

Social Media Influence on Newspaper Reading Habits amongst Students of Tertiary Institutions



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Abstract

This study examines the influence of social media on the newspaper reading habits of tertiary institution students, using Auchu Polytechnic students as the population of the study. Among the objectives were to determine whether tertiary institution students prefer social media or newspapers for news consumption and investigate if social media prompts them to read news from newspapers. To achieve this, the survey research method with the use of a questionnaire was adopted while the Taro Yamane sample size calculation formula was employed to obtain a representative sample size of 481. The study was anchored on the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), which emphasizes the audience's role in selecting media that aligns with their personal needs and desires. The findings revealed that tertiary institution students prefer social media for news consumption and that social media encourages them to consume news from newspapers. Based on these findings, the study recommended that newspapers should enhance their digital presence and leverage social media partnerships, collaborating with influencers and news aggregators to share snippets of in-depth stories.

Keywords: *Influence, Social Media, Newspaper Reading Habits, Tertiary Institution Students*

Introduction

Social media plays a major role in determining how individuals access and interact with material and news. With social media, information consumption has changed dramatically in the digital age (Feezell, 2018). Social media sites like Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Twitter have completely changed how individuals, especially young people, stay informed. With their constant immersion in academic, social, and technological environments, tertiary institution students now rely heavily on social media as a quick and easily available source of news updates. This change has sparked crucial discussions about how social media's widespread reach affects more conventional ways of consuming news, like reading newspapers.

According to Birkner *et al.* (2018), newspapers, both printed and digital, have long been recognised as trustworthy sources of in-depth reporting and analysis, but as social media has grown in popularity, a lot of young person now prefer its immediate accessibility and multimedia capabilities. Social media has become a compelling

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substitute for traditional newspapers because of its customizable news feeds, interactive content, and real-time updates. The way that media consumption has changed is especially noticeable among students, who frequently have to juggle their active online presence with academic responsibilities.

A drop in younger generations' newspaper reading habits has been attributed to the evolving nature of news consumption. Newspapers' longer reading times and absence of interactive features may make them less appealing to students in particular (Ekstrand *et al.*, 2020). Instead, they receive quick and digestible news from social media that suit their hectic schedules. This signal worries about the possible effects of declining newspaper circulation, such as a reduction in the critical thinking and thorough comprehension of current events that newspapers are typically recognized for promoting.

In addition, social media provides a visually stimulating and dynamic news consumption experience in contrast to newspapers' largely text-based and static content. Students can actively participate in the distribution of news by liking, sharing, commenting, and discussing news pieces on social media platforms, making the experience more engaging. However, since social media content is frequently not held to the same strict editorial standards as traditional journalism, students may be exposed to bias, false information, and sensationalism as a result of this increased reliance on these platforms for news (Shu & Liu, 2022).

The purpose of this study is to investigate how social media affects tertiary institution students' newspaper reading habits. The study will shed light on the possibilities and drawbacks of this shift in the way that students consume news by investigating the elements that lead them to turn to social media as their main news source. In order to evaluate how students interact with news in the digital era and to address the wider implications for media literacy, journalism, and informed citizenry, it is imperative to comprehend these patterns.

The rapid rise of social media as a primary source of news has significantly altered the traditional news consumption landscape, particularly among younger generations (Antunovic *et al.*, 2018). Tertiary institution students, who are heavy users of social media, increasingly rely on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram for news updates, often bypassing newspapers, whether in print or digital format. This shift raises concerns about the declining relevance of newspapers as reliable sources of in-depth news and analysis. While social media offers immediacy and convenience, it may also contribute to the decline of critical reading habits, as students opt for short, easily digestible news snippets rather than the comprehensive reporting typically found in newspapers.

The growing reliance on social media for news among tertiary institution students also presents challenges related to information quality and credibility (Alrubaian *et al.*, 2018). Unlike newspapers, which follow rigorous editorial standards, social media platforms are often prone to misinformation, sensationalism, and bias. This raises concerns about the ability of students to differentiate between credible news sources and unreliable content, potentially affecting their overall media literacy and understanding of current events. The problem is further compounded by the fact that social media encourages passive consumption of news, which may lead to a superficial understanding of important issues.

Given these challenges, there is a need to investigate how social media is influencing the newspaper reading habits of students in tertiary institutions. Understanding the

extent to which students are abandoning traditional newspapers in favor of social media can help identify the potential implications for journalism, media consumption patterns, and informed citizenship. This study aims to explore these dynamics, highlighting the factors that drive students' preferences for social media over newspapers and the consequences this shift may have on their overall engagement with news and information.

Three objectives form the fulcrum of this research which are, determining whether students of tertiary institutions prefer social media or newspapers for news consumption; assessing the frequency of newspaper readership among students in tertiary institutions, and investigating if social media prompts tertiary institution students to read news from newspapers. From this research objectives, research questions are drawn in consonance with the objectives and treated at the end of the research.

Social Media Usage among Tertiary Institution Students

The communication and engagement landscape have been significantly altered by social media, especially among students in tertiary institutions (McHaney, 2023). This group, sometimes referred to as "digital natives," uses social media in distinctive ways that reflect a variety of influences, such as social connections, academic expectations, and the development of personal identities.

Research suggests that social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are important for students' socialization and involvement in the classroom. A study by Koranteng *et al.* (2019) found that social media makes it easier for students to create online communities where they may exchange academic resources, work together on projects, and participate in discussions about topics relating to their studies. According to Koranteng *et al.* (2019), increased peer learning and academic assistance are benefits of this connection that have a favourable impact on student's academic performance and overall educational experience.

Social media has an impact, but not all of it is good. Türel and Dokumacı' (2022) research emphasises how social media can lead to procrastination and academic distraction. Due to students' tendency to spend too much time on social media at the expense of their studies, the ubiquitous availability of these platforms can result in a drop in academic production. According to Türel and Dokumacı (2022), students who reported using social media more frequently were more likely to struggle to focus on academic assignments.

Furthermore, the way that students interact on social media platforms may have an impact on their mental health and general well-being. According to a study by Keles *et al.* (2020), there is a link between students' elevated levels of anxiety and depression and their heavy social media use. This can worsen feelings of inadequacy and stress, which the researchers link to the pressures of online self-presentation and continual exposure to idealized images of peers' lifestyles (Keles *et al.*, 2020).

The use of social media and concerns about privacy and digital footprint management overlap. According to Shabahang *et al.* (2024), students frequently don't understand the long-term effects of their online behavior, which might result in unintentional oversharing and possible security problems. The authors highlight how important it is for educational establishments to include digital literacy in their curricula to assist students in navigating the challenges of using social media ethically and safely.

Newspaper as a Medium of News Dissemination and Consumption

The newspaper remains a significant medium for news dissemination and consumption despite the rise of digital platforms. Although traditional print newspapers face increasing competition from online news sources, research like that carried out by Cawley (2019) underscores their continued relevance and the unique advantages they offer.

Cancela (2021) said newspapers continue to serve as a critical source of in-depth news coverage and investigative journalism. According to him, newspapers provide comprehensive reports and analyses that are often lacking in the brevity of online news articles. His research highlights the role of newspapers in maintaining journalistic standards and offering detailed context that aids in the public's understanding of complex issues. This in-depth approach contributes to the preservation of informed citizenry and democratic engagement.

However, the newspaper industry is undergoing significant transformations due to declining print circulation and advertising revenues. A study by Cawley (2019) reveals that many newspapers are shifting towards digital formats to adapt to changing consumer preferences. Despite this transition, the author notes that print newspapers still hold substantial value for certain demographics, including older adults who prefer the tactile experience of reading a physical newspaper and may have limited access to digital platforms (Cawley, 2019)

The economic pressures on the newspaper industry also affect the quality and scope of news coverage. According to Puijk *et al.* (2021), cost-cutting measures in many newsrooms have led to a reduction of staff and resources, impacting the depth and breadth of reporting. The study highlights a growing reliance on wire services and syndicated content, which can limit the diversity of local news coverage and diminish the unique contributions of individual newspapers (Puijk *et al.*, 2021).

Moreover, newspapers face challenges related to the changing patterns of news consumption. According to Bruns (2018), while many readers still value newspapers for their credibility and comprehensive reporting, the rise of social media and online news aggregators has shifted consumer behavior towards quicker, often less vetted news sources. This shift has implications for the newspaper industry's ability to engage with younger audiences and adapt to the digital news environment (Bruns, 2018).

While newspapers continue to play a vital role in news dissemination and consumption, they are confronted with significant challenges. The ongoing digital transformation, economic pressures, and shifting consumer behaviors necessitate a reevaluation of how newspapers can

Tertiary Institution Students and Newspaper Reading Habit

Students in tertiary institutions are changing their reading habits as a result of changing media consumption patterns and technological improvements. Thurman and Fletcher (2019) state that although newspapers have historically been the main source of news, younger generations are no longer reading them as often.

In contrast to traditional print newspapers, university students are increasingly likely to obtain news through digital channels including social media and online news websites (Yu *et al.*, 2022). The authors credit this change to the immediate and convenient nature of digital news, which fits in with the hectic schedules of today's students.

Despite this tendency, some research indicates that newspapers continue to play an important role in the lives of some students, especially those who have a strong affinity for print media and in-depth reporting. According to research by Apuke and Omar (2020), a portion of students continue to read physical newspapers on a regular basis. This behavior is typically motivated by a desire for the tactile sensation and the comprehensiveness of print news. The study shows that these students appreciate newspapers because they provide in-depth analysis and editorial viewpoints that they often feel are absent from Internet news.

The dwindling newspaper readership among university students is associated with evolving social and educational contexts. According to a study by Duan (2024), time limits and academic stress are two factors that lead to students using newspapers less frequently. According to the study, students choose digital news sources above traditional print media since they can be readily integrated into their mobile lifestyles and offer quick updates.

Theoretically, this study is anchored on the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT). The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), developed by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch in the 1970s, provides a framework for understanding how individuals actively seek out and use media to satisfy specific needs (Liestia, 2023). Unlike other media theories that emphasize the effects of media on audiences, UGT focuses on the audience's role in selecting media that aligns with their personal needs and desires. According to UGT, people use media to fulfill various needs such as information, personal identity, social interaction, and entertainment, and this media choice is driven by the perceived gratifications that different media can offer (Camilleri & Falzon, 2021).

When applied to the topic of *The Influence of Social Media on Newspaper Reading Habits among Students of Tertiary Institutions*, UGT helps explain why students may increasingly turn to social media platforms instead of traditional newspapers. Social media offers immediate access to a wide array of content, which caters to the need for timely and relevant information (Qureshi *et al.*, 2021). For students, who often seek quick updates and current news, the real-time nature of social media can be more appealing compared to the static and slower-paced content of print newspapers. This immediacy fulfills the information needs more effectively, leading to a shift in news consumption patterns.

Furthermore, UGT highlights the role of social interaction and personal identity in media consumption. Social media platforms facilitate interactions and discussions among peers, which can enhance the social aspect of news consumption. Students can share articles, comment on news stories, and engage in conversations about current events, all of which contribute to their social engagement and sense of belonging. This interactive and community-oriented experience provided by social media may be more gratifying compared to the solitary experience of reading a newspaper, influencing students' reading habits.

In addition, UGT considers the gratification of personal interests and entertainment. Social media platforms offer highly personalized content that aligns with users' preferences and interests (Tuten, 2023). Students can follow specific topics, influencers, and trends that resonate with their tastes, making the news consumption process more engaging and relevant. In contrast, newspapers typically offer a broader range of content

that may not cater as specifically to individual preferences, leading students to gravitate toward the more personalized and entertaining options provided by social media.

Uses and Gratifications Theory provides a valuable lens for understanding the shift in newspaper reading habits among tertiary institution students in the face of rising social media usage. By examining how social media meets students' needs for timely information, social interaction, personal identity, and entertainment, UGT explains why social media platforms have become more appealing than traditional newspapers. This theoretical framework allows for a deeper understanding of the changing media landscape and the factors driving students' media preferences.

Methodologically, quantitative research is adopted, using a survey research design with a structured five-Likert scale questionnaire to gather data. The population consists of students from Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi, Edo State. According to Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi (2024), the population of students in the school is 8,000. To determine an appropriate sample size for the research, the Taro Yamane sample size calculation formula was employed. Based on this formula, a sample size of 381 students was selected for the study to ensure a representative sample of the population.

The sampling technique utilized in this study is the accidental sampling method, also known as convenience sampling. This technique involves distributing the questionnaire to students who are readily available and present within the campus. Specifically, questionnaires were administered to any student encountered on-site, after verifying that they were students of the school. This approach was chosen to efficiently gather responses from a significant number of students within a limited timeframe.

Once the data collection process was completed, the gathered data was subjected to detailed analysis using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 23. The SPSS software was employed to process the data, generate tables, and descriptive statistics, and identify patterns and trends. The analysis involved calculating frequencies and percentages to interpret the responses. The most prevalent responses were considered indicative of the dominant trends and were used to substantiate the study's findings.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Out of the 481 questionnaires that were distributed, 378 were obtained and used for this research. The results are presented and analyzed below:

Table 1: Do you prefer social media or newspapers for news consumption?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Prefer Newspapers	57	15.1	15.1	15.1
Prefer Newspapers	25	6.6	6.6	21.7
Neutral	4	1.1	1.1	22.8
Prefer Social Media	153	40.5	40.5	63.2
Strongly Prefer Social Media	139	36.8	36.8	100.0
Total	378	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2024

In Table 1, it is established that respondents prefer social media for news consumption, with 153 respondents representing 40.1% and 139 respondents representing 36.8% preferring and strongly preferring social media, respectively. Respondents who prefer newspapers for news consumption were 57, accounting for 15.1%, and 25, accounting for 6.1%, while those who were neutral amounted to 4 respondents, representing 1.1%.

Table 2: How frequently do you read newspapers?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Very frequently	29	7.7	7.7	7.7
Frequently	40	10.6	10.6	18.3
Sometime	98	25.9	25.9	44.2
Not very frequently	169	44.7	44.7	88.9
Never	42	11.1	11.1	100.0
Total	378	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 2 indicates that the frequency of newspaper readership is low among the respondents, as shown by the 169 respondents (44.7%) who said they do not read newspapers very frequently. Only 29 respondents (7.7%) and 40 respondents (10.6%) reported reading newspapers very frequently and frequently, respectively. Additionally, 98 respondents (25.9%) sometimes read newspapers, while 42 respondents (11.1%) never read newspapers. This shows that the frequency of reading newspaper among the respondents may be low, but they do still read.

Table 3: Do social media prompt you to read news from newspapers?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Never	25	6.6	6.6	6.6
Rarely	64	16.9	16.9	23.5
Sometimes	123	32.5	32.5	56.1
Often	99	26.2	26.2	82.3
Very often	67	17.7	17.7	100.0
Total	378	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 3 shows that social media plays a notable role in driving newspaper readership for many respondents, though its influence varies. A significant portion, 123 respondents (32.5%), indicated that social media sometimes encourages them to read newspapers, while 99 respondents (26.2%) said they are often prompted. Additionally, 67 respondents (17.7%) stated that social media very often leads them to read newspapers. On the other hand, 64 respondents (16.9%) rarely experience this influence, and 25 respondents (6.6%) said they are never prompted by social media to read newspapers.

Discussion of Findings

Research question 1: Do tertiary institution students prefer social media or newspapers for news consumption?

According to Table 1, 153 respondents (40.1%) prefer social media for news consumption, while an additional 139 respondents (36.8%) strongly prefer it. This overwhelming preference for social media reflects the convenience, accessibility, and immediacy associated with digital platforms. Recent studies, such as those by Klinger *et al.* (2023) underscore that younger audiences, especially tertiary institution students, tend to favor social media for its speed and ability to provide diverse perspectives. The interactivity and user-generated content on platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram also allow users to engage with news in real time, further enhancing its appeal.

On the other hand, only 57 respondents (15.1%) indicated a preference for newspapers, with a mere 25 respondents (6.1%) strongly preferring them. This decline in newspaper readership is well-documented in recent literature. For example, a report by Newman *et al* (2024) found that print media continues to lose ground to digital platforms, particularly among younger demographics. Traditional newspapers are often seen as slow, static, and less engaging compared to the fast-paced environment of social media, which aligns with the responses captured in Table 1.

One key reason why students prefer social media over newspapers is the ability to personalize news feeds. According to Kalogeropoulos and Nielsen (2018), users can tailor their social media experience by following specific news outlets, influencers, and topics, creating a highly individualized news consumption experience. This customization is particularly appealing to students who have specific interests and time constraints. Newspapers, on the other hand, offer limited personalization, with news typically presented in a fixed format that may not align with the immediate interests of younger audiences.

Another aspect driving social media's popularity is its role in facilitating critical discussions. As highlighted by Bouvier and Machin (2018), social media not only delivers news but also creates spaces for debates and discussions among peers, making it more than just a news platform. This aspect of social media resonates with students, who often engage in discussions about current events within their social networks. Newspapers, although authoritative, do not offer the same level of interactivity and social engagement, which limits their appeal to digitally savvy students.

The widespread use of mobile devices further explains the dominance of social media in news consumption. As Schwaiger *et al.* (2022) note, smartphones and tablets have become the primary tools for accessing news among younger audiences. Social media platforms are optimized for mobile use, allowing users to consume news on the go. Newspapers, in their traditional print form, do not offer the same level of portability or convenience, making them less attractive to students who are constantly on the move and seeking quick updates.

Research question 2: How frequently do students in tertiary institutions read newspapers?

The low frequency of newspaper readership among students in tertiary institutions, as indicated by the data from Table 2, reflects broader trends in media consumption patterns among young adults. The finding that 44.7% of respondents reported not reading newspapers very frequently underscores the declining role of traditional print

media in the digital age. Recent studies, such as those by Vermeer *et al.* (2020), suggest that younger generations, especially students, are increasingly turning to digital platforms for news. They prefer online sources due to their convenience, real-time updates, and multimedia content, which print newspapers cannot offer. Therefore, the low readership rates observed in the study may be attributed to this ongoing shift in news consumption habits.

Moreover, the fact that only 7.7% of the respondents reported reading newspapers very frequently and 10.6% read frequently suggests that traditional newspapers are becoming less relevant to the lives of students. According to Groot and Costera (2020), print newspapers are perceived as less engaging and slower compared to online news. Students, who are often time-constrained, may find it more efficient to access news on mobile devices. However, the persistence of a small percentage of frequent newspaper readers could indicate a segment of students who value in-depth journalism or prefer the tangible experience of print media.

The data also reveals that a quarter of the respondents (25.9%) sometimes read newspapers. This suggests that while newspapers are not the primary news source for most students, they are still part of their broader media diet. According to a study by Boczkowski *et al.* (2018), many young people maintain a multi-platform news consumption habit, where they occasionally turn to print or digital newspapers when seeking detailed analysis or local news coverage. This intermittent readership aligns with the notion that students may not completely abandon newspapers but integrate them selectively with other media sources.

Despite the overall low frequency of newspaper readership, the fact that 55.3% of respondents do engage with newspapers at some level (whether frequently, sometimes, or very frequently) suggests that traditional newspapers still retain some relevance. The continued presence of newspapers in the media landscape can be attributed to their perceived credibility and authority in reporting in-depth news stories (Boukes *et al.*, 2022). Some students may turn to newspapers for their editorial rigor and comprehensive coverage, especially for topics that require deep analysis.

While the findings that newspaper readership is relatively low among tertiary students, the data reflects broader trends in media consumption. As digital news continues to dominate, traditional print newspapers are increasingly seen as supplementary rather than primary news sources. Nevertheless, newspapers still hold some value for students, especially for those who appreciate detailed journalism. The challenge for print media will be to adapt to the evolving needs of young readers while

Research Question 3: Do social media prompt tertiary institution students to read news from newspapers?

The findings from Table 3 indicate that social media plays a notable role in encouraging tertiary institution students to read newspapers, though the degree of influence varies significantly among respondents. This aligns with recent research on media consumption trends, which highlights the growing interplay between social media and traditional news outlets. According to Vermeer *et al.* (2020), social media serves as a gateway for many users to discover news stories, which they may later explore more in-depth through traditional platforms like newspapers. The data suggests that while social media does not directly substitute newspaper readership, it can act as an important catalyst for engaging with print or digital newspaper content.

A substantial 32.5% of the respondents indicated that social media sometimes prompts them to read newspapers. This group likely uses social media as a filter for identifying news stories that pique their interest, but they still rely on newspapers for more comprehensive coverage. According to Swart (2023), students often encounter news through their social media feeds, and while these platforms provide initial exposure, they do not always satisfy the need for deeper understanding or context. Thus, social media platforms, particularly Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, often act as initial touch points that encourage users to seek more detailed news stories from newspapers.

Additionally, 26.2% of respondents noted that social media often encourages them to read newspapers, and 17.7% reported being very often prompted by social media. This significant portion suggests that for some students, social media and newspapers are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary. Koumachi (2019) points out that digital natives frequently oscillate between social media and traditional media to gain different perspectives. Social media offers immediacy and variety, while newspapers, particularly their digital versions, provide depth and reliability. This hybrid consumption pattern shows that social media can play a positive role in sustaining interest in traditional journalism among students.

However, 16.9% of the respondents stated that social media rarely influences them to read newspapers, and 6.6% reported never experiencing this influence. These findings reflect a segment of students who may not see the value in switching from quick, digestible social media content to more time-intensive newspaper reading. In a study by Waage (2018), it was observed that some young people prefer social media platforms that condense news into shorter, more engaging formats like videos, headlines, and memes. For these students, the appeal of newspapers may be limited by the time and effort required to consume them, even when social media highlights stories of potential interest.

While social media does prompt many tertiary students to read newspapers, its influence varies significantly. A considerable portion of students use social media as a gateway to more detailed newspaper content, while others find it sufficient for their news needs without further exploration. These findings suggest that social media plays a dual role: it both complements and competes with traditional newspapers. For newspapers to remain relevant, particularly among younger readers, they may need to enhance their digital presence and work in tandem with social media platforms to capture and sustain audience attention.

Conclusion

The study shows that tertiary institution students overwhelmingly prefer social media over newspapers for news consumption, citing its accessibility, speed, and interactivity. The declining relevance of traditional newspapers, particularly in print form, is further underscored by the low frequency of readership among students, with digital platforms being favored for their convenience and real-time updates. These findings of this study align with broader media consumption trends, where younger audiences increasingly turn to social media as their primary news source.

Despite the general decline in newspaper readership, social media plays a crucial role in prompting some students to engage with newspapers, either in print or digital formats. Social media and newspapers can complement each other and to remain

relevant, newspapers must adapt by enhancing their digital presence and leveraging the influence of social media to attract younger readers.

Recommendations

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

1. Newspapers should enhance their digital presence to appeal to students who prefer social media for news consumption.
2. To address the low frequency of newspaper readership, newspapers should integrate multimedia and interactive content in their digital versions.
3. Newspapers should leverage social media partnerships, collaborating with influencers and news aggregators to share snippets of in-depth stories, driving readership by encouraging students to transition from social media feeds to full newspaper articles.

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