



*Research Article*

## **Perception, Usage and Influence of Online Newspapers on Mass Media Audience in Selected Higher Institutions in Delta State, Nigeria.**

*David Solomon Tam & Erhenede Augustine Efetobore*

### **About Article**

#### **Article History**

Submission: March 25, 2026

Acceptance: March 29, 2026

Publication: April 1, 2026

#### **Keywords:**

*Online newspapers, audience perception, digital media, readership, content credibility*

#### **About the Authors**

##### **David Solomon Tam**

david.tam@dou.edu.ng

07033742891

Dennis Osadebay University, Asaba.  
Department of Mass Communication

**&**

##### **Erhenede Augustine Efetobore**

[erhenedeaugustine@gmail.com](mailto:erhenedeaugustine@gmail.com)

07035697943

Dennis Osadebay university, Asaba.  
Department of Mass Communication

### **ABSTRACT**

This study examined the use, perception, and effects of online newspapers among respondents, with particular emphasis on usage patterns, content preference, audience perception, and the factors influencing such perceptions. The study used the Selective Influence Theory as the theoretical framework. Using a survey research design, data were collected from respondents and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Findings revealed a high level of online newspaper usage, with most respondents accessing online newspapers regularly, especially on a daily and weekly basis. General news and political contents were the most frequently read, while educational content attracted the least attention. The study further revealed that majority of respondents read in-depth analyses and perceive online newspapers as providing detailed information, although some expressed reservations regarding content quality. Audience perception was largely positive; however, issues such as fake news, bias, and excessive advertisements contributed to negative perceptions. The study also established that audience perception significantly affects online newspapers, influencing readership, trust, and information sharing. Source credibility and content quality emerged as the most significant factors shaping audience perception. The study concludes that while online newspapers play a vital role in information dissemination, improving credibility, content depth, and professionalism is essential for sustaining audience trust and engagement.



## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Perception is the direct apprehension of objects and their relations through the senses. de Lange, Heilbron, & Kok, (2018) traces its origin to the Latin term *percipio*, meaning "to receive" or "take possession." Fadman (1996) defines perception as the sorting, interpretation, and integration of stimuli by the sense organs and brain, while Huff (1999), cited in Okundaye (2010), describes it as the process of selecting, organizing, and interpreting sensory data into meaningful mental representations.

Perception involves three core processes selection, organization, and interpretation enabling individuals to understand their environment. McQuail (2010) highlights that perception is shaped by psychological disposition, past experiences, cultural expectations, and social relationships. Social psychology views it as interpreting sensory information from the environment, while cognitive psychology focuses on extracting and utilizing environmental information to guide behavior (Fiske & Taylor, 2013; Ezeaka et.al.2025).

Audience perception is critical to evaluating the success of communication, as audiences are central to the communication process. Smith and Brown (2020) emphasize the need to understand audience perceptions when designing online newspapers to meet readers' needs and preferences, enhance user experience, and optimize content delivery.

Online news emerged with the advent of Web 2.0, allowing instant sharing of information with millions of internet users

globally (Nadine, 2011; Enemu et. al. 2019). This development underscores the importance of understanding audience perception in digital journalism to align content with evolving reader expectations.

Lang (2020) highlights that audience perception is shaped by limited cognitive resources, emotional processing, and selective exposure. Audiences engage more with media aligned with their goals, values, and interests, influencing attention, comprehension, and retention. Emotional factors enhance or impair media processing, depending on context and individual differences such as personality, expertise, and motivation. The study also emphasized the role of contextual factors, like environmental conditions, social norms, and technological influences, in shaping audience behavior.

McQuail (2010) adds that active audiences interpret and derive meaning from media content. Reception analysis examines how media is received and used, while audience fragmentation highlights the division of audiences into smaller, diverse groups with unique preferences. Media literacy enables critical evaluation of media messages, empowering audiences to engage more effectively.

Online newspapers, a hallmark of 21st-century technological advancements, are digital versions of traditional print newspapers accessible via the internet (Etim, 2013). They offer news, opinion pieces, and multimedia content, appealing to readers for their convenience and accessibility on devices like smartphones and tablets (Smith, 2020).

Johnson (2019) notes that online newspapers provide the flexibility to access news anytime, anywhere, often integrating social media features for sharing, commenting, and engagement. Boczkowski (2020) observes that digitalization has transformed journalism by enhancing personalization and interactivity, reshaping news production, distribution, and consumption.

While online newspapers offer advantages such as interactivity, immediacy, and global reach, they also face significant challenges in maintaining quality, ensuring credibility, and generating sustainable revenue. Sultan and Amir (2023; Ezeaka & Ewetuobi, 2024) described this transformation as a new phase in journalism that enables wider global communication but simultaneously raises concerns about misinformation, weakened editorial standards, and the blurring of boundaries between news and entertainment.

Boczkowski (2020) highlights that online newspapers blend traditional journalism with digital features, transforming news production, distribution, and consumption through diverse and personalized content. Garcia (2021) adds that integrating social media features fosters community engagement and participation, further transforming reader interactions with news content. The technological revolution has significantly transformed journalism, with newspapers transitioning from print to digital formats. This shift has allowed online newspapers to thrive, but it also underscores the need to examine audience perceptions of these platforms.

Understanding how readers engage with digital news is essential for optimizing online newspapers to meet audience expectations. Johnson (2019) highlights that aligning content and design with reader preferences is critical for success. Similarly, Smith and Brown (2020) emphasize the importance of prioritizing audience perception to address readers' needs, while Garcia and Patel (2021) stress that understanding audience perceptions informs strategic decisions to enhance user experience and engagement.

However, a knowledge gap remains regarding audience perceptions of online newspapers. To address this, the present study critically examines "Audience Perception of Online Newspapers."

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The objectives of the study are to:

1. examine the perception of audiences towards online newspaper content;
2. analyse the readership patterns of audiences in relation to online newspaper content;
3. determine the effects of audience perception on online newspaper content, and
4. identify the factors influencing audience perception of online newspaper content.

## **2.1 Research questions**

The following are the research questions of the study:

1. What are the perceptions of audiences towards online newspaper content?
2. What are the readership patterns of audiences in relation to online

newspaper content?

3. What are the effects of audience perceptions on online newspaper content?
4. What factors influence audience perception of online newspaper content?

This study holds great significance for all audiences and readers of online newspapers, as their perceptions play a critical role in influencing their readership patterns. Additionally, it is highly beneficial to online newspaper journalists, as understanding audience perceptions can directly impact the creation and presentation of online newspaper content.

Furthermore, this study contributes to the existing body of literature by providing a comprehensive review of relevant studies and presenting new research findings in the field of online newspaper journalism. It also serves as a valuable resource for students, scholars, researchers, and online newspaper creators, offering insights and fostering further research to advance the understanding and development of online newspaper journalism.

### 3.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

**The theory chosen for the study is the Selective Influence Theory.** The Selective Influence Theory is not attributed to a single scholar as a standalone theory; rather, it originates from the broader body of work on selective processes in mass communication, primarily developed by Paul Felix Lazarsfeld and his colleagues in the 1940s. This line of research was later theoretically grounded in Leon Festinger's Cognitive

Dissonance Theory in 1957, which explains the psychological mechanism underlying selective exposure and interpretation. The foundations of selective influence can be traced to the 1940s–1950s, particularly through Lazarsfeld's empirical studies on media effects and Festinger's 1957 formulation of cognitive dissonance.

The Selective Influence Theory emphasizes how individuals interact with information in ways that align with their beliefs and values. This perspective is grounded in the principle that individuals seek internal consistency in their attitudes and judgments, which shapes how they process information. Contemporary research supports this view by showing that individuals actively select, interpret, and recall information that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs while avoiding contradictory messages to reduce cognitive dissonance. Stroud (2017) explains that selective exposure and selective processing reinforce existing attitudes by limiting engagement with opposing viewpoints. Similarly, Knobloch-Westerwick and Meng (2020) found that individuals systematically prefer attitude-consistent information, thereby strengthening prior beliefs and shaping overall perception.

De Keersmaecker, Jonas & Schmid, Katharina. (2022) describes this theory as a response to the mental discomfort people experience when confronted with conflicting information. To limit or reduce this discomfort, individuals employ interrelated selective processes. McQuail (2010) identifies these processes as selective exposure, selective attention,

selective perception, and selective retention, each of which influences how individuals engage with media messages:

- 1. Selective Exposure:** This process involves individuals exposing themselves only to messages that align with their existing opinions and values. De Keersmaecker, Jonas & Schmid, Katharina (2022; Okpala & Chukwu, 2023), highlight that people consciously or subconsciously avoid messages that might challenge their established attitudes, minimizing dissonance.
- 2. Selective Attention:** Selective attention refers to individuals focusing on messages that resonate with their pre-existing beliefs and attitudes. McQuail (2010) notes that the brain processes information faster than it can interpret, necessitating the selection of specific information to avoid cognitive overload.
- 3. Selective Perception:** In this process, individuals interpret messages in ways consistent with their existing opinions and attitudes. De Keersmaecker, Jonas & Schmid, Katharina. (2022) explain that perception involves the psychological re-framing of a message, ensuring its meaning aligns with the recipient's beliefs and attitudes.
- 4. Selective Retention:** This process pertains to how individuals remember messages. McQuail (2010) observes that people are more likely to retain and recall messages that align with their beliefs and self-image while forgetting those that conflict with them. Messages perceived as favorable to one's self-concept are remembered more accurately and for longer periods.

## 4.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 4.1 Understanding Perception

Perception is the process by which individuals organize and interpret sensory data from their environment using sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell. It involves three key stages: sensation (the detection of sensory stimuli), processing (the neural analysis of sensory input), and interpretation (the assignment of meaning based on prior experience, expectations, and sociocultural context). Contemporary empirical studies in *Journal of Experimental Psychology* demonstrate that perception is an active cognitive process shaped by top-down and bottom-up mechanisms (Goldstein, 2022). Furthermore, perception is inherently subjective and is influenced by attention, affective states, expectations, and prior experiences, which collectively determine how individuals construct meaning from sensory inputs (Goldstein, 2020).

Perception plays a critical role in communication. Social relationships and psychological factors shape how recipients interpret messages, making it unlikely that all recipients derive the same meaning. Selective perception, for instance, leads audiences to focus more on negative information than positive, a tendency reinforced by cognitive biases in information processing. Recent studies indicate that individual differences in cognitive capacity and media literacy significantly influence patterns of attention, particularly within complex digital environments. Potter (2021) explains that individuals develop cognitive “filters” to manage information overload, selectively attending to content that aligns with their

needs while ignoring less relevant stimuli. Similarly, Lang and Bailey (2022) report that limited cognitive resources require audiences to prioritize certain media inputs, thereby shaping perception and message interpretation.

#### 4.1.1 Audience (Student) Perception

Audience perception is a critical aspect of mass communication, shaped by cultural background, beliefs, and experiences (Koliska, Assmann, and Splendore, 2021). It highlights how individuals bring their subjectivity to media interactions, helping communication professionals tailor messages to effectively engage target audiences (McComb, 2014; Solomon, 2016; Bryant & Vorderer, 2017; Berger, 2014). Halls (2013) emphasizes its role in crafting strategies to convey messages, influence actions, and shape attitudes and beliefs.

The media environment including the medium, genre, and presentation also shapes perception. Blair (2015) notes that audiences actively engage with media by focusing, interpreting meaning, and drawing connections, rather than passively consuming content. This active participation explains why individuals may interpret the same message differently.

Audience perception involves processes such as attention, interpretation, acceptance, recall, attitudes, and behaviors (Stokes, 2015). It is multidimensional, as seen in perceptions of Nigerian online newspapers, which readers view as convenient and accessible sources of information (Olley & Chile, 2015).

#### 4.1.2 Online Newspapers

Like traditional newspapers, online newspapers are digital news platforms that publish written articles, photographs, and videos, but with enhanced technological capabilities that extend beyond print formats. They possess several key attributes:

- **Interactivity:** Online newspapers enable user participation through comments, sharing, and engagement across digital platforms. Kämpel, Karnowski, and Keyling (2015) found that interactive features significantly enhance audience engagement and participatory communication.
- **Multimedia content:** Online news integrates text, audio, video, and infographics to enrich user experience and improve information processing. Van der Haak, Parks, and Castells (2012) emphasized that multimedia storytelling enhances audience understanding and retention.
- **Immediacy (real-time updates):** Online newspapers provide continuous updates and breaking news coverage, allowing audiences to access information instantly. Thurman and Fletcher (2019) noted that digital journalism prioritizes speed and constant news flow as a defining characteristic.
- **Searchability and archives:** Digital platforms allow users to easily retrieve past articles through search engines and archived databases, improving accessibility and research efficiency. Zamith (2018) reported

that search functions significantly shape how audiences navigate and consume news content.

- **Personalization:** Many online newspapers use algorithms to tailor news content based on user preferences and behavior. Möller et al. (2020) observed that personalized news feeds influence content exposure and audience perception.

#### 4.1.3 Audience (Students) Perception of Online Newspaper

As previously suggested, a key prerequisite for determining the effectiveness of any mass communication is audience perception. The reason for this is because it depends on how the audience perceives and reacts to media messages. Positive or negative audience perception is possible. From a favorable perspective. According to McQuail (2010), there is a growing trend toward positive perception. It is thought of as an easily available and practical knowledge source. It is seen as being just as reliable as traditional media.

The positive reactions and interpretations that the public has of a media message are referred to as audience perception. In this context, some markers of a favorable opinion are as follows:

**Credibility:** The audience views the online newspaper as reliable and trustworthy (Hampton & Lu, 2017).

**Relevance:** The audience finds the content of the online newspaper meaningful and valuable (Kalogeropoulos & Newman, 2017).

**Loyalty:** The audience frequently returns to the online newspaper, demonstrating consistent readership (Johnson & Kaye, 2014).

**Positivity:** The audience exhibits a favorable attitude toward the online newspaper (Hampton & Lu, 2017).

**Engagement:** The audience shows a keen interest in and actively interacts with the content.

**Recommendations:** Based on their perception, the audience recommends the online newspaper to others (Johnson & Kaye, 2014).

**Satisfaction:** The audience is content with the quality and quantity of the newspaper's content (Johnson & Kaye, 2014).

**Familiarity:** The audience feels well-acquainted with the brand and content of the online newspaper (Kalogeropoulos & Newman, 2017).

**Involvement:** The audience experiences a sense of connection and participation with the online newspaper.

**Enjoyment:** The audience derives pleasure from reading the newspaper (Johnson & Kaye, 2014). On the other side, the following are some negative indicators of negative audience perception on online news;

1. Lack of credibility: news credibility as a vital ingredient when it comes to the issues of news. News credibility goes along in influencing the audience perception of the news. The audience perceives the online newspaper as

untrustworthy or biased. (Metzger & Flanaghi, 2015). Lack of credibility of news in this regard that bring about; erosion of trust, misinformation, polarization, lost of audience, disinformation, legal tussle (Reuter institute, 2020 and pew research center,2020)

2. Inaccuracy: accuracy is another major prerequisite for judging any newsworthy item. Here journalist must try to present news items that are accurate and exact. News should be an embodiment of accurate facts and figures. Inaccurate news report in an indicator of a negative audience perception. According to (Kalogeropoulos & Newman 2017). Inaccuracy makes the audience to believe that the online newspaper contains inaccurate or false information.
3. Sensationalism: this refers to the practice of presenting news that is filled of shocking, trilling and provoking emotions. Audience in this regard often at the expense of accuracy, fairness and nuance (The Guardian, 2022). Sensationalism can have negative implication such as; distorting public perception of important issue, creating unnecessary anxiety, damaging the credibility of the media outlet and contributing to the widespread of misinformation and fake news (Media Bias,2022)
4. Overload: most times with the abundance of information in the internet, audience tends to have overload of information which makes them confused, not knowing the correct information. Audience usually feel overwhelmed by the amount of the

content of online newspaper (Johnson & Kaye,2014)

5. Mistrust: negative audience perception usually breeds mistrust. Here the audience mistrust the online newspaper's sources or motives(Metzger &Flamaglin 2015)

#### **4.1.4 Effect of Audience (Students) perception on online newspaper**

**Audience perception undoubtedly has a profound impact on online newspapers, influencing both individuals and society.**

**Key effects include the following:**

1. **Selective Exposure:** Audiences tend to seek information that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs and values, a phenomenon known as selective exposure. Guo, Chen, & Lu, (2024) and Schmid et al., (2022) defined Selective exposure as the tendency of individuals to prefer attitude-consistent information while avoiding contradictory messages in order to reduce cognitive dissonance and maintain psychological comfort. McQuail (2010) further elaborates that people naturally seek information that reinforces their beliefs, affirms their interests, and boosts their ego, while avoiding content that contradicts their dispositions or threatens their self-image. Studies by Fleming & Levine (2017), and Chen & Reese (2015) also confirm that audience preferences significantly influence their exposure to online newspapers. The Pew Research Center (2020) notes that selective exposure based on beliefs and values shapes audience perceptions of online news.

- 2. Confirmation Bias:** Audiences interpret news content in ways that affirm their existing beliefs and biases, a process referred to as confirmation bias. Kahneman (2011) highlights how this leads to a reinforcement of individual biases, reducing openness to alternative perspectives.
- 3. News Avoidance:** Negative audience perceptions can lead to news avoidance, where individuals actively avoid consuming news altogether. According to the American Press Institute (2018), 38% of Americans report avoiding news due to frustration, fatigue, or feeling overwhelmed. This trend is detrimental to news sources and media organizations, as it reduces audience engagement.
- 4. Emotional Responses:** Audience emotions, shaped by their beliefs, norms, and values, significantly influence their perception of online newspapers. Emotional responses whether positive or negative are triggered by the nature and framing of news content. Recent studies show that emotions play a central role in how audiences process, interpret, and recall news information. Nabi (2015) explains that emotional reactions guide attention and message evaluation, thereby shaping audience perception. Similarly, Kleemans, Schlütz, and van den Bulck (2017) found that emotionally charged news content enhances memory retention and influences how news is interpreted over time.
- 5. Trust and Credibility:** Trust and credibility are critical factors shaping audience perceptions of online newspapers. The perceived trustworthiness of a news source directly influences audience acceptance and

interpretation of information. Recent research indicates that credibility in digital news environments is influenced by factors such as accuracy, transparency, source reputation, and responsiveness to audience feedback. Tandoc, Lim, and Ling (2018) noted that the proliferation of misinformation has significantly challenged trust in online journalism. Furthermore, Newman et al. (2023) reported that declining trust in news is linked to concerns about bias, lack of accountability, and the speed of online news production. Studies also show that when audiences perceive news sources as unreliable, it leads to skepticism, selective exposure, and reduced engagement with news content (Vraga & Bode, 2020; Fletcher & Park, 2017).

#### **4.1.5 Factors Likely to Influence Audience Perception of Online Newspapers**

- 1. Personalization:** Audiences tend to personalize the content of online newspapers to align with their preferences. According to Kim (2019), personalization enhances audience engagement and positively impacts their perception of the newspaper's content.
- 2. Credibility:** Credibility is a critical factor influencing audience perception. When online newspapers are perceived as credible, audiences are more likely to trust and believe their content without doubt. Kohler (2017) highlights that transparency, objectivity, and accountability are key contributors to credibility. Conversely, a lack of trust and transparency can lead to suspicions of hidden agendas, diminishing audience confidence (Pew Research Center, n.d.).
- 3. Audience Experience:** The audience's

previous interactions with an online newspaper shape their perception. A positive user experience, whether through a well-designed website or app, can significantly enhance audience satisfaction and perception.

4. **Quality of Content:** Audiences are drawn to high-quality content, as no one prefers associating with poorly produced material. Quality content increases engagement and readership. Kim (2019) notes that well-crafted content not only influences audience perception but also encourages sharing and boosts newspaper circulation.
5. **Social Media:** The rise of social media has transformed the landscape of newspaper publication, particularly in the digital age. Social media has increased the accessibility and reach of online newspapers. The Reuters Institute (2019) observes a shift toward visually appealing, concise content such as headlines, summaries, and infographics, which cater to modern readers' preferences. Pew Research Center (2019) adds that social media platforms have broadened the audience base for online newspapers.
6. **Interactivity:** Unlike traditional print newspapers, online newspapers offer interactive features such as comments, forums, and social media integration. Lee (2018) suggests that these features enhance audience engagement and perception. Innovations like virtual reality and 360-degree videos create immersive storytelling experiences, boosting the audience's view of the newspaper's quality and innovation (The Guardian, 2019).

## 5.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted for this study is the survey research design. Survey research is defined as a systematic method of collecting data from a sample of individuals in order to describe, explain, or predict characteristics of a larger population. Recent scholars emphasize that survey designs enable researchers to gather standardized data efficiently and analyze patterns of attitudes, opinions, and behaviors across populations. Creswell and Creswell (2018) explain that survey research involves the use of structured instruments to collect quantifiable data from a representative sample, thereby allowing for generalization of findings. Similarly, Ponto (2015) notes that survey research is particularly suitable for studies examining perceptions and trends, as it facilitates the collection of data from large populations while maintaining reliability and validity. The rationale for using this design is its ability to employ a representative sample to measure trends related to the phenomenon under investigation—in this case, audience perception of online newspapers.

The study's population consisted of **1,849 mass communication students** drawn from **Dennis Osadebay University, Asaba, University of Delta, Agbor, Michael and Cecilia Ibru University, Agbarha-Otor, and Delta State Polytechnic, Oghara**. Using the **Taro Yamane sample size formula (1964)**, a sample size of **370** was derived from the total population of **1849 students**. This sample size was chosen to ensure effective management of time and financial resources while minimizing sampling errors.

The **random sampling technique** was employed for this study. **Oduko (1992)** defines random sampling as a method that ensures every possible sample of a fixed size has an equal probability of being selected, thereby promoting fairness and representativeness.

The primary instrument for data collection was an **online Google questionnaire**, which was distributed electronically to respondents. After data collection, the responses were analyzed using **pie charts** and presented in **simple percentages**, ensuring clarity and ease of interpretation.

## 5.1 Findings

### Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

**Table 1:** *Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 370)*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Male	155	42.0
	Female	215	58.0
	<b>Total</b>	370	100.0
<b>Age Group</b>	.....	67	18.0
	21–25	170	46.0
	26–30	78	21.0
	31 and above	55	15.0
	<b>Total</b>	370	100.0
<b>Academic Programme</b>	ND	85	23.0
	HND	120	32.0
	B.Sc.	165	45.0
	<b>Total</b>	370	100.0
<b>Institution</b>	Dennis Osadebay University, Asaba	78	21.0
	University of Delta, Agbor	104	28.0
	Michael & Cecilia Ibru University	96	26.0
	Delta State Polytechnic, Oghara	55	15.0
	Others	37	10.0
	<b>Total</b>	370	100.0

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The gender distribution shows that females constituted a higher proportion (58%) compared to males (42%), indicating slightly greater female participation in the study. In terms of age, the majority of respondents (46%) fall within the 21–25 age range, suggesting that young adults are the most active consumers of online newspapers. Regarding academic programmes, B.Sc. students formed the largest group (45%), followed by HND (32%) and ND (23%), reflecting participation across different academic levels. Furthermore, respondents were drawn from multiple institutions, with the highest representation from the University of Delta, Agbor (28%), followed by Michael and Cecilia Ibru University (26%) and Dennis Osadebay University (21%). This distribution indicates that the study captured a broad and diverse sample of Mass Communication students, thereby enhancing the representativeness and generalizability of the findings.

**5.1.1 Analysis of Thematic Variables**

**Table 2 Use of Online Newspapers**

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	310	84.0
No	60	16.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 2 indicates that a substantial majority of respondents (84%) use online newspapers, while only 16% do not. This high level of usage suggests that online newspapers have become a dominant source of information among Mass Communication students. The result reflects the increasing penetration of digital media technologies and the shift from traditional print to online platforms. It also implies that respondents are highly exposed to digital news content, making them suitable for

assessing audience perception. The widespread adoption further suggests that online newspapers are not only accessible but also perceived as relevant and convenient sources of information.

**Table 3: Frequency of Use**

Frequency	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Daily	126	34.0
Weekly	107	29.0
Occasionally	93	25.0
Rarely	44	12.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The findings in Table 3 show that 34% of respondents access online newspapers daily, while 29% do so weekly, and 25% occasionally. Only 12% rarely engage with online newspapers. This pattern indicates a relatively high level of consistent engagement with digital news platforms. The dominance of daily and weekly users suggests habitual consumption behaviour, implying that online newspapers play a significant role in respondents' information routines. This consistent exposure is critical, as it increases the likelihood of forming strong perceptions and attitudes toward online newspaper content.

**Table 4: Preferred Content Type**

Content Type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
News	115	31.0
Politics	81	22.0
Entertainment	70	19.0
Sports	56	15.0
Education	33	9.0
Others	15	4.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 4 reveals that news content (31%) and political news (22%) attract the highest readership, followed by entertainment (19%) and sports (15%). Educational content records the lowest engagement (9%). This suggests that respondents primarily use online newspapers for surveillance purposes keeping informed about current events and political developments. The relatively lower interest in educational content may indicate that students rely on other academic sources for formal learning. The findings highlight the role of online newspapers as tools for information awareness rather than academic study.

**Table 5: Engagement with In-depth Content**

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	233	63.0
No	137	37.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The results in Table 5 show that 63% of respondents engage with in-depth analysis, while 37% do not. This suggests that a majority of the audience values detailed and interpretative journalism rather than just surface-level headlines. The implication is that online newspapers that provide analytical and investigative content are more likely to sustain audience interest and credibility. However, the relatively high proportion of non-engaging respondents indicates that some users may prefer brief or summarized content, reflecting diverse consumption preferences.

**Table 6: Perception of Content Depth**

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	215	58.0
No	100	27.0
Undecided	55	15.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 6 indicates that 58% of respondents believe online newspapers provide detailed information, while 27% disagree and 15% remain undecided. This mixed perception suggests that although a majority acknowledge the depth of online newspaper content, a significant portion of the audience is either dissatisfied or uncertain. This may be attributed to inconsistencies in content quality across different platforms. The finding implies that improving content depth and consistency is essential for strengthening audience trust and satisfaction.

**Table 7: General Perception**

Perception	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Positive	181	49.0
Negative	115	31.0
Neutral	74	20.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The findings in Table 7 show that 49% of respondents have a positive perception of online newspapers, while 31% hold negative views and 20% remain neutral. Although positive perception dominates, the presence of a substantial negative and neutral segment indicates that audience trust is not absolute. This suggests that while online newspapers are widely used, concerns about credibility, bias, or content quality still affect audience evaluation. The result reflects a moderately favorable but cautious audience attitude.

**Table 8: Positive Perception Indicators**

Indicator	Frequency	Percentage
Credibility	100	27.0
Timeliness	89	24.0
Accessibility	78	21.0
Depth of Analysis	103	28.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 8 shows that depth of analysis (28%) and credibility (27%) are the strongest factors shaping positive perception, followed by timeliness (24%) and accessibility (21%). This indicates that audiences value not just speed of information but also accuracy and depth. The findings emphasize that credibility and analytical quality are critical determinants of audience trust. This suggests that online newspapers must prioritize fact-checking, comprehensive reporting, and timely updates to maintain positive audience perception.

**Table 9: Negative Perception Factors**

Factor	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Fake News	126	34.0
Bias	96	26.0
Poor Quality Content	81	22.0
Excessive Ads	67	18.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The findings in Table 9 reveal that fake news (34%) is the most significant factor contributing to negative perception, followed by bias (26%), poor content quality (22%), and excessive advertisements (18%). This indicates that issues related to misinformation and credibility are the primary challenges facing online newspapers. The prominence of fake news suggests that audiences are increasingly aware of and sensitive to information accuracy. This undermines trust and can negatively influence readership behaviour.

**Table 10: Influence of Perception**

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	263	71.0
No	107	29.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 10 shows that 71% of respondents believe that audience perception influences online newspaper usage, while 29% disagree. This demonstrates that perception plays a significant role in shaping audience behaviour, including trust, engagement, and continued use. The finding reinforces the idea that positive perception enhances usage, while negative perception discourages engagement.

**Table 11: Effects of Perception**

Effect	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Positive	163	44.0
Negative	133	36.0
Both	74	20.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>1000</b>

The results in Table 11 indicate that 44% of respondents perceive positive effects, 36% perceive negative effects, and 20% believe both effects exist. This suggests that audience perception has a dual impact on online newspapers. While positive perception enhances readership and trust, negative perception can reduce credibility and discourage usage. This duality highlights the importance of maintaining content quality and credibility.

**Table 12: Positive Effects**

Effect	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Increased readership	130	35.0
Trust in content	122	33.0
Information sharing	118	32.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 12 shows that increased readership (35%), trust in content (33%), and information sharing (32%) are the major positive

outcomes of favorable perception. This indicates that when audiences perceive online newspapers positively, they are more likely to engage, trust, and share information. This enhances the reach and influence of online newspapers.

**Table 13:** *Negative Effects*

Effect	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Reduced readership	141	38.0
Distrust	126	34.0
Misinformation	103	28.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The findings in Table 13 indicate that reduced readership (38%) and distrust (34%) are the major negative consequences of unfavorable perception, while misinformation (28%) also plays a significant role. This suggests that negative perception can directly affect audience retention and credibility. It highlights the risk of losing audience loyalty when content quality is compromised.

**Table 14:** *Factors Influencing Perception*

Factor	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Source credibility	96	26.0
Content quality	89	24.0
Update frequency	67	18.0
Social media influence	63	17.0
Political bias	55	15.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 14 reveals that 82% of respondents agree that certain factors influence their perception of online newspapers. This confirms that audience perception is not random but shaped by identifiable variables such as credibility, content quality, and media influence.

### 5.1.2 Discussion of Findings

The findings reveal a high level of engagement with online newspapers among respondents, as evidenced by the majority who use them regularly. Audience perception was found to be largely positive, driven by credibility and depth of analysis, while negative perceptions were associated with fake news and bias.

Furthermore, audience perception significantly influences usage patterns, readership levels, and trust in online newspapers. Positive perceptions enhance engagement, while negative perceptions reduce credibility and readership.

## 6.0 CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it is evident that online newspapers have become a major source of information for a significant proportion of the audience. The high level of usage and regular engagement with online newspapers reflect the growing importance of digital media in contemporary society. Respondents rely heavily on online newspapers for timely news, political information, and entertainment, indicating their relevance in shaping public opinion and knowledge.

The study further reveals that audience perception of online newspapers is generally positive, particularly in terms of credibility, timeliness, accessibility, and depth of analysis. However, the presence of fake news, bias, poor content quality, and excessive advertisements negatively affects audience trust and readership. These negative perceptions pose serious challenges to the credibility and sustainability of online newspapers.

Additionally, the study establishes that audience perception has both positive and negative effects on online newspapers. Positive perception enhances readership, trust, and information sharing, while negative perception leads to reduced readership, distrust, and misinformation. Factors such as source credibility, content quality, update frequency, social media influence, and political bias were identified as key determinants of audience perception. Overall, the study concludes that strengthening ethical standards, improving content quality, and enhancing credibility are crucial for the continued relevance and effectiveness of online newspapers.

## 7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. **Improvement of Content Quality:** Online newspaper organizations should prioritize high-quality, well-researched, and in-depth content to meet audience expectations and enhance credibility.
2. **Strengthening Credibility and Fact-Checking:** Media organizations should adopt strict editorial policies and effective fact-checking mechanisms to reduce the spread of fake news and misinformation.
3. **Reduction of Bias in Reporting:** Journalists and editors should ensure balanced and objective reporting to minimize political or ideological bias that negatively affects audience perception.
4. **Audience Engagement and Feedback:** Online newspapers should create platforms for audience feedback and interaction to better understand audience needs and improve content relevance.
5. **Responsible Advertising Practices:** Excessive and intrusive advertisements should be minimized to avoid distracting readers and undermining user experience.
6. **Media Literacy Campaigns:** Government agencies, educational institutions, and media organizations should promote digital and media literacy to help audiences critically evaluate online news content.
7. **Policy and Regulatory Support:** Relevant regulatory bodies should strengthen policies guiding online journalism to promote professionalism, accountability, and ethical standards in digital media practice.

## REFERENCES

- Blair, J. (2015). Media and audience: A study of perception and influence. *Media, Culture & Society*, 37(4), 537-554. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443714562444>
- Bryant, J., & Vorderer, P. (Eds.). (2014). *Psychology of entertainment*. Routledge.
- Chen, G. M., & Reese, S. D. (2015). *Networked China: Global dynamics of digital media and civic engagement*. Routledge.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.
- De Keersmaecker, Jonas & Schmid, Katharina. (2022). Selective exposure bias predicts views on diversity over

- time. *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review*. 30. 10.3758/s13423-022-02167-0.
- de Lange, F. P., Heilbron, M., & Kok, P. (2018). How do expectations shape perception? *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 22(9), 764–779. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2018.06.002>
- Enemu, C.J., Ezeanyi, B.C & Ezeaka, N.B. (2019). Extent of Information Technology (ICT) Integration among Students in Tertiary Institutions in Anambra State. *International Journal of Education and Research* 7(7).<file:///C:/Users/HP%20430%20G4/Desktop/My%20Papers%20and%20Publications/Extent%20of%20ICT%20Paper.pdf>
- Ezeaka, N.B & Ewetuobi, E.I (2024). Influence of Whatsapp Online Phishing messages on data security among undergraduates in Anambra State. *African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research*7(4) 273-282. DOI: [10.52589/AJSSHR-LR7BIBZD](https://doi.org/10.52589/AJSSHR-LR7BIBZD)
- Ezeaka, N.B., Umuze, N.A., Chukwuma, A.F. & Obiesili, A.C. (2025). Exploring the Relationship between Social Media Usage and Mental Wellbeing of Young Adults in Nigeria. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS), IX (III)* 4202-4209. DOI:<https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.90300335>
- Fiske, S. T., & Taylor, S. E. (2013). *Social cognition: From brains to culture*. McGraw-Hill Education.
- Fleming, K., & Levine, T. R. (2017). Credibility and trust in digital journalism. *Digital Journalism*, 5(5), 514 – 532. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2016.1237347>
- Fletcher, R., & Park, S. (2017). The impact of trust in the news media on online news consumption and participation. *Digital Journalism*, 5(10), 1281–1299. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2017.1279979>
- Garcia, M, and Patel, R(2021). Enhancing users' experiences in online newspaper: insights from audience perception studies. *Digital communication research*. 8(1)45-58.
- Goldstein, E. B. (2020). *Sensation and perception* (10th ed.). Cengage Learning.
- Goldstein, E. B. (2022). *Sensation and perception* (11th ed.). Cengage Learning.
- Guo, J., Chen, H.-T., & Lu, S. (2024). Better informed or stay naïve? Revisiting different types of selective exposure and the impact on political learning. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 68(1), 1 – 22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2024.2341031>
- Hall, S. (2013). *Representation and the media*. Sage Publications.
- Johnson, A (2019), exploring reader preferences in online newspaper design. *Digital journalism*. 6(3). 201-215)
- Johnson, T. J., & Kaye, B. K. (2010). Credibility of social network sites for political information among politically interested Internet users. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*,

- 1 5 ( 2 ) , 5 7 – 7 4 .  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2010.tb01800.x>
- Kahneman, D. (2011). Thinking, fast and slow. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Kleemans, M., Schlütz, D., & van den Bulck, J. (2017). The emotional impact of news: How emotional framing influences memory and perception. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 94(2), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699016654689>
- Knight Foundation. (2018). Trust, media, and democracy: A Knight Foundation survey. Knight Foundation.
- Knight Foundation. (2019). How Americans consume news: Patterns, preferences, and perceptions. Knight Foundation. Retrieved from <https://knightfoundation.org/reports>
- Knobloch-Westerwick, S., & Meng, J. (2020). Reinforcement of attitudes through selective exposure to information: A meta-analysis. *Communication Research*, 47(2), 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650216644025>
- Koliska, M., Assmann, K., & Splendore, S. (2021). Defining audience perception in digital journalism: A comparative study of news trust and engagement. *Digital Journalism*, 9(8), 1050–1067. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2021.1873813>
- Koliska, M., Thuman, C., Stares, R., & Kunert, K. (2021). Audience perception of online news: A study of trust and credibility. *Journal of Media Psychology*, 33(1), 34–45. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-1105/>
- Kümpel, A. S., Karnowski, V., & Keyling, T. (2015). News sharing in social media: A review of current research on news sharing users, content, and networks. *Social Media + Society*, 1(2), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305115610141>
- Lang, A., & Bailey, R. (2022). Motivated cognition and attention to media messages: The role of limited cognitive resources. *Journal of Communication*, 72(2), 205–223. <https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqab056>
- Lee, E. (2013). Understanding audience motivation for entertainment content in online news media. *Media Psychology*, 16(4), 417–434. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2013.815124>
- Lenfest Institute. (2018). Trust and credibility in the digital age. Lenfest Institute for Journalism.
- Li, Y., & Xu, Y. (2020). Agenda setting theory in the digital age: A systematic review. *International Journal of Communication*, 14, 1–23.
- McCombs, M. E. (2014). Setting the agenda: The mass media and public opinion. Polity Press.
- McQuail, D. (2010). *McQuail's mass communication theory* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications
- Media Bias/Fact Check. (2022). Media bias and the spread of misinformation. Media Bias/Fact Check.
- Metzger, M. J., & Flanagin, A. J. (2018). Credibility in the 21st century: Integrating perspectives on source,

- message, and media credibility in the contemporary media environment. *Communication Yearbook*, 42, 291-315. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2018.1468655>
- Möller, J., Trilling, D., Helberger, N., & van Es, B. (2020). Do not blame it on the algorithm: An empirical assessment of multiple recommender systems and their impact on content diversity. *Information, Communication & Society*, 23(7), 959–977. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2018.1536576>
- Nabi, R. L. (2015). Emotional flow in persuasive health messages. *Health Communication*, 30(2), 114–124. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2014.974129>
- Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Robertson, C. T., Eddy, K., & Nielsen, R. K. (2023). Trust in news and digital media consumption. *Digital Journalism*, 11(5), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2023.2181237>
- Okpala, O.C., & Chukwu, E.A. (2023). A Critical Discourse analysis of Newspaper Editorials on Insecurities in Nigeria. In *Interdisciplinary Journal of African and Asian Studies (IJAAS)* Vol. 9 (4) . P p . 180 - 188 . <https://www.nigerianjournalonline.org>
- Okpala, O.C., & Chukwu, E.A. (2023). Modal auxiliaries as linguistic tools in Insecurity Discourse: A study of some Nigerian Newspaper Editorials. In *Nigerian Journal of African Studies (NJAS)* Vol. 5, No 3. Pp 53-58. (ISSN: 2734-3146) . <https://www.nigerianjournalonline.com>
- Okpala, O.C., & Chukwu, E.A. (2023). Cohesion in Selected Editorials from Two Nigerian Newspapers. In *Awka Journal of English Language and Literary Studies*, Vol. 9 (2). Pp. 127-152 . <http://journals.unizik.edu.ng/ajells/article/view/2488>
- Okundaye, P (2010), perception and readership of the Urhobo voice by Delta State University Students. Project submitted to the department of mass communication, Delta state, University, Abraka.
- Olley, O. W., & Chile, S. T. (2015). *Readers' perception of Nigerian newspapers on the internet. Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religion*, 4, 26–34.
- Pew Research Center. (2020). State of the news media 2020. Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism. Retrieved from
- Ponto, J. (2015). Understanding and evaluating survey research. *Journal of the Advanced Practitioner in Oncology*, 6(2), 168–171.
- Potter, W. J. (2021). *Media literacy* (10th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Reuters Institute. (2020). Digital news report 2020. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. Retrieved from
- Smith J and Brown, E (2020) audience-center approaches to online newspaper design. *Journal of digital media studies*. 7(2), 88-102.
- Solomon, S. (2016). *The psychology of perception*. Sage Publications.
- Stroud, N. J. (2017). *Selective exposure and*

- political polarization. Communication Research, 44* ( 1 ) , 3 – 2 8 .  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650215600496>
- Sultan, M., & Amir, S. (2023). Digital journalism and the crisis of credibility: An analysis of online news environments. *Journal of Media Studies, 38*(2), 45–60.
- Tandoc, E. C., Lim, Z. W., & Ling, R. (2018). Defining “fake news”: A typology of scholarly definitions. *Digital Journalism, 6*(2), 137–153.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2017.1360143>
- Thurman, N., & Fletcher, R. (2019). Has digital distribution revitalised readership? Revisiting the effect of digital transformation on news consumption. *Journalism Studies, 20* ( 1 3 ) , 1 9 2 0 – 1 9 3 7 .  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2019.1591922>
- Van der Haak, B., Parks, M., & Castells, M. (2012). The future of journalism: Networked journalism. *International Journal of Communication, 6*, 2923–2938.
- Vraga, E. K., & Bode, L. (2020). Defining misinformation and understanding its bounded nature. *Political Communication, 37*(1), 136–144.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2020.1716500>
- Wimmer, R. D., & Dominick, J. R. (2020). Agenda setting theory: A review and extension. *Journal of Communication, 70* ( 1 ) , 1 - 2 5 .  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqz023>
- Zamith, R. (2018). Quantified audiences in news production: A synthesis and research agenda. *Digital Journalism, 6* ( 4 ) , 4 1 8 – 4 3 5 .  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2018.1444999>
-