

NEWSPAPER READERSHIP IN PORT HARCOURT

By

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Abstract

This study among other things looked at how variables like sex, educational qualification and income influence newspaper readership. It also sought general information on newspaper readership in Port Harcourt. Two major hypotheses were tested. These are that majority of the people in Port Harcourt will read at least one newspaper daily and that majority of the people in Port Harcourt prefer to read a newspaper from their state of origin to a national newspaper. Three minor hypotheses were also tested. The survey research method was employed and the questionnaire was used as instrument to elicit information from respondents. Simple percentages were used to analyse data collected. The first major hypothesis was supported by findings of the study, while the second major hypothesis was not supported. The three minor hypotheses were all supported. The study recommended more comprehensive studies on newspaper readership in Port Harcourt and other parts of the country.

INTRODUCTION:

Different studies have been carried out on newspaper readership. Some have tried to find out the pattern of newspaper readership among students (Spanier, 1997). Others have looked at editorial readership among students (Uyo, 1972), while some have studied the relationship between political affiliation and the particular newspaper read (Oladimiji, 1981). There have also been studies on how education, age and economic status affects readership (Schramm and White, 1960) and the relationship between level of education and consumption of mass media (Ogundiran 1971). This study will among other things look at how variables like sex, education, income

and age influence newspaper readership. It will also seek general information on newspaper readership in Port Harcourt.

“The newspaper”, MacDougall and Reid (1987:23) point out “is an institution developed by modern civilisation to inform and lead public opinion and to furnish that check upon government which no constitution has been able to provide”. To most people, reading the newspaper has become a habit. For them, the newspaper is both their eyes and ears. They believe whatever and anything they read as the gospel truth. The belief in newspapers in some countries is so strong that they do not question anything that they read in the papers.

According to Baran (2002:143)

In Caesar's time Rome had a newspaper "Acta Diurna"(actions of the day) written on a tablet, and was pasted on a wall after each day's meeting of the senate. Its circulation was one, and there was no reliable measure of total readership. However, it does show that people have always wanted to know what was happening and that others have helped them to do so.

The implication is that people have always yearned for information and the invention of newspapers is an avenue to meet their information needs. "All Athens and foreigners sojourning there would spend their leisure time at nothing but telling something or listening to something new", "reported the Chronicler Luke almost 2,000 years ago. (Acts 17:21). A century earlier the Roman government recognising the public appetite for news, had begun displaying Acta Diurna daily bulletins in prominent places (Awake 2005). This goes further to support Baran's claim.

Newspapers actually in the form we recognise them today developed their roots in the 17th century Europe. Curantos - a one-page news sheet about specific events, was printed in English in Holland in 1620 and imported to England by British booksellers who were eager to satisfy public demand for information about continental happenings that eventually led to what we now call the Thirty years war. (Baran 2002). This

agrees with Hiebert, Ugnurait and Bohn's (1975) claim that by 1620 infant newspapers were being printed in many places including Amsterdam in Holland.

Despite the early history of newspapers, there was none in Nigeria before 1859. Mojaye (2006) points out that the first newspaper emerged in the year 1859 with the publication of Iwe Irohin, a bi monthly newspaper by a Christian Missionary, Rev. Henry Townsend in Abeokuta. After this, there has been a proliferation of newspapers in Nigeria. There are now some national newspapers, private newspapers and most states also own newspapers. Today the newspaper industry has grown tremendously; newspapers are springing up like mushroom all over the country. This development invariably has accentuated a basic problem faced by human beings: The problem of allocating available time among the various things they have or need to do.

Specifically, how much time do people spend on reading newspaper, assuming this is one of the many things they do with their time? What aspects of newspapers attract their attention most? Of the numerous newspapers, which one do individuals read most and why? These are questions that need answering. The objectives of this study therefore include finding out:

- * Which newspaper is read most by residents of Port Harcourt.
- * What makes people in Port Harcourt read a particular newspaper more than others.

- * Whether sex of the reader affects readership.
- * Whether educational level attained affects readership in the city.
- * Whether the income of the reader play any role in newspaper readership and so on.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This researcher is not aware of any study that has been specifically done on newspaper readership in Port Harcourt. There are however, other works that have been done on mass media usage generally and newspaper readership specifically which bear on the problem of the study. In most of these works, findings suggest that age, educational level, sex and economic factors among others affect individual preferences of a particular mass medium and its content. Some of these findings will be briefly highlighted.

Researcher Berelson (1949) found out that readers use the newspaper:

- ❖ To get information about and interpretations of public affairs.
- ❖ As tools for daily living (for example, advertising, radio and movie listening and announcements for birth, deaths and weddings)
- ❖ For relaxation and escape.
- ❖ For prestige (newspaper content is raw material for conversation).
- ❖ For social content (from human interest stories and advice columns).

These interesting reasons notwithstanding, recent researches have shown that in America, overall circulation rose from 48 to 62 million between 1945 and 1970, but the amount of time people spend reading their papers decreased. People were reading only 20 percent of the stories, spending less than 30 minutes a day with the paper and only 15 minutes was focused primarily on the paper itself (Compayne and Gomery, 2000). It has been observed also in the United States that newspaper readership is dropping among young people and there are research findings to support this. For instance the findings from a study reported by Baran (2000) stated that fewer than 30 percent of 18 to 29 years read a daily paper. Fewer than 20 percent of 30 to 44 years old do so, (In 1972 the proportion was 75 percent). The problem facing newspapers then was how to have young readers of the future. Online papers are believed to be one solution, but the fundamental question remains: should newspapers give readers what they should want or what they do want.

Other research findings have shown that people read newspapers for different reasons. Baskette, Sissors and Brooks (1997) are of the opinion that the most important part of selling a newspaper is its content, first and then its design, but the two elements are not divided fifty fifty. Depending on age, social status, sex and other demographic variables, the reasons for reading newspaper vary. Findings by Weaver and Mullins (1975) support

this.

This study is therefore based on the Uses, Gratification Theory. Littlejohn (2002) stated that the approach focuses on the consumer the audience member rather than the message. "Unlike the powerful effects tradition this approach imagines the audience members to be a discriminatory user of the media". It views the members of the audience as actively utilizing media contents, rather than being passively acted upon by the media. Another relevant theory to this study is the Dependency Theory, which states that audiences depend on media information to meet needs and attain goals. What determines the amount of dependency a person experiences are the number and centrality of information functions being served and the social stability. When social change and conflict are high, established institutions, beliefs and practices are challenged forcing people to make revelations and choices. At such times, reliance on the media for information increases. It decreases when social stability is high and change is low (Defluer and Bal-Rokeach 1982).

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The findings of a motivational research undertaken for a leading American newspapers, *The Detroit Press* suggest that people feel lost and anxious without a newspaper. This is because they would not know what is going on in the world, fearing the worst they are

reassured to read each day that everything is well (Stephenson 1967). The newspaper audience can be described as the total number of people exposed to the copies of newspapers in circulation. As Wright (1959) puts it, "The audience is relatively large; it is heterogeneous and is anonymous". This is the reason why it is difficult to predict the behaviour of the audience. There is need for audience analysis to make for effective communication. It is on this, and the fact that communication is basic to human existence that this study is based. The newspaper industry which is a fast growing one in Nigeria will no doubt find this study useful. It will also be useful to people wanting to research on this, or similar topics.

METHODOLOGY

The survey research method was applied in this study and the self administered questionnaire was used as instrument to elicit information from respondents. A total of copies of the 200 questionnaire were administered of which 172 were returned. The simple random sampling method was used to sample respondents. The questionnaire was initially administered on few samples to determine its validity. Simple percentages were used to analyse the data collected.

The study area is Port Harcourt, the capital of Rivers State in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria. It has a coverage of about 12,000 Ha (NDDC 2003) The

population of the area is estimated at 1,200,000 (1.2 million) using a projection of 2.8 percent growth rate of the 1991 population figure (NPC 1991).

Hypotheses

This study, in addition to seeking general information about newspaper readership in Port Harcourt tested the following hypotheses.

Major Hypotheses

- 1 Majority of the people in Port Harcourt read at least one newspaper a day.
- 2 Majority of the people in Port Harcourt prefer to read a newspaper from their state of origin to a national newspaper.

Minor Hypotheses

- (a) People with higher income will read newspapers more than those with lower income.
- (b) People with higher educational qualification will read newspapers more than those with lower educational qualification
- (c) Men will read newspapers more than women.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

As stated earlier, five hypotheses were tested in this study; two were considered major, while the other three were minor hypotheses. The first major hypothesis is that majority of the people in Port Harcourt read at least one newspaper daily. To

test this hypothesis, respondents were asked how often they read newspapers; whether daily, every other day, twice a week, once a week, or occasionally. Responses showed that 60.5% (104) of the respondents said they read newspaper daily, 10.5% (18) of them read newspapers every other day, 6.9% (12) read twice a week, 3.5% (6) read once a week, while 18.6% (32) read newspapers occasionally.

Table 1 below shows that majority of the respondents 60.5% (104) out of 172 read newspapers daily. The first major hypothesis of this study that majority of people in Port Harcourt will read at least one newspaper daily is therefore supported.

Table 1

Frequency on Readership (N=172)

Frequency of Readership	Response
Daily	60.5% (104)
Every other day	10.5% (18)
Twice a week	6.9% (12)
Once a week	3.5% (6)
Occasionally	18.6% (32)
Total	100%

Motivational Factors in the Choice of Favourite/Regular Newspapers.

The second major hypothesis is that

majority of the people in Port Harcourt prefer to read a newspaper from their state origin to a national newspaper. In order to test this hypothesis, respondents were asked how they choose their favourite/regular newspaper. They were given options including whether they choose it because it is a paper published by their state of origin. The results here indicate that 15.1% (26) choose their favourite/regular newspaper because it is their state's newspaper. Seven percent (12) made their choice based on the fact that the newspaper carries political news, another 51% (88) said it is because it has good content and balanced reporting. People who choose their favourite/regular newspaper because of its good production quality were 7% (12). Twenty eight respondents, 16.3% choose theirs because they feature their favourite columnist(s), while the remaining 3.5% (6) said it is because of some other reasons. This is shown in Table II. The second major hypothesis that majority of the people in Port Harcourt prefer to read a newspaper from their state of origin to a national newspaper is not supported by the data collected. While only 15.1% (26) of the respondents said they choose their favourite/regular newspaper because it is their state's newspaper, a majority of 51.1% (88) said it is because it has good content and balanced reporting which is a feature of most national newspapers. This finding supports research findings reported by Baskette, Sissors and Brooks (1997) that one of the most

important parts of selling a newspaper is its content, first and then its design.

Table II
Motivational Factors in the Choice of Favourite/Regular Newspaper (N=172)

Factors	Response
It is my state paper	15.1% (26)
It carries political news	7% (12)
It has good content/ balanced reporting	51.1% (88)
It's production quality	7% (12)
It features my favourite columnist (s)	16.3% (28)
Others	3.5% (6)
Total	100% (172)

Apart from the two major hypotheses, three minor hypotheses were also tested. The first minor hypothesis is that people with higher income will read newspapers more than those with lower income. The different levels of income were classified into two groups. Those that are N240, 000:00 P.A and below (Low income Group), and N241, 000:00 P.A and above (High income Group). Data collected shows that 106 of the respondents (67.4%) fall into the low income group, 56 of them (32.6%) are in the high income groups.

Fifty-eight (58%) of the respondents in the low income group said they read newspapers daily, 8.6%

(10) of them read newspapers every other day, while 10.3% (12) of them read newspapers twice a week, others 5.2% (6) read once a week, while the remaining 25.9% (30) of the respondents read newspapers occasionally. In the high income group, 82.1% (46) of the respondents read newspapers every day, 14.3% (8) of them read every other day, while the remaining 3.6% (2) read occasionally. The first minor hypothesis that people with higher income will read newspapers than those with lower income is therefore supported by data collected.

Table III
Income and Frequency of Readership
(N=172)

Income Level			
Frequency of Readership	Low Income Group	High Income Group	Total
Daily	50% (58)	82.1% (46)	60.5% (104)
Every other day	8.6% (10)	14.3% (8)	10.5% (18)
Twice a week	10.3% (12)	-	6.9% (12)
Once a week	5.2% (6)	-	3.5% (6)
Occasionally	25.9% (30)	3.6% (2)	18.6% (32)
Total	67.4% (106)	32.6% (56)	100% (172)

Educational Qualification and Frequency of Readership

The second minor hypothesis is that people with high educational qualification will read newspapers more than those with lower educational qualification. The different educational levels were grouped into low and high educational levels. Those with West African School certificate and below fall

into the low educational levels, while those with OND/NCE and above fall into the high educational level.

Table IV shows that 69.8% (120) of the respondents fall into the low level of education category, while 31% (52) fall into high level of education. Of those with low level of education, 50% (60) read newspapers daily, 13.3% (16) read every other day, while 8.3% (28) read newspaper occasionally. In the high income group, 84.6% (44) of them read newspapers daily, 3.8% (2) read newspapers every other day; another 3.8% (2) read twice a week, while the remaining 7.7% (4) read newspapers occasionally.

The second minor hypothesis that people with higher educational qualification will read newspapers more than those with lower educational qualifications is therefore supported. This is shown in Table IV.

Table IV
Educational Qualification and Frequency of Readership

Level of Education Frequency of Readership	Low	High	Total
Daily	50% (60)	84.6% (44)	60.5% (104)
Every other day	13.3% (16)	3.8% (2)	10.5% (18)
Twice a week	8.3% (10)	3.8% (2)	6.9% (12)
Once a week	5% (6)	-	3.5% (6)
Occasionally	23.3% (28)	7.7% (4)	18.6% (32)
Total	69.8% (120)	30.2% (52)	100% (172)

Table IV shows that the higher the educational level, the higher the frequency and vice versa. Findings

here and that of the first minor hypothesis support the findings of Wade and Schramm (1969) that newspapers and magazines are likely to be used by better educated groups and readers in the higher income and occupational categories than others.

Sex And Frequency Of Readership

The third minor hypothesis is that men will read newspapers more than women. To test this hypothesis, respondents were asked how often they read newspapers. Of the 55.8% (96) male respondents in the sample, 73% (70) said they read newspapers daily; 10.4% (10) said they read every other day, 4.1% (4) said they read twice a week, while the remaining 12.5% (12) said they read newspapers occasionally. Thirty four (44.7%) of the 76 female respondents said they read newspapers daily, 10.5% (8) read every other day, 10.5% (8) also read twice a week, while 8% (6) of them read once a week. The remaining 26.3% (20) female respondents said they read newspapers occasionally.

Table V shows that men read newspapers more than women. This supports the third minor hypothesis that men will read newspapers more than women. This is in line with the findings of O'Keefe and Spetnagel (1973) which state that newspaper is more likely to be read by men than women.

Table V
Sex And Frequency of Readership

Frequency of Readership	Sex		
	Male	Female	Total
Daily	73% (70)	44.7% (34)	60.5%(104)
Every other day	10.4% (10)	10.5% (8)	10.5%(18)
Twice a week	4.1% (4)	10.5% (8)	6.9% (12)
Once a week	-	8% (6)	3.5% (6)
Occasionally	12.5% (12)	26.3% (20)	18.6% (32)
Total	55.8% (96)	44.2% (38)	100% (172)

One of the findings of this study is that The Guardian is the most read newspaper in Port Harcourt. Respondents were asked to name their favourite/regular newspaper. Only eight Nigerian newspapers were mentioned. They were The Tide, 17.4% (30) The Punch, 2.3% (4), The Guardian, 39.5% (68), Thisday, 29% (50), Daily Independent, 7% (12), Vanguard, 2.3% (4), Nigerian Tribune 1.2% (2) and The Comet 1.2% (2) This might not however apply to other parts of the country This is because there have been a lot of controversies on which is the most read newspaper in Nigeria

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The objective of the study was to seek general information on newspaper readership in Port Harcourt. More specifically, the study tested two major and three minor hypotheses. The first major hypothesis is that majority of the people in Port Harcourt will read at least one newspaper a day. This hypothesis was upheld: about two-third, 60.5% of the 172 respondents said they read newspapers daily. The second major hypothesis that majority of the people in Port Harcourt prefer a newspaper from their state of origin to a national newspaper was not supported. Instead, a substantial number of the respondents, 51.1% (88)

said they read their favourite/regular paper because of its good content and balance reporting; only an insignificant 15.1% (26) said they read it because it is their state's paper.

The first of the three minor hypotheses is that people with higher income will read newspapers more than those with lower income. This hypothesis was upheld by the data collected; more than three-quarters, that is, 82.1% of those with high income read newspapers daily, as against 50% of those with lower income who read newspapers daily. The second minor hypothesis which is that those with higher educational qualification will read newspapers more than those with lower qualification was also upheld. Table IV shows that 84.6% of those with higher educational qualification read newspapers daily, as against 50% of those with low level of education that read daily. The last hypothesis which is the third minor hypothesis is that men will read newspapers more than women. It was found that 73% of the male respondents read newspapers daily, while only 44.7% of the female read newspapers daily. This hypothesis was also upheld.

One thing that is apparent from this study is that people buy newspapers that carry a lot of materials, and has credibility. Most people also like to read articles from their favourite columnist (s). It could be inferred therefore, that a newspaper that loses its credibility, will consequently lose its readership. The amount of information a newspaper carries might also influence readership. A newspaper that wants to increase its circulation figure has to improve on its content, and include a lot of varieties. Design also plays an

important role.

The findings of this study are not conclusive. However, they may serve as a baseline for others who want to carry out similar studies. This study was limited to only 200 respondents of which only 172 copies of the questionnaire were returned. More studies on newspaper readership in Port Harcourt and other parts of the country should be carried out. They should involve more hands, time and a larger population.

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