

A Study of Online and Offline Newspaper Readership in Gbagede, Ifelodun Local Government, Kwara State – Nigeria

By

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Abstract

New technology has influenced newspaper readership in the society. This study determines the preferences in the both print and online newspapers in Gbagede town. A qualitative research approach with Focus Group Discussion (FGD) method was adopted to gather and analyse data from the selected respondents. Focus Group Discussion was used in the research work. The findings reveal that 94.4% of respondents agreed that print media is now less relevant because of free access to online publications. Similarly, all the respondents confirmed that newspapers are no longer in circulation especially in the area under study. Meanwhile, 89% of the respondents also confirmed that internet service is not a barrier to online publication. A thematic analysis was used for the FGD in the both per centage and pie chart formats. Uses and Gratification Theory was adopted in the. The study revealed that the dwellers rely on online newspapers.

Keywords: *Online, Offline, Newspaper, Readership, Gbagede Community*

Introduction

Agba, 2002 as cited in Diri, (2016) “The newspaper remained the prominent medium for many centuries before the advent of the electronic media (radio) in the early 20th Century. And it was not until the 1950s that we began to rely increasingly on television and radio for news, even though, they provide little more than the headlines”. The legacy media that is, print and electronics used to be the main sources of disseminating information before the emergence of the new media.

The electronic media is the latest of the legacy media in Nigeria. According to Ohaja (2005), when the electronic media were introduced, they had an edge over newspapers because they were presenting the same condensed reports as the latter but at a faster pace and in form that clearly matched reality. Television, especially moving and talking pictures of scenes featuring almost simultaneously with the event itself. Feature writing became the print media’s lifeline to prevent them from becoming obsolete and irrelevant to the public...(p. 16) In view of the above challenges, Wilson (1997: p. 152) argues that “it is not true that the new technologies replace the old ones. They may replace some of their functions or create new functions or supplement the old one, but cannot replace them”.

The new media which is interactive in nature is now becoming more popular because it is mobile and prompt in breaking news with advantages of both audio and video contents. The prediction coined by McLuhan in the early 60s that the world is turning to a global village as a result of new technologies appear to be relevant in this work through a study of the attitudes of the inhabitants of Gbagede community to the reading of online and offline (hard copy newspaper) news contents. New media delivery system is now in vogue and capable of processing, storing, transferring and retrieving information and data within a minute irrespective of distance.

Ubogun, 2017 opined that newspaper was extensively used before now because it was cheaper to acquire compared to television. Nevertheless, newspaper and other media (television) have

some loopholes (Fortunati & Sarvica, 2004). The internet at present is one of the most successful means of communication as a new mass medium and a dynamic one. The online newspaper has come to serve as a rival or replacement to the newspaper in information dissemination. Therefore, the study seeks to compare the readership of online and offline newspapers in Gbagede, Ifelodun Local Government Area, Kwara State in ascertaining the assertion.

Statement of the Problems

The intent of the study is to compare and analyse the preference of the inhabitants of Gbagede community in online and offline newspapers consumption in the modern time. The indices that may affect the preference such as the perception, and motivation of the residents under the study would be considered. Similarly, the available news consumption time either for the online or offline by the dwellers would also be appraised.

Research Questions

- i. Do you agree that the online newspapers have made the offline ones to be less relevant today?
- ii. How accessible are print newspapers in your area?
- iii. Do you have the time to read online newspapers than offline papers
- iv. Do you prefer reading print newspapers to online publication?
- v. Are you of the opinion that Online newspapers give access to varieties than print media?
- vi. Does internet service regular in your area?

Conceptual Explanations

Online Newspaper

Sullivan (2005) stated that an online newspaper is news information in an electronic format or online edition on the internet by newspaper publishers. Similarly, Deuzes (2001) describe online newspaper as an online reporting media which has the internet as a main trait which is used to arbitrate and converse with the use of related computers. Online newspaper is a digital system of publication that can also have the written edition. Online newspapers make possible message between readers and journalists.

Online newspaper is a digital system of publication that can also have a written edition. Online newspapers make possible message between readers and journalists. That is, it is an interactive medium unlike the legacy which is a one-way communication model.

Offline (Print) Newspaper

A print newspaper is a converse to the online. It is a conventional medium of disseminating information through printing on paper. According to Oxford dictionary, a newspaper is a publication including news, articles, and advertisements, usually issued daily or weekly in printed form, but including web-based versions. Hassan, (2018) asserts that print media industry experiences changes as a result of advancement in technology especially new media. Smith and Hendricks (2010) asserted that the dynamic nature of the industry resulted in constant revolutions and changes than at any other time in the print media history globally.

Online and Offline Newspaper Reading

The focus of this study is to compare the preference of the duo online and offline readership among the inhabitants of Gbagede Community, Kwara State. Meanwhile, Findahi (2008) revealed that since the emergence of internet, readership of print newspapers has slightly changed in Europe. In the same vein, Ihlstrom and Lundberg (2002) found that readership of online newspapers has significantly increased in Sweden. Despite the increase in the online

newspaper readership, some findings predicted bright future for print newspapers. Hassan (2018) asserts "The readership of print versions may decline, but readers will never substitute print newspaper with its online counterpart. In north western Nigeria, print newspapers will continue to survive despite the challenges they face from their online counterparts". As postulated by Uses and Gratification theory, audiences are aware of their reasons for choice of media message they wish to so consume.

In the same direction, Salman, Ibrahim, Yusof, Mustaffa, and Mahbob (2011) asserted that print newspapers remain an important source of information in Malaysia, despite the availability and interactive nature of the internet, which becomes the most effective means of communication in recent years. Also, the findings of Chan (2007) indicated that the internet becomes the most effective and preferred medium for information. But according to Thurman (20014), most of daily readers still prefer print newspapers to their online counterparts in terms of local popularity.

Though, De Waal, Schonbach, and Lauf (2005) found that online newspapers might slightly substitute their print counterparts, but they do not seem to replace the entire functions of the print versions vis-à-vis news and information.

Hassan & Azmi (2018) asserts that the internet becomes a necessity for the survival of newspapers, as most of them have inevitably integrated the web. In this regard, Everett (2011) argues that though the future of print newspapers is equivocal, it will definitely include technology. This is because the internet becomes a crucial and timely source of news for journalists, which facilitates the process of news gathering and dissemination due to the rich information it offers (Chari, 2009). This implies that if the newspapers successfully embrace technology, they will continue to play their role as informative and educative reading material, as well as credible source of information.

Global Shortfalls of Print Media

It is globally acknowledged that online news media is now in vogue as against the print media. According to Simon and Cardinal (2007) "magazine sales were down because they offer the same free content online. This reflects the relationship that exists between the two channels. Similarly, a study by Westlund and Färdigh (2015) showed a shift in the consumption of news from offline to mobile, indicating a replacement for offline news media in the work.

There has been positive growth in the number of internet users since 1995," Year of the Internet". Cheap personal computers, unlimited access, and high-speed internet connectivity combined with a strong economy in the late 1990s and early 2000s contributed to the internet growing positively in the United States. The time people spent reading online stories have almost doubled between 1998 and 2006 (Willnat, 2009).

A research project was conducted in the context of EU COST Action IS0906. Data was collected online in early 2013 from nine European countries by local and international commercial firms. It showed that the highest percentage of the participants reported consuming news online via other channels, followed by participants who reported reading an online newspaper. Overall, the mean usage time among the sample as a whole is highest for online newspapers and other digital channels followed by that of printed newspapers.

In 2010, at the International News Conference, London, Arthur Sulzberger, Jr. editor of the New York Times said, "We'll stop printing the New York Times sometime in the future date. With the advent of the Internet, it has increased the burden of the paper business, which has been stable and profitable for many years. Over the past decade, there has been a dramatic decrease in printed copies of newspaper subscriptions and an increase in e-paper subscriptions

In 2019, the Bengaluru edition of the Deccan Chronicle has moved its entire operations to the digital platform. Deccan Chronicle Holdings also stopped operations of the DC Kochi, Asian Age Kolkata, and all other editions of its business daily Financial Chronicle. Yadav (2020).

Back home in Nigeria, most daily newspapers are now online while few hardcopies are printed because of advertisements and references. Most newsstands that display print copies of newspaper and magazine are now closed down in metropolitan cities in Nigeria.

Theoretical Survey

A comparative study of online newspaper and its print counterpart can be explored using “Uses and Gratification Theory” coined by Bulmer and Katz in (1974) in this work because it studies media need and choice among the people of a given geographical milieu. The uses and gratifications theory deal with understanding why people use certain types of media, what they need to achieve in using the medium, and what gratifications do they get from using them. The theory suggests that media users play an active role in choosing and using the media of choice. Bulmer and Katz believed that the user seeks out the media source that best fulfils their needs and satisfaction.

Potter (2012) opined that the basic tenets of Uses and Gratification theory formed five claims:

- i. communication behavior is purposive, motivated and goal directed;
- ii. individuals initiate the choice and usage of communication medium;
- iii. communication behavior is mediated or guided by a host of psychological and social factors;
- iv. in the gratification of needs, the media contend with other forms of communication;
- v. people are naturally more powerful than the media in the course of effects.

Lucena 2011 cited in Hassan (2018) declared that The Uses and Gratifications theory has been applied as an approach in many communication studies to understand the relationship between audiences and their media choice. According to him, the theory claims that individuals, who are the audiences, choose and use media messages to satisfy their psychological and social needs; they gain personal gratification rather than being inactively affected by media messages.

Hassan is also of an opinion that changes may occur in print and online newspaper readership due to emergence of the Internet. Readers make decision regarding choice of either print or online, depending on the information in need and availability of the choice of channel.

This implies that by offering online news content, readers of a particular newspaper can actively gain personal gratification from either of the newspaper versions of their choice. For instance, if the readers of Daily Trust newspaper decide to read more online version than its print counterpart, then the readership and circulation of the print version might be affected. This is based on the inferences of Uses and Gratification theory as pointed out by Potter (2012).

In essence, the adoption of the Uses and Gratification Theory in the comparative study of online and offline newspaper readership in discuss is relevant and also applicable to the study.

Methodology

The method adopted for this study is Focus Group Discussion (FGD). This is a qualitative research approach. It is usually an explorative process and therefore flexible, iterative, reflective, non-predictable and contextualized (Silverman 2006). According to Khan & Manderson (1992), the participants in FGD are typically selected to participate in qualitative research based on transparent criteria, such as their knowledge, life experience, particular characteristics or role in a group or community. This approach to sampling is called “Purposive”.

Gbagede is the choice of the researcher because it is one of the fast-developing towns in the area as a result of availability of regular power supply and available land for construction. Most residents of Gbagede community are educated occupiers such as; pensioners, civil servants, teachers and elites who are the target population of the study. Only those who value news and current affairs were selected as part of the FGD. According to the traditional ruler of the community, the town is divided into three traditional wards: Gbagede oke (upper Gbagede), Gbagede isale (lower side of Gbagede), and Igbo'pe (palm tree forest). It is a fast-developing community in the local government because of its proximity to Ilorin, the Kwara State capital. The researcher based the population of the community on the evidence provided by the traditional ruler from the monthly security contributions of each household. According to the document, Gbagede oke has about 481 residents, Gbagede isale has 322 and Igbope 242 respectively. With the reference to the information, the population is about 1,045 inhabitants.

Based on the traditional setting of the community, three FGDs were conducted with 12 members in each group in the following order: Group A (Gbagede oke) 12 Civil Servants were selected. Group B (Gbagede isale) 12 Students of tertiary institutions were selected while Group C (Igbo'pe) 12 Self-employed/traders were randomly selected. Probability sampling was used to select the Focus Group Member in each category. Each element of the population has equal chance of being selected. Kothari (2004) asserted that random sampling refers to a technique sample selection that gives each element of the population an equal probability of being picked up and each item to have an equal chance of being included. Close ended questions: "Yes/No" was adopted in the exercise as data gathering instrument. Percentage and pie chart statistical diagram were used for the analytical results.

Discussion and Findings

In analysing the findings of the three groups, 'Yes' stands for positive response (agree), while 'No' represents negative response (disagree). The frequency of those who succumbed to the options and the percentages were shown in the last three columns of the tables:

Group "A" Civil Servants

S/N	Research Question	YES	NO	TOTAL
1	Do you agree that the online newspaper has made the offline to be less relevant today?	12 100%	0 0%	100%
2	How accessible are print newspaper in your area?	12 100%	0 0%	100%
3	Do you have the time to read online newspapers than offline?	9 75%	3 25%	100%
4	Do you prefer reading print newspapers to online publication?	2 17%	10 83%	100%
5	Are you of the opinion that Online newspapers give access to varieties than print media?	8 67%	4 33%	100%
6	Does internet service regular in your area?	10 83%	2 17%	100%

Source: Field Work

Table: G1s

Group “B” Students of Tertiary Institution

S/N	Research Question	YES	NO	TOTAL
1	Do you agree that the online newspaper has made the offline to be less relevant today?	10 83%	2 17%	100%
2	How accessible are the print newspaper in your area?	12 100%	0 0%	100%
3	Do you have the time to read online newspapers than offline?	12 100%	0 0%	100%
4	Do you prefer reading print newspapers to online publication?	0 0%	12 100%	100%
5	Are you of the opinion that Online newspapers give access to varieties than print media?	6 50%	6 50%	100%
6	Does internet service regular in your area?	12 100%	0 0%	100%

Source: Field Work

Table: G2

Group “C” Self Employed/Traders

S/N	Research Question	YES	NO	TOTAL
1	Do you agree that the online newspaper has made the offline to be less relevant today?	12 100%	0 0%	100%
2	How accessible are print newspapers in your area?	12 100%	0 0%	100%
3	Do you have the time to read online newspapers than offline?	12 100%	0 0%	100%
4	Do you prefer reading print newspapers to online publication?	6 50%	6 50%	100%
5	Are you of the opinion that Online newspapers give access to varieties than print media?	6 50%	6 50%	100%
6	Does internet service regular in your area?	10 83%	2 17%	100%

Source: Field Work

Table: G3

Discussion and Qualitative Data Analysis

Each of the FGDs had a scribe (Secretary) who took the minutes of the discursion while another man operated the voice recorder. Similarly, a moderator who managed the discussion was also appointed. The maximum time allowed for each group was 90 minutes. The three groups were met at different day in the same venue. The discussion of the findings is guided by the research questions based on the data collected from the three Focus Group Discussions conducted.

RQ1: Do you agree that the online newspaper has made the offline to be less relevant today?

Going by the data collected on the field, 94.4% of the discussants agreed that the emergence of digitalisation of media space has made the print media less relevant in the society. While 5.6% of the groups still rely on print newspapers. One of the respondents of a group attested that “The emergence of online newspapers has closed down many newspaper publishing houses, while creating a digital challenge to some journalists”. The outcome is contrary to the opinion

of Lin, 2002 where he concludes that online media are a “functional supplement to traditional media instead of a complement or displacement mechanism”. Here, the author does not see the online newspapers as a displacement of the print media. Though, most respondents in this study affirmed to the displacement of the print media for online. Yadav (2020) affirms that in the USA, from 2004 to 2019, the weekly circulation of newspapers and magazines declined by 45 percent. In 2004, 104 dailies had a circulation of more than 100,000 but it had declined to only 39 dailies in 2019

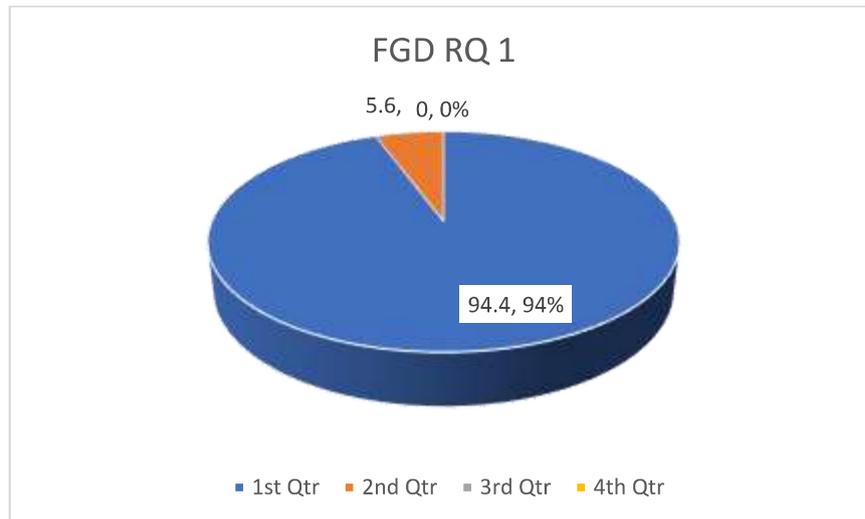


Diagram 1(A): Showing the per centage of responses to RQ 1

RQ 2: How accessible are print newspapers in your area?

The consensus of the groups is that print newspapers are not available in the area under review. The reports of the three groups are 100% affirmation that print newspapers are not accessible in the area. The absence of the print newspapers in the area influenced the inhabitants to adopt online newspaper. Some respondents confirmed that if at all the print newspaper is available, they still prefer to read online publications because it is free and can be read at convenience.

.RQ 3: Do you have the time to read online newspapers than offline?

According to the discussions, many of the respondents only read online newspapers and do not have access to offline papers in the area under study. 33 of the FGD size which represents 92% of the respondents claimed to have time to read online newspapers rather than hard copies. Meanwhile, the remaining 8% respondents claimed that they often read offline newspapers occasionally in the offices or library. During the discussions with one of the groups, a respondent confessed that he has never sighted a print newspaper from the January of this year, but claimed reading online newspapers for at list 10 minutes for about two to three times a day. Some FGDs respondents who claimed to have sighted newspapers this year affirmed that they did not have time reading it. In the same vein, a student respondent confirmed during the exercise that he did a classified advertisement in an online newspaper when there was a need to do one. Which means, the need to patronise print media for advertisement is becoming irrelevant.

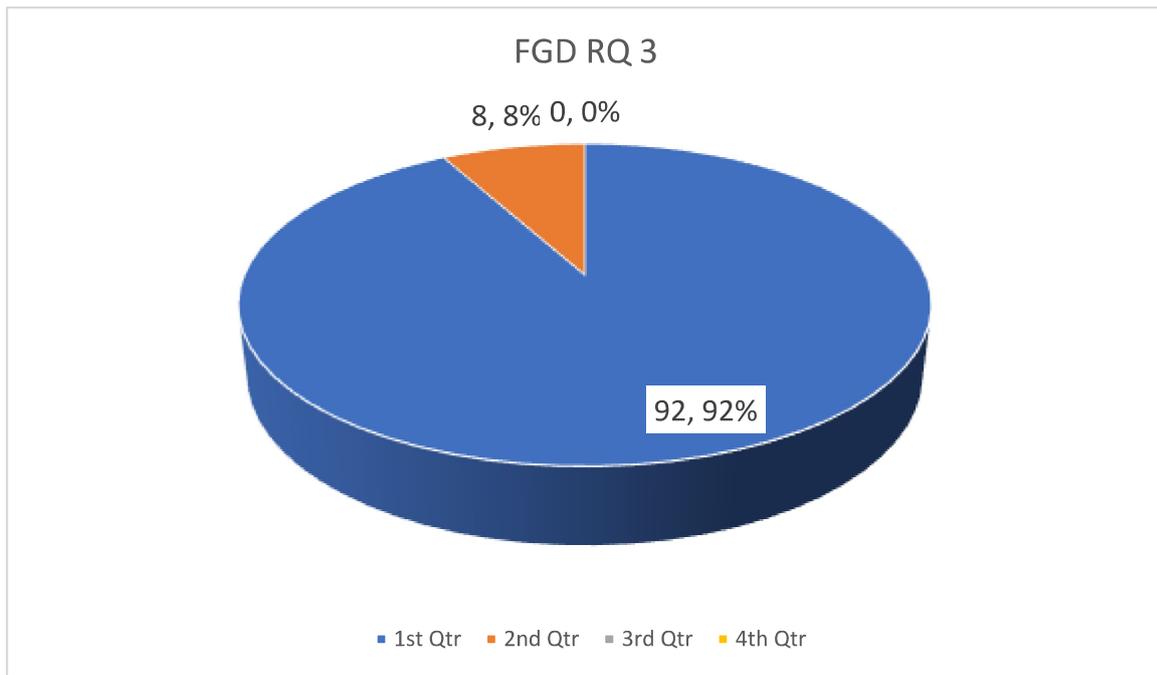


Diagram 1(B): Showing the per centage of responses to RQ 3

RQ 4: Do You Prefer Reading Print Newspapers to Online Publication?

There were contradictory opinions on the preference of reading print newspapers to the online counterpart among Group 'B' respondents. Meanwhile, the popular opinions among the three Groups on the preference of print newspapers to online is negative. 28 respondents representing 77% claimed not preferring print newspapers to the online publication, while 23% preferred reading of print newspapers. The researcher discovered during the discussions that print newspapers are not available to buy in some communities such as the community under the study.

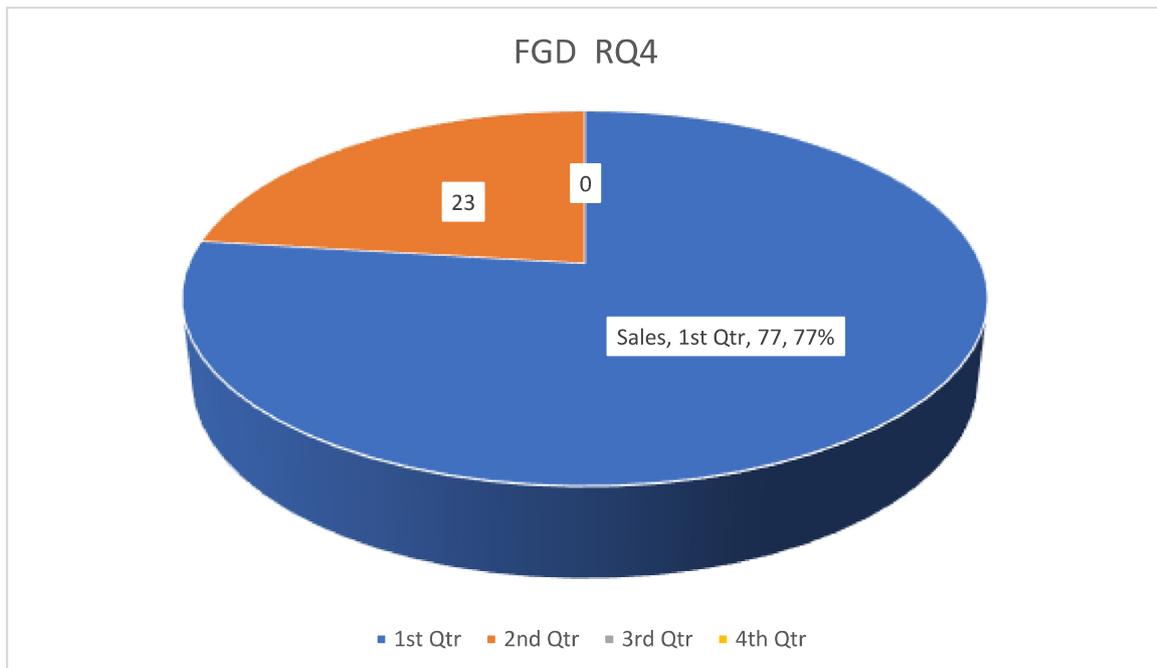


Diagram 1(C): Showing the per centage of responses to RQ 4

RQ 5: Are you of the opinion that Online newspapers give access to varieties than print media?

None of the three groups under review subscribed to this statement, rather there were contradictory opinions on the question. After thorough data collection of the groups, 56% of the respondents are of the opinion that online newspapers give more access to varieties than print media, while 44% disagree with the statement. During one of the discussions, a respondent was of the opinion that online newspapers are more economical and cost effective where several online newspapers may be accessed without an extra cost while if such choice of varieties are needed in hardcopy, one will need to buy as many as necessary to read.

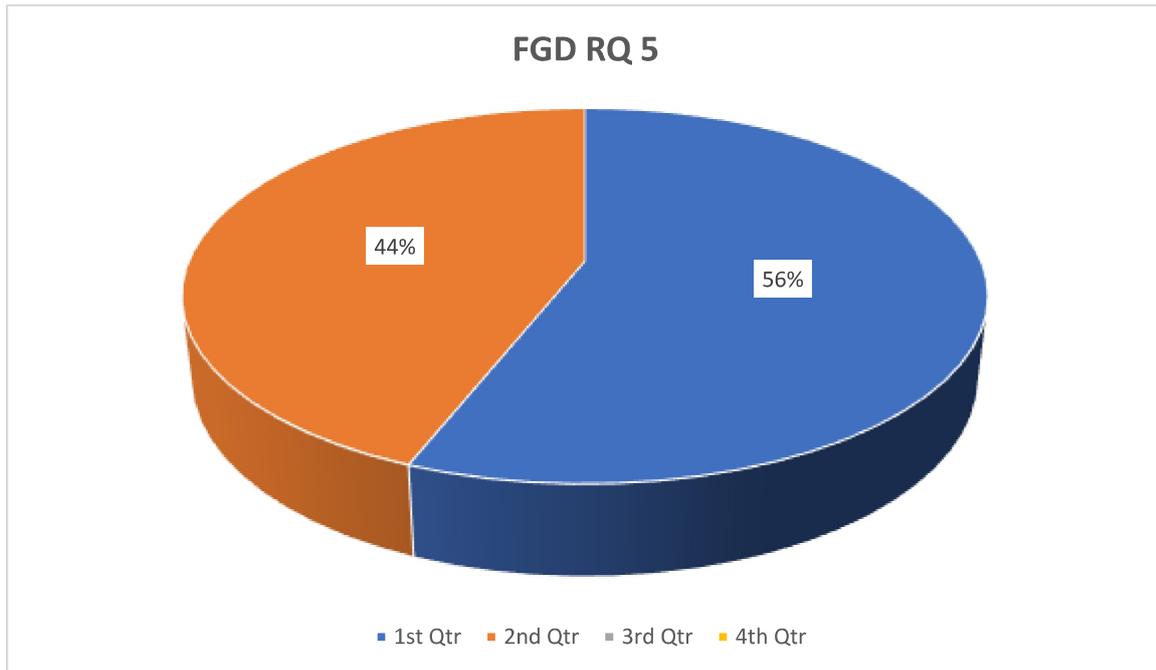


Diagram 1(D): Showing the per centage of responses to RQ 5

RQ 6: Does internet service regular in your area?

The data collected shows that almost everybody agreed that the internet service in the community under review is very regular. 89% of the respondents affirmed the statement while only 11% disagreed the regular supply of internet service. Though, some of the respondents that were negative to the statement complaint of fluctuations in the internet network from a new service provider in the area.

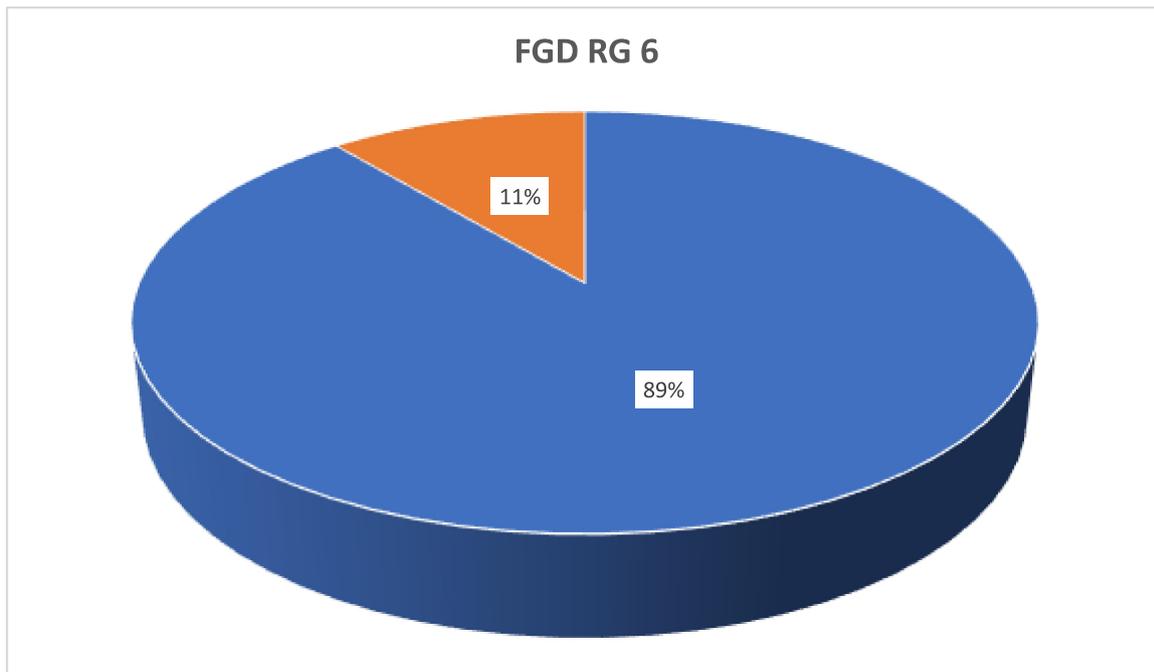


Diagram 1(E): Showing the per centage of responses to RQ 6

Limitation

Some of the limitations to the study is the unavailability of updated population data from the National Population Commission. The community is a fast developing one in the Local Government Area. As at the last population census in 2006, the community was enumerated and matched with a neighbouring community. There was no figure recorded for the community in the head count. There is a massive increase in the population of the area now due to uninterrupted electricity and virgin land for development.

Furthermore, it was not an easy task in getting the respondents from each of the three zones in the community. Most members declined invitation to participate because there is no monetary reward attached to the discussion. But with the help of the traditional head of the community and some learned members who understand the mission of the study, the researcher was able to overcome the challenge.

Conclusion

This study examined the readership patronage of Online and Offline Newspaper in Gbagede Community, Ifelodun Local Government Area, Kwara State. It is evident from the findings that most readers preferred online newspapers rather than offline publications. Apart from the advancement in technology that tends to phase out the print media, the research discovered that hardcopies are not accessible in some communities especially in the area under study. It is established in the findings that online newspaper has completely substituted the offline in Gbagede community based on the outcome of this work.

Similarly, some respondents lamented the cost of buying a newspaper which they tagged as a 'non-essential' commodity. While some also argued that the online newspaper is not also one hundred per cent free as internet data is required for connection. Though, the argument was defeated by the online newspapers defenders that said with data of two hundred Naira, an online

reader may read more than ten online newspapers for days. Instant availability of breaking news was also mentioned in favour of online newspaper during the discussion.

As postulated by Uses and Gratification theory, the findings of this study showed that audiences are aware of their reasons for choice of media messages. They also consider these reasons as they actively search for media messages to satisfy their information appetite. Online newspaper publishers are advised to take the advantage of the new technology to maximize their potentials while the publishers of print media are also to improve their outreach. Meanwhile, the research also discovered that most print media have online edition which also contributed to the readership apathy of hardcopy in the society.

Recommendation

Based on the outcome of this study, the following are recommended for the concerned users of this work:

- Manufacturers and merchants of elite and educated oriented products are advised to adopt online newspapers advertisement placement because most newspaper readers now subscribe to online medium as against the usual print.
- It is a recommendation of the researcher that publisher of offline publications are to develop online version of their print publication if not yet hosted, and run the duo together in order to secure both online and offline readership.
- The researcher also suggested that publisher of newspapers are to brainstorm and come out with a solution to the threat that the new media technology has imposed on the print media.
- In order to retain the print media in the media space, Weekend Community Newspaper is here advised to be introduced to encourage more readership. Furthermore, community and traditional rulers may be used to circulate such publication in the rural setting.

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