)	58 (53.7%)	14 (13.0%)	44 (41.1%)	28 (26.1%)
Blogs and Youtube	20 (18.5%)	2 (1.9%)	6 (5.6%)	16 (14.8%)	18 (16.8%)	4 (3.7%)
Social Networks (Facebook etc)	9 (8.3%)	5 (4.6%)	4 (3.7%)	10 (9.3%)	12 (11.2%)	2 (1.9%)
Sub-Total	108 (100%)		108 (100%)		107 (100%)	
Total	323 (100%)					

Table 6 shows a general belief that mainstream online news is credible. This is supported by combined scores of respondents of select universities. Contextually, mainstream news outlets cover all online versions of traditional media that runs print or broadcast versions. Blogs/Youtube and social networks (Facebook etc) are minimally represented in terms of credibility. This is connected with its personalised attributes that are easy to manipulate.

Table 7: Students’ perception and use of Internet as credible news source relative to traditional news media?

Option	Delta State University, Abraka		Novena University, Ogume		Western Delta University, Oghara	
	Credible	Not credible	Credible	Not credible	Credible	Not credible
Internet News	20 (18.5%)	3 (2.8%)	18 (16.7%)	5 (4.6%)	58 (54.2%)	27 (25.2%)
Traditional News Media	65 (60.2%)	20 (18.5%)	74 (68.5%)	11 (10.2%)	19 (17.8%)	3 (2.8%)
Sub-Total	108 (100%)		108 (100%)		107 (100%)	
Total	323 (100%)					

On students’ perception and use of Internet as credible news sources relative to traditional new media, Table 7 shows that respondents (students) of Delta State University, Abraka and Novena University Ogume perceive traditional news media with their online ancillaries are credible than Internet news published by blogs. Remarkably, respondents (students) of Western Delta University, Oghara indicated high credibility of Internet news against traditional online news of mainstream media. The responses in Table 8 further supports the perception theory which hinges on different ways of seeing and interpreting media messages.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the show significant use of Internet for news among the respondents (students) of select universities. However, respondents of Novena University Oigum showed great extent of exposure to Internet news.

On dominant Internet news that appeals to students, the study found that most respondents are readily attracted to 'Breaking News' than other types of Internet news. This finding corroborates with the study of Obijiofor and Hanusch (2013) carried out among second and third-year journalism and arts students at the University of Queensland (Australia) get their news and found that that 'Breaking News' appeals to most students than other news on the Internet. A Breaking News is an instantaneous flash of news on the Internet which the traditional print media or broadcast media may not carry due to emergency of event. A 'Breaking News' maybe news about the nation (National News) or any other form of news. This justifies the reasons most respondents quickly read them than taking time to read a voluminous content of a 'Sports News.'

The study also found that students of Mass Communication of select universities made deliberate decisions about aspects of the Internet services that satisfied their needs, such as the need to keep up-to-date with sports news but with minimal appeal on international news, entertainment/comedy and games/cartoons.

The study also found that the credibility of Internet News source is often determined by the efficiency of its handlers; for instance, most respondents tend to confer credibility status on online versions of prominent mainstream media. This means that most respondents believed that online versions of traditional mainstream media such as The Nation, Guardian, AIT, Channels are more credible than Internet news from private blogs. This finding validates the choice of Perception theory for the study. The theory believes that people perceive media messages in diverse ways.

Remarkably, the study found that most respondents from the select universities see blogs as less credible than online versions of mainstream media. This position hinges on the assumption that people can manipulate information easily leading to dissemination of fake news.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes with focus students' perception of Internet news. In light of the above, the study makes the following recommendations:

- a. Greater emphasis should be directed to the teaching of media literacy among students of Mass Communication. Media literacy will teach them on efficient use of media technology and management of information especially on the Internet. It will also help them to know when news is subjective rather than objective thereby eradicating the possibility of fake news.
- b. On media contents, efforts should be made by media users to sieve what is surfed online by juxtaposing such news with reports from mainstream media of print and broadcast stations. This will create avenue for assessing 'Breaking News' to ensure they do not create false alarms.
- c. The credibility of news is very important. Writers should ensure that they only publish credible news based on objective news coverage.
- d. There should be minimal regulations of what is published online without violating writers or readers' right to free speech and expressions. There is need for internal mechanisms that will detect fake news and properly, deprive the writer or publisher the rights to comments for some days like Facebook and other social media platforms.

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