

Perception and Use of Social Media as News Sources by Undergraduate Students of Caleb and Leadcity Universities

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Abstract

Social media enable users to engage with others and present themselves selectively to a wide or specific audience. These platforms enable real-time interaction and content creation, which are valued by users. Social media has significantly impacted how people socialise and connect on a global scale, bringing about significant changes in social dynamics. This study examines the perception and use of social media as news sources by undergraduate students of Caleb and Leadcity universities students. The research has the following objectives: to examine patterns of mass communication undergraduates' use of social media, to identify what factors motivate mass communication undergraduates to use social media and to determine the perceptions of mass communication undergraduates about social media. The research made use of Media Richness Theory. The purposive sampling method was used for this study. The population of the study consisted of all mass communication undergraduate students of Caleb University and Leadcity University and 400 questionnaires were distributed to the respondents. The study discovered that a large number of people make-use of social media regularly and spend nothing less than an hour every-day. The study also discovered that most students use social media for timely updated information, they use it to communicate regularly. Equally, the students also used it for alternative view points on an issue.

Keywords

Perception; Social media; News; sources and undergraduate students



I. Introduction

One of the first things that Napoleon Bonaparte did when he overcame a country was to hijack the newspapers. Since no such thing as the Internet existed in the eighteenth century, the French revolutionist who was a genius for propaganda was able to gain control over a major medium of influence. This way, he could not only wage strong wars but also affect the information people received as well as the way that people thought about the information. Didiugwu et al., (2015) affirm that in an estimate by Hugh Gough during the 1789 revolution that occurred in Paris, the literacy level was about ninety percent (90%) for men and eighty percent (80%) for women. And so, Bonaparte capitalized on these conditions until circumstances transformed him from an obscure general commanding a secondary army into the hero of the day (Owens-Ibie, N., & Aondover, 2024).

While Bonaparte has been said to be one of the most charismatic revolutionists in world history, he could not have achieved such feat, however, had it not been for the existence of a mass medium and his monopolization of it. Nonetheless, if the World Wide Web had existed before the twentieth century, it is possible that Bonaparte would have encountered a great ordeal in his attempt to solely influence the dynamics of mass communication (Ahmed&Msughter, 2022). By its nature, the Internet raises a number of important issues of freedom of expression. It is challenging for individuals who want to govern the Internet because there is no single place or on/off button. Even the most extreme, obscene, and vulgar communication is greatly protected by the anonymity of its users, allowing voice to people who would otherwise be silenced (Agbo&Chukwuma, 2016).

According to Aondover et al., (2022) the explosive growth of the Internet since the 1980s has been far faster than the growth of any other communication medium, faster than the spread of the telephone, radio, television, or even cellular telephones. According to a 2007 U.S Census Bureau survey, estimates indicate that there are at least 1.3 billion users worldwide. In an interconnected global village as the one that currently exists, the influence of the advent of the Internet cannot be taken too lightly. It has not only democratized access to information but also turned every user of the Internet into a potential mass communicator.

The influence gap between wealthy and ordinary citizens, therefore, becomes possible to fill. This is because, on the Internet, every ‘content producer’ is equal. Each operates on the same thread of a communications platform. Each, also, is only as powerful as its ideas. As the information age advances vis-à-vis technology, every average contemporary citizen can afford to take opportunities to freely express themselves and get involved in the quest to realize democracy. One of these very important quests is in the evolving modern face of journalism. Newspapers are now realizing they would face a financial catastrophe if they do not keep up with new technical rivals after the advent of the Internet (Aondover et al., 2023). Newspaper readership has been on a steady decline in the past two decades. As penetration of the Internet into homes increases, newspapers and magazines are among the most threatened of the major media. While traditional news platforms have lost audience, online news consumption has been undergoing major changes as well.

The rise of social media has expanded expression through social media. Social media have been described as a new form of communication that shifts mainstream control of information to the audience. Because of the Internet's widespread use, low production and distribution costs, simplicity of use, and really simple synchronization (RSS), the social media is a publishing innovation and a digital newswire that introduces a fresh and potent push-pull publishing paradigm. As such, it changes the power structures in journalism, giving yesterday's readers the option of being today's journalists and tomorrow's preferred news aggregators. Perhaps this is one of the major reasons why they have grown popular over the years, the reason that they are an avenue to quickly share ideas and information and, at the same time, encourage instant feedback and interactivity. Internet research company Technorati tracks more than 100 million already on the internet, some constructed by the famous, most by the not-famous (Idris & Msughter, 2022).

Even when they may not engage in original newsgathering, bloggers add value to news by reflecting on and raising questions about them. Still, much of what they write is speculative and reflects their values. According to technology writer Andrew Sullivan, blogging is altering the media landscape and may spark a revolution in how journalism is practiced in our society. This is due in part to the fact that bloggers have attracted readers' attention, but also to the fact that their personal touches are much more in line with modern sensibilities than the opinionated magazines and newspapers of the past. According to an Andrew Keen, blog critic, ‘(One) can't just be a great journalist just the way (one) can't be a great chef or a great soccer player. Journalists follow a set of standards, a code of ethics. Ethical issues abound in the changing world of bloggers and it further goes on to affect the perception of the media with which they operate as influencers of modern news agenda (Kurfi et al., 2021). Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the perceptions and use of social media as news sources by undergraduates of Caleb University and Leadcity University.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

While a number of studies have investigated how journalists use new technologies in a number of countries, very little attention has been paid to how students view and use social media as sources of news. The popularity of bloggers is leading to a new way of thinking about news (Maikaba & Msughter, 2019). Bloggers present news in a manner that undermines its seriousness, thereby presenting news as gist rather than a topic for social discourse. This is added to the fact that social media are also written from the expressions of personal opinions, which, again, readily negates the principle of impartiality in news. However, undergraduates seem to have placed social media as indispensable avenues to seek news because of their human-interest perspectives and unparalleled accessibility. In this manner, young adults – avid and loyal blog readers – remain largely dependent on sensational news sources, those which may not necessarily inform balanced opinion-formation and objective decision-making, hallmarks of a responsible citizen.

Although tolerated and respected, contributors (also known as bloggers) do not possess a central professional code of ethics. Most social media are not edited and do not meet the standards of accuracy and fairness required by mainstream news sites and newspapers. In other words, on most occasions, their (social media’s) credibility is questionable. This paradigm shifts from newspapers to social media as interesting sources to secure information displaces the role of professionalism in the perception of what good and balanced news is (Mojaye&Aondover, 2022). This work therefore seeks to establish the roles which undergraduates’ perceptions and use of social media as news sources play in this shift.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the problem stated, the study provides answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the patterns of mass communication undergraduates ‘on social media?
2. What factors motivate mass communication undergraduates to use social media?
3. What are the perceptions of mass communication undergraduates about social media?

II. Review of Literature

2.1 Empirical Review

Audience members seek information for various purposes such as comfort, empowerment, to learn, and the knowledge to act. In a quantitative survey of New Zealand-based students by Ighiegba and Olley (2018) respondents generally had strongly agreed that the Internet was a source of information, and thus indirectly a source of knowledge creation; with half of the respondents limiting their time on the Internet to an average of one hour per day. Findings of Obi-Ani et al., (2021) also revealed that blogs, although rarely used by journalism professionals and educators, were mainly read for informational purposes such as for alternative viewpoints on an issue and story ideas for research work.

However, not all information or media can, all at once, prove useful or credible to users. Several studies suggest a relationship between an individual’s involvement with salient issues as news and distrust or trust of a medium as a relevant source. For instance, when people consider a subject as an important subject in a medium, they are equally as likely, if not even more so, to be convinced by arguments regarding the subject and are less likely to believe that a medium is biased (Yar’Adua et al., 2023). When one looks at different media news, usually, media tends to start with the most important issues. On the other hand, readers also look for what they suppose as important issue, so if readership

finds what they want in a medium, they may judge it as a credible medium. One of the factors used to weed out untrue information is credibility (Taiwo et al., 2024) O'Keefe in Msughter et al., (2023) credibility means "judgments made by a perceiver (for example, a message recipient) regarding the believability of a speaker."However, some people believe that institutions should also be considered communicators in this sense.The study of credibility is generally considered to be one of the oldest areas of communication research, having its roots in the ancient Greeks.

Therefore, bloggers can be said to be persons (communicators) whose media are deserving of proper examination. Their media can also be regarded as a sub-channel under the general Internet media. As it concerns how and why university students use the Internet, several works of research have been carried out. Findings from surveys by Objofor and Green in Obasi and Msughter (2023) indicate that students constitute the main users of Internet services in developing countries. In this context, it is expected that university students not only access the internet for leisure purposes but also to educate themselves and to access news.In Australia, using survey questionnaires, Levi and Folker in Namadi and Aonover (2020) evaluated 2ndand 3rdyear journalism students in University of Queensland and found the Internet to be the most popular source of news for undergraduates.

This study examines and compares the use of social media amongst undergraduates in Lagos state using Caleb University and Leadcity University. The reports gotten are that most of Caleb university student use social media as day-to-day activities. The objectives of this research Is to determine the patterns of mass communication undergraduates use of social media and to assess the perceptions of Mass Communication undergraduates about news on social media via Instagram.

2.2 Theoretical Underpinning

This study adopted Media Richness theory, which attempts to describe a communications medium by its ability to reproduce the information sent over it (Onyejelem&Aonover, 2024a). In 1984, it was introduced by Richard Draft and Robert Lengel who categorized this ability into four, namely: □ Ability to handle multiple information cues simultaneously, ability to Ease swift feedback, Ability to initiate a personal focus and Ability to make use of natural language.This theory argues that an individual's choice of media technologies is influenced by the characteristics of each medium.

The theory arranges media on a scale ranging from, lean 'to rich' based on attributes such as 'speed of feedback, variety of channels, personalness of source, and richness of language used' (Onyejelem & Aonover, 2024b). This model of media used embraces into its framework of analysis the assumption that media users tend to determine the richness of a medium by evaluating the difficulty or ease of the services the medium provides. This theory recognizes the individual recipient as a major causative factor in the conferral of statuses of importance on media systems (Usman et al., 2022). However, it is criticized by virtue of its deterministic nature which is rigid. It is proclaimed that social pressures can impact media use much more actively than richness, and in ways that are incompatible with media richness theory's tenets.

III. Research Method

In this study, a survey method was used to determine the factors that influence social media readership and perceptions. This is because this descriptive research method is relatively inexpensive, useful in describing the characteristics of a large population and collecting large data from a large number of respondents. The target population for this study consisted of all Mass Communication undergraduate students of Caleb University and Leadcity University. According to the information gotten from the offices of the Heads of Department of each university, the entire population summed up to 756 students. Below is a tabulation of the target population for this study:

LEVEL	Caleb University	Leadcity University	Cumulative TotalPoint
100	27	48	75
200	70	52	122
300	198	57	255
400	274	30	304
Total	569	187	756

Figure 1: Population of Leadcity University and Caleb University Mass Communication Undergraduate Students of 2022/2023 Academic Session

The sample of this study consisted of 300 respondents altogether from Caleb University and Leadcity University. The figures were drawn by a 40% estimate of the population from each university. The sampling technique that was used for this study is the purposive sampling method. This technique was chosen to enable the researcher to reach the sample with ease and to fulfill the purpose for which the scope of the study was chosen. The research instrument that was used to gather data from respondents is the questionnaire. The method of data analysis was Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Table 1. Respondents Most Frequently Used Social Media

SOCIAL MEDIA	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Instagram	177	59%
WhatsApp	35	11.7%
Twitter	80	26.7%
Facebook	8	2.7%
Total	300	100%

The table 1 above shows that most respondent make use of Instagram representing 177(59%) while Twitter represents 80(26.7%), WhatsApp with 35(11.7%) and Facebook with 8(2.7%).

Table 2. Genre of News Most Read on Internet by Respondent

GENRE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Current affairs\politics	69	23%
Fashion	127	42.3%
Music	60	20%
Sport	44	14.7%
Total	300	100%

The table 2 above shows that majority of the respondents read news on fashion representing 127(42.3%), current affairs/ politics with 69(23%), music with 60(20%) and sport with 44(14.7%)

Table 3. Regularity of Using Social Media by Respondents

REGULARITY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Daily	203	67.6%
Some weekdays	83	27.7%
Weekends only	14	4.7 %
Total	300	100 %

The table 3 above shows that majority of the respondent make use of social media daily with 203(67.6%) while some make use of social media some weekdays with 83(27.6%) and some weekends only with 14(4.7%).

Table 4. Time Spent on Social Media by Respondents

REGULARITY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
1-5 minutes	20	6.7%
30 minutes but less than an hour	82	27.3 %
1 hour and above	198	66%
Total	300	100%

The table 4 above shows that the average time majority of the respondent spend on social media is 1 hour and above with 198(66%) while some spend 30 minutes but not less than an hour with 82(27.3%) and some spend 1-5 minutes with 20(6.7%).

Table 5. TheUse Social Media as a Part of Daily News Consumption

REGULARITY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Never	5	1.7%
Almost never use	20	6.7%
Sometimes	81	27%
Almost every time	104	34.6%
Every time	90	30%
Total	300	100%

The table 5 above shows that majority of the respondent use social media as a part of daily news consumption almost every time with 104(34.6%), some use social media as part of daily news every time with 90(30%), so use social media as part of daily news sometimes with 81(27%), some almost never use with 20(6.7%) and some never use with 5(1.7%).

Table 6. Use of Social Media for Additional Information

REGULARITY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Never	4	1.3%
Almost never use	13	4.3%
Sometimes	84	28%
Almost every time	105	35%
Every time	94	31.4%
Total	300	100%

The table 6 above shows that 105(35%) of the respondent use social media for additional information on an issue or a topic, 94(31.4%) use social media every time, 84(28%) use social media sometimes, 13(4.3%) almost never use social media, and 4(1.3%) never use social media.

Table7. The Use of Social Media to Express Opinions

REGULARITY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Never	1	0.3
Almost never use	13	4.3
Sometimes	79	26.3
Almost every time	118	39.4
Every time	89	29.7
Total	300	100

The table 7 above shows that 118(39.4%) of the respondent use social media to express their comment or opinions almost every time, 89(29.7%) use it almost every time, 79(26.3%) use it sometimes, 13(4.3%) almost never use it and 1(0.3%) never use it.

Table 8. Extent to which Social Media helps to Analyze Information

REGULARITY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Strongly agree	51	17%
Agree	175	58.3%
Neutral	65	21.7%
Disagree	4	1.3%
Strongly Disagree	5	1.7%
Total	300	100%

From table 8 above shows that 175(58.3%) of the respondents agree that social media helps to sort through and analyze information clearly, 65(21.7%) were neutral about it, 51(17%) strongly agreed, 5(1.7%) strongly disagree and 4(1.3%) disagree.

Table 9. Social Media is an Alternative Approach to Traditional Communication

REGULARITY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Strongly agree	68	22.6%
Agree	168	56%
Neutral	53	17.7%
Disagree	9	3%
Strongly disagree	2	0.7%
Total	300	100%

The table 9 above shows that 168(56%) of the respondent agree that social media provides a good supplement to traditional communication, 68(22.6%) strongly agree, 53(17.7%) are neutral about it, 9(3%) disagree and 2(0.7%) strongly disagree.

IV. Discussion

In this study, social media are familiar source of news for undergraduates. The results here are consistent with the findings of Awoleye et al., (2008) that the Internet and social media, asides for messaging and chatting, are found to be a popular source of information for undergraduate students. A major 59% of the respondents use Instagram among others, with twitter emerging as the second most-read; and mostly 42.3% generally sought for fashion news on these platforms. The finding of the study is also in agreement with the study of Petra and Christopher (2007) that 59.1% of the students indicated that they accessed social media via hyper links than through webpage addresses (Oreoluwa et al., 2024).

Besides, there were predominant neutral responses to certain factors that could motivate the use of social media. Mostly, 29 % were undecided about the notion that they were motivated to use social media to read additional information on an issue or topic, 24.6% said that they read social media to communicate and interact with others, and 26.3% that they use social media to express own comments or opinions. In similar ways, there is a concord between these findings and those embedded in a social media users profile study by Sylvia et al., in Msughter et al., (2023) where social media, among several other social networks, rated lowest as platforms users might engage to find and interact with people, and to share common interests and ideas were read for informational purposes such as for alternative viewpoints on an issue and story ideas for research work (Vitalis et al., 2023).

Based on the findings, the students' perceptions about social media were generally positive. The results show that a majority (58.3%) of the respondent population subscribed to the notion that social media help to sort through and analyze information quickly. Again, this corroborates the study of Deborah et al., (2007) that journalism educators and professionals were found to have same perceptions. This mainstream opinion, perhaps, plays a central role in the phenomenon of dependency which social media have come to, over time, gain from their audiences. Out of 300 students, 162 (54%) agreed that social media represent a personal way to communicate information. Another leading 51.7% believed that social media are relevant to the Mass Communication profession and industry, while 56% agreed that social media provide a good supplement to traditional communication such as newspapers, radios and the likes.

V. Conclusion

The study revealed that students are fairly exposed to the usage of social media for information seeking (mostly, fashion news, as gathered). Usefulness contributes significantly to the relationship between students' involvement with salient issues as news and use of social media as a relevant source as students were mostly motivated surf the net as a part of daily news consumption. While students remark news on social media as timely yet inaccurate, there is a general positive worldview about the credibility of news in newspapers and the importance of social media to the mass communication profession and industry as a good supplement to traditional communication such as newspapers, television and the likes.

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