

**EVALUATION OF FREE READERS ASSOCIATION OF NEWSPAPERS AND THE
MARKETABILITY OF NATIONAL DAILIES IN PORT HARCOURT**

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Abstract

This paper examined Free Readers Association of Newspapers and the Marketability of National Dailies in Port Harcourt which aimed to fill the gap in existing research, which has focused on marketability and the impact of free readers on national dailies without exploring the specific dynamics in Port Harcourt. The objectives of this study are to; determine the influence of free readers association of newspapers and the marketability of national dailies in Port Harcourt, ascertain the level of patronage of free readers association of newspapers and the marketability of national dailies in Port Harcourt; and to find out the type of News content that interests Free Readers Association of Newspapers in Port Harcourt the most. The study draws its strength from uses and gratification theory. It adopted survey research design using questionnaire as its research instrument. The population of the study consisted of vendors of National Newspapers in Port Harcourt, which was 100 according to PRAN 2025; and the sample size were 100 vendors who had sold Punch, The Nation and other newspapers in Port Harcourt for more than four years. The study adopted the purposive sampling technique. The study used four point Likert scale for data analysis. Consequently, the study found that free readers association of newspapers of Nigeria has negative and positive influence in the marketability of national dailies in Port Harcourt. The study also found that the level of patronage from free readers association of newspapers to vendors cannot be compared to the amount of newspapers they read for free. It was found also that FRAN have more interest on sport and political news contents. The study concludes that the excess of free readers association of newspapers should be curtailed to give room for prospective customers. The study recommends for enactment of legislation that will guide the relationship between the free readers association of newspapers in Nigeria and the vendors. Similarly, the study advocates for monthly or weekly subscription or monthly stipends for newspaper houses by free readers association of newspapers of Nigeria for the benefit of newspaper houses in Port Harcourt, this will minimize the seeming conflicts between vendors and free newspaper readers.

Keywords: *Evaluation, Free Readers Association of Newspapers, National Dailies, Marketability*

Introduction

The newspaper industry has been around for more than three centuries, and it has experienced an overwhelming run. Although the first official newspaper was published in 1605 in Strasburg, it was during the industrial revolution, in the early 19th century, when the steam printing press and telegraph developed. This allowed inexpensive papers to be sold by street vendors to a wider audience. Between 1890 and 1920, the industry grew and newspapers enjoyed the focal attention of being society's primary source of information. This was known as the 'golden age' for print media (Patel, 2010) However, the Great Depression disrupted this and in the 1930s newspapers were severely hurt, hundreds of companies halted or ended operations. This was escalated with the emerging broadcast radio, offering lower priced alternative news and as a result capturing a large portion of advertising revenues from newspapers. Television was the next technology that disrupted the newspaper business. It was a more powerful medium to distribute information and it overtook

the newspaper and majority of national advertising in the 1960s. in response newspapers consolidated (Patel, 2010)

In 1995, the Internet was introduced to the public and by the millennium the Internet as a worldwide platform became evident. The Internet reached more people than any newspaper had or ever could and profits margins, if any, have dropped to an average of 5%. The mere ability to access information and receive instant updates threatened the purpose of a newspaper, and evidently the Internet has been a growing source of competition and contention for the newspaper publishers.(Patel, 2010)

However, vendors of Newspapers had been selling, until the emergence of free readers association, which to some extent may affect the marketability and sales of Newspapers. Right from the time of “Iwe Irohin Newspaper in 1859 till date, newspaper has been a major channel of mass communication. It is used in the socio-economic and political dissemination of information to keep the masses informed. Newspaper is designed to inform, educate, sensitize, enlighten, mobile, entertain and muckrake the government and the society at large. Many have argued that newspaper can make and unmake a nation, individual or organization. In the light of this, citing Thomas Jefferson, former American President who once said, “If I were allowed to choose between having a government without a newspaper and having a newspaper without a government, I would not hesitate to choose the later”

A former president of Nigeria, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe was once quoted as saying: “The Press is the light of the society, show them the light and they would see the way.” others have called the press, the fourth Estate of the Realm, meaning the fourth organ of the government. McQuail (2005) citing Edmund Burke (1800) states: “The Press is the fourth organ of the Realm.” This harps the position and power of the press and places it as par with what the British called:

- i. The House of Commons
- ii. The Lords Spiritual and
- iii. The Lords Temporal

Similarly, Section 22 of 1999 Constitution of Nigeria as amended places the press in a robust position with the following expression: “The Press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this chapter and uphold the responsibility of the government” (Okoye, 2007).

Baran (2004) argues that newspapers achieve their goals through the role of journalists who gather, process and report societal happenings. Kohn (2003) writes that the purpose of a newspaper is to give the news impartially, without fear or favour, regardless of party, sect or interest involved. Kohn (2003) citing the American Society of Newspaper Editors states that: “Sound practice of journalism makes clear distinction between news reports and expressions of opinion. Newspaper reports should be free from opinion or bias of any kind”. Hasan (2013) discussing the role of newspaper and journalists in promoting the economy of a nation, argues that news should have economic interest of the publisher to generate return on investment (ROI).

It is against this background, that this study aimed to evaluate free readers association of newspapers and the marketability of national dailies in Port Harcourt.

Statement of the Problem

Free readers association is a common phenomenon that has generated a lot of interest, across many nations, states, including Rivers state, and particularly Port Harcourt. They have seen to an extent, the growing number of awareness in news contents among common people who may not have ordinarily been intentional about sourcing of information, but find themselves reading for free with some like minds. Nevertheless, the growing criticisms and conflicts by newspaper vendors against members of free readers association of newspapers in Port Harcourt have assumed a serious proportion, hence it needs an urgent investigation, this is to avoid conflict between the former and the later. There is also a seeming decrease in paper circulation, posing a question on the marketability of national dailies in Port Harcourt. . This study tend to unravel all of these concerns. Previous studies had focused on marketability of national dailies in Nigeria, the impact of free readers on the promotion of national dailies and has not investigated the influence of free readers of national dailies, the marketability of the newspaper and in Port Harcourt. This study seek to cover the gap from the previous studies.

Objectives of the Study

The following are the objectives of this study, which are to:

1. determine the influence of free readers association of newspaper and the marketability of national dailies in Port Harcourt.
2. ascertain the level of patronage of free readers association of newspapers and the marketability of national dailies in Port Harcourt.
3. find out the type of News content Free Readers Association of Newspapers in Port Harcourt find most interesting.

Research Questions

The following research questions were poised to guide the study:

1. What influence does the free readers association of newspapers have in the marketability of national dailies in Port Harcourt?
2. What is the level of patronage of free readers association of newspapers and the marketability of national dailies in Port Harcourt?
3. What type of News content does Free Readers Association of Newspapers in Port Harcourt find most Interesting?

Conceptual Review

Emergence of the First Newspaper in Nigeria

Iwe Irohin was the first newspaper printed in Nigeria in 1859 and sited at the Egba community. According to the founder and publisher of the newspaper, Rev. Townsend, the newspaper was established for the purpose of providing information for the Egba people and the Yoruba community. According to Akinbode (2025), it folded up in 1867 as a result of cultural and political crisis between the European settlers and the people of Egba land.

This same crisis led to the expulsion of all Europeans in Egba land including the missionaries and this also culminated in the end of the Mission Printing Press in Abeokuta. The Iwe Irohin no doubt excited the intelligence of the people then, Townsend himself confirmed this when he stated that the Iwe Irohin was “a paper of information for the Egba people of Yoruba, one among the collateral means of exciting the intelligence of these people, (Akinbode, 2025)

On his objective for embarking on the venture, Reverend Townsend said, “my objective is to get the people to read and to beget the habit of seeking information by reading.” He elaborated this when he posited; “I have set on foot a Yoruba newspaper, my first number is out, I am writing the second, my objective is to get the people to read, that is to beget the habit of seeking information by reading, it was reckoned with during the time”

Records have it that at the advent of the newspaper, there were at least 3,000 (three thousand) people who in CMS school had learned to read, and the missionaries felt it a duty to provide them with more literature. The newspaper was one of those literature. The paper was also said to have educated the growing public about the history and politics of the time. One of the characteristics of Iwe Irohin was that it did not publish any advertisement at the initial stage.

The Newspaper fought against slave trade and advocated for trade in produce and merchandise as against human trafficking. The voice of the paper was loud and heard over political developments of the time including the punitive expeditions and inter-tribal wars, which plagued the surrounding Yoruba nation, from January 1866, the newspaper began publishing two editions of the paper, one in English, the other in Yoruba (Akinbode, 2025). This was in consonance with the earlier announcement made in December 28, 1865 issue of Iwe Irohin. Before its demise, the newspaper circulation was about 3,000 (three thousand). It also indulged in criticizing the slave trade, which thrived clandestinely then (Daramola, 2006, Wodi, 2006). Although the paper did not achieve much in business for long period of time, but it secured a large level of education and the social awareness of the generality of the people.

Nationalist Press in Nigeria

This was another period of significance in the history of Nigerian press. The Nigerian press in this era was virile, daring and nationalistic. The main focus of the Nigerian press, this period was how to awaken citizens to join the struggle for independence (Daramola, 2006). Some of the nationalist press are:

The West African Pilot

Daramola (2006) notes that Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe popularly known as Zik laughed the West African pilot in November 1937. The maiden edition of the newspaper wrote in its editorial,

..... the West African Pilot is a child of circumstance and we are cognizant of the fate of many a child of circumstance in the theatre of world's history. Nevertheless, this new organ of public opinion is dedicated to perform its task, in concert with its contemporaries, in a spirit of humility and candour and co-operation ... consistent with this policy, we shall not scruple to focus the spotlight of public opinion on any issues which affects the destiny of Africa, in the light of our sincere and honest convictions.

The Pilot and Zik Press Limited, contained several clearly marked features that made their period of ascendancy a period apart in the history of Nigerian journalism. It is an important period, perhaps the most important, in the history of the Nigerian press because journalistic activities of this period positively affected newspaper publishing of the future (Daramola, 2006).

Dr. Azikiwe was educated in the United States of America where he graduated in political science and anthropology. He had undergone a diploma course in journalism at a high institution and had engaged in journalism practice in many newspapers as a feature writer and city reporter. Zik returned from the USA in 1934, moved to Accra, Ghana and became the editor of the *African Morning Post*. He edited the paper for two years (1935 – 1937).

Dr. Azikiwe and his colleague, Isaac W. Johnson, fell foul of the colonial authorities. They were charged and convicted for publishing a seditious article in the *African Morning Post* Zik conviction was however quashed on appeal, and he returned to Nigeria in 1937 to establish the *West African Pilot*. He also published his second book “*Renascent African*” in the same year. His first book was *Liberia in World Politics* published in 1934 (Daramola, 2006, Wodi, 2006).

The Characteristics of ZIK Press

His journalism was bold, acrobatic, intensive, sensational and nationalistic in outlook. During the fifteen year period, (1934-1950), it was said that Zik was the most celebrated nationalist on the West Coast of Africa, if not the whole of black Africa. To the outside world, Zikism and African nationalism appeared to be synonymous. Zik used his pen in a most powerful way to propagate his ideals. Coleman (1958) said of Zik”.

The boldness, daring and sometimes shocking directness of his editorials and news were radically above those of his predecessor.

An European friend of Zik said of Zik's music: Most of Zik's music is played on black keys and it is sweeten, exciting and daring to African ears... the white keys when used, are often to contrast the difference in standard of living.

The Gaskiya Taft Kwabo

Daramola, 2006;Wodi, 2006) corroborate that Gaskiya Taft Kwabo newspaper was published on January 2, 1939 by the colonial administration in the north. The history of the paper according to Duyile (1989) is dated back to 1937 when there was rumour that the British colonial administration was planning to handover her West African colonies to Adolf Hitler of Germany.

According to Daramola, (2006) Adolf Hitler was the German who spearheaded the Second World War. This rumour created a lot of fear in the people. A medium of mass communication therefore was needed by the colonial masters to douse the tension created and dispel this falsehood. Since there were no newspapers in large number in the North as in the south, a regular journal that could reach the majority was considered.

The government therefore concluded on setting up a vernacular newspaper which was to be known as Gaskiya Teft Kwabo. The newspaper was printed by the Northern Literature Agency, which was later renamed Gaskiya Taft Kwabo Corporation. The corporation was situated in Zaria. Mallam Abubakar Imam, one of the few educated northerners at that time was appointed editor of the paper late in 1938. The newspaper was a weekly newspaper sold for one penny and was vocal. (Daramola, 2006)

The Nigerian Tribune

The Nigerian Tribune was established in 1949 by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, a lawyer, politician, author and statesman. The first edition of the paper appeared on the streets of Ibadan (current capital of Oyo State) on 16th November, 1949. The Nigerian Tribune was preceded by Iroyin Yoruba in 1945 edited by a Yoruba front-line politician and lawyer. It is an English-language newspaper published in Ibadan, Nigeria. It is the oldest privately owned Nigerian newspaper still in circulation.

Nigerian Tribune (September 6, 2025) highlights that during the colonial period, the Nigerian Tribune served as a platform for promoting Obafemi Awolowo's welfare programmes and represented the interests of the Yoruba community during a time of ethnic competition. After Nigeria gained independence in the 1960s, while many publications were under government control, privately owned newspapers such as the Nigerian Tribune, The Punch, Vanguard, and The Guardian continued to report on corruption in public and private sectors despite government censorship. (Nigerian Tribune September 6, 2025)

Chief Obafemi Awolowo himself had worked as a trainee reporter with the Daily Times in 1934 but found the Daily Times to be dull, and not too aggressive enough based on the demands of the period, from the beginning the Nigerian Tribune was set up as a business enterprise with the setting up of a limited liability company known as African Press Ltd. Publisher of the Tribune Group. It began as a tabloid though with old technology in a one-storey building somewhere at Adeoyo, Ibadan. In the 1970s, the press moved to Oke Ado equipped with modern technology. The Nigerian Tribune began as a regional newspaper and as the mouth organ of its proprietor to champion the cause of Action Group (AG) the political party of Chief Obafemi Awolowo (Daramola, 2006; Wodi, 2006).

Post-Independence Newspapers in Nigeria

Daramola (2006) identifies the following as some of the post-independence press in Nigeria;

The Punch Newspaper

The Punch Newspaper began as a Sunday publication on 17th March 1973. Its publisher, Chief Olu Aboderin was an Ibadan man from Kudeti area. He was neither a journalist nor a son of a journalist. Rather, he was an accountant with the National Bank who probably took to newspaper publishing in order to defend freedom of the press and to make money. The paper was published by a limited liability company, Punch Nigeria Limited (Daramola, 2006).

The Sunday Punch hit and punched the journalism trade with sensational news stories and features. It came out fearlessly with crops of professional journalists, determined to defend the liberty of the people and act as the watchdog of the Nigerian society.

The Sunday Punch experiment worked and within two years its popularity had soared. It became a household name as a result of this success the daily edition began on November 1976. The two newspapers, *Punch* (daily) and *Sunday Punch* were radical in content and critical of government's unpopular policies. The newspapers covered every aspect of the society. Since its publisher was not a politician, the newspapers did not pitch tent with any political group during the democratic dispensation. The newspapers were neither in support nor against the military regimes of the period for no just cause, as a result of its apolitical nature. *The Punch* newspapers were able to criticize government when necessary and praised them when the occasions demanded (Daramola, 2006).

The National Concord

The National Concord newspaper rolled out from the National Concord Press Ltd on 1st March, 1980. The newspaper came out with its Sunday edition almost simultaneously. Its publisher was the business mogul, Chief Moshood Kashimawo Olawale Abiola popularly known as MKO Abiola. According to Duyile (1989, pp 423-433) there had been underground plans by the business magnate for several months. The plans involved the proprietor and a crop of first class journalists and technicians to fashion out a sustainable proposal for the setting up of the newspaper.

The Guardian

The Guardian newspaper began as Sunday Guardian on 27th February 1983. The Guardian (daily) began six months after precisely on July 4, 1983. The newspaper is owned by the wealthy businessman Alex Ibru. The Ibru family is generally known in Nigeria for business success. started with the likes of Dele Cole, Stanley

macebur and host of others. The newspaper is known for quality and hardly makes grammatical mistakes. (Daramola,2006).

Alex Ibru seems to be a contented businessman with little or no interest in politics and government appointments, although he served as Minister of Internal Affairs under General Sani Abacha between 1993 and 1994. His desire therefore was to diversify his business interest to newspaper publishing and make money out of it. The newspaper was not therefore to garner influence for him or to promote his political viewpoint. Ibru himself has always been a mild and simple man only cut for clean business. (Daramola,2006)

The Vanguard Newspaper

Vanguard newspaper hit the newsstand for the first time on Sunday, June 3, 1984. The publisher is the versatile journalist, Sam Amuka-Pernu (aka Pa Sam), a former reporter with the *Daily Times*, Amuka-Pernu rose to become the first editor of Spear magazine in the early 1960s. His aim was purely to elevate the practice of journalism and make profit. Vanguard newspaper is not the first effort of Sam Amuka-Pernu. The Itsekiri-bom journalist had in 1973 collaborated with Chief Olu Aboderin, a banker to establish Punch newspaper, one of the frontline newspapers in Nigeria today. As a result of disagreement the two jolly friends parted way later in 1981 (Daramola, 2006).

The Vanguard newspaper first came out as a Sunday paper in 1984 but started producing daily newspaper on July 15, 1984. The objective of the paper, according to its leader, was to “serve in the vanguard of a better life for the people of Nigeria).

From the outset, the paper began as a limited liability company, with the registration of a company known as Vanguard Media Limited. The newspaper was committed to free enterprise, the rule of law and good governance. Today Vanguard Media Limited publishes Vanguard (daily), Sunday Vanguard, weekend vanguard and Sports Now (Daramola, 2006).

Champion Newspaper

The champion newspaper began publication on historic day, a day Nigerian was celebrating her twenty-eighth independence. Saturday (October 1988). It was published and printed by Champion Newspapers Limited at Isolo Industrial Scheme, Ilasamaja Lagos. Its proprietor is the multimillionaire businessman. Chief Emmanuel Iwuayanwun (Daramola, 2006).

The idea to have a newspaper was first sold to Chief Iwuayanwu sometimes in 1986. Iwuayanwu, an engineer by profession has thought of a regional newspaper in Owerri, his hometown in Imo State. But the success recorded by *The Guardian* of Alex Ibru and *National Concord* of Chief M.K.O. Abiola in addition to advice from professional journalists he consulted must have propelled the enterprising businessman to opt for a national paper located in Lagos.

This day

This day newspaper was rolled out from the press of Leaders and Company Limited in March 1995. The newspaper began as a weekly publication but after sometime, the daily edition resumed. The proprietor is the young maverick, Nduka Obaigbena who doubles as Editor-in-Chief and publisher. Obaigbena had in the late 1980s tried his hand on a news magazine called This week, which folded up as a result of what his proprietor regarded as under-capitalization (Daramola, 2006). The birth of the newspaper in 1995 can be traced to the disappearance of many newspapers from the newsstand. Early in 1994, the major Nigerian newspapers were namely; *The Guardian*, *Concord* and *Punch* groups had been closed down by the administration of General Sani Abacha. By 1995, the newspapers were still off the street. This created a vacuum. The public was yearning for a newspaper that would fill the void. It was this desire and thirst for news that probably propelled Nduka Obaigbena who had in 1993 incorporated the Leaders and Company Limited to start a newspaper from the ashes of *This Week*. (Daramola,2006).

Roles of Newspaper in Contemporary Society

According to Ferguson and Pattern (1993), the following are the roles of newspapers in the society:

The Political Role

The press (radio, television, newspapers, magazines, and all other news gathering and disseminating agencies) is the watchdog of government. Freedom always go with certain responsibilities. The guarantee of a free press carries the obligation of providing to the audience information upon which to base political decisions. Thus, any news organization that is doing its job properly will cover in detail the activities of government. It will fight attempts by the government to do the public's business behind closed doors. It will scrutinize budgets and programmes to see if the public's tax money is being spent properly. This is the foremost of the press' responsibilities.

The Economic Role

The public needs information about products, goods, and services in addition to events. Through advertising, the press informs the public of such items. Business, industrial, and agriculture news perform the same function. It should be noted, that advertising pays the bills and without it, there would be no newspapers or broadcast.

The Sentry Role

The press watches society's horizons. What is peeking over the horizon to the challenges of tomorrow? Technological change, the youth culture, new life-styles, patterns of change in criminal justice, and the impact of changing habits of energy use all evolved after prediction in the mass media. In other words, the press must report not only what is happening today but also what is likely to happen tomorrow. When the United States became involved in the revolutions, social and economic difficulties of Central America in the 1980s, many experts thought the press had failed in its duties as a sentry. Those experts believe that journalists who lacked understanding of the region's culture, history, politics, and economics had not alerted the nation to the true extent of the problems there.

The Record-keeping Function

The mass media should reflect an accurate record of local, national, and world news. Who was elected to the school board? What bills passed congress? What happened to the price of oil? Who died? Who won and who lost in sports? Who filed for bankruptcy? Who filed to run for public office? The journalism of big headlines and splashy news programme depends on the underpinning of record-keeping. Consumers also need to know many things, including the data often found tucked away in the back of the paper in list form.

The Entertainment Role

Mass media consumers need diversion as well as information. The comics, entertaining feature stories, and pictures help meet this need. The business of the press is serious, of course, but the audience is made up of people of all ages and interests. Few newscasts or newspapers should be without an entertaining or light element.

The Social Role

In times past, people got their news from their neighbours on a person-to-person basis. Today, the mass media perform this function. "Did you watch the 'Tonight Show' last night?" is a reflection of the social function. The media substitute for simpler relationships of the past.

The Marketplace Role

The press provides the forum in which all sorts of ideas are presented; it becomes the marketplace of ideas. If the audience is concerned about the environment and conveys this concern through the press, then perhaps something will be done. If citizens don't want their trees to be cut down for a street-widening project, they turn to the forum of the mass media to generate support. Thus, a city's agenda is reviewed: Do we want wider streets for more efficient moving of automobiles, or do we want the trees to remain and the automobiles' dominance of our lives to be curtailed?

Also, Kebble (2006), Alikor and Amadi (2019) agreed that journalists play the following roles in striving to build a virile and egalitarian society:

- i. Journalists embark on constructive criticism of government politics, programmes, actions or inactions.

- ii. Journalists embark on surveillance of the society.
- iii. Journalists carry out the role of muckraking of government officials, captains of industry and deviant characters in the society.
- iv. Journalists provide voice for the voiceless in the society.
- v. Journalists provide feedback to the government on the yearnings and aspirations of the people in the society.
- vi. Journalists play the role of a watchdog in the society.
- vii. Journalists chronicle societal newsworthy events.
- viii. Journalists provide the platform for acknowledgement of what has happened in the society.
- ix. Journalists play the role of a societal megaphone.
- x. Journalists serve as agenda-setter in the society.
- xi. Journalists serve as societal informant and news carrier.

Free Readers Association of Newspaper in Nigeria

Free readers association, just as the name implies, started off as a free reading of newspapers at vendors stand, though today, some of the vendors charge a token of between 50 to 100 naira on the readers, since most of them end up not patronizing the vendors.

Basically, this group of people in Nigeria are mostly adult males, who gathers at various newspaper stands daily to read daily news stories for free. Most of the persons found in this category usually claim to be very active in politics and have the audience of a good opinion leader. Surprisingly, some of the free readers are sometimes very educated people, students and business people. Few women are often seen amongst them. This organization, FRAN (Free Readers Association of Nigeria) was established to cater for access to books and reading materials for those within the rural areas.

Objectives of FRAN

1. Supporting reading culture among Nigerians
2. Building libraries and reading centers
3. Advocating literacy programmes and education initiatives
4. Staging reading programs, book societies and clubs.

The Importance of the Free Readers Association of Nigeria.

1. Social interaction: They offer a platform for socializing and networking among members.
2. Knowledge sharing: Members share ideas, insights and knowledge on different topics, including politics, sports and trending events.
3. Inclusion: The group is made up of people from different walks of life, including those who may be neglected or excluded from mainstream media.

FRAN is important, because of its contribution in the print media in terms of information dissemination.

Newspaper Vendors

Newspaper vendors are people who sell newspapers and other periodicals to the public. They are also known as newsagents or paper boys. They can be found on road traffic, bus-stops, newsstands, on the streets and people's office to sell too.

Their roles include;

1. Buying newspapers and other publications from distributors or wholesalers;
2. Restocking supplies as needed;
3. Displaying and selling them to buyers.

Newspaper vendors play a critical role in the spread of information and community's access to news and knowledge. Some challenges of newspaper vendors include;

1. Low sales: The use of social media is on the increase and therefore most people prefer to read from the comfort of their digital tool, example phones.
2. Weather conditions: Bad weather eg, rain or extreme heat, can affect sales of newspaper outdoors.
3. Security concerns: Most newspaper vendors leave home early in morning or late in the night to source for newspapers from editors, so they can sell. These hurdles highlight the determination of newspaper

vendors in remaining in business and keeping continuity in providing essential service to their audience or buyers.

Theoretical Framework

Uses and Gratification Theory

Uses and gratification theory was developed by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch in the 1974, as a reaction to traditional mass communication research emphasizing the sender and the message. It theory seeks to understand how and why people actively seek out specific media to satisfy specific needs. Its core focus is not ‘what media do to people’ but rather ‘what people do with the media’. It discusses how users deliberately choose media that will satisfy their needs and allow them to enhance knowledge, relaxation, social interaction, diversion or escape. Uses and Gratification theory is also called functional theory which is concerned with the social and psychological origin of needs, which generate expectation of the mass media which leads to different patterns of media exposure, resulting in need gratification and other consequences, mostly unintended ones (Katz, 1974).

In 1942, Lazarfield and Stanton produced a series of books and studies that paid attention to how audiences used media to organise their lives and experiences. Their works are believed to have laid foundation for the Uses and Gratifications theory. This theory focuses on the uses to which people put media and the gratifications they seek from that use” (Baran & Davis, 2003, p.256). The basic assumptions according to Folarin (1998) and Griffin (2003) are: Who uses which content and from which media? Under what conditions and for what reasons do they use the media? The scenario according to (Kunczik, 1988), Folarin (1998, p. 65) is that: An individual has some need related to communication, and they select the media that appear likely to satisfy those needs, selectively consumes the content and an effect may or may not occur. This theory is supported with the Fraction of Selection hypothesis proposed by Wilbur Schramm in 1954. “The hypothesis states that people weigh the level of reward (gratification) they expect from a given medium or message against how much effort they must make to secure that reward” (Baran & Davis, 2003, p.257). In other words, media that are easier to use stand at an advantage over others that require more efforts, more investments and more concentration.

This theory is relevant to this study because it explained the reason free readers has, notwithstanding the long age disagreements or inconveniences they pose to newspaper vendors, but hasn’t been able to stop standing at Newspaper stands. The gratification they get from these stands, with like minds discussing on trending national issues is of value to them. They also do not pay most times, or may drop stipends to the vendors and walk away, without much financial commitment.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Igbeka & Ola (2010) on a study titled "Use of Newspapers by Nigerian University Students: The Case of Delta State University, Anwai Campus" examined how students utilize newspapers for information and recreation. This study used the survey research design with the questionnaire as the instrument for data collection. The research indicates a high usage rate, with students favouring content related to their disciplines and unbiased reporting. It concludes that students read newspapers contents related to their needs, and recommended that students should develop an open mind to other contents outside their disciplines. The study is relevant to this present study with regard to newspaper readership.

ResearchCage 2017, on ‘Influence of Free Readers’ Activities on Newspaper Circulation in Nigeria: A Study of Uyo Metropolis’, examined the influence of free readers’ activities on Newspaper circulation in Nigeria with a focus on Uyo Metropolis. The primary aim of the research was to know why people gather every morning at Plaza newspaper stand, Ikot Ekpene Road, Uyo and other newspaper stands to know the latest information, locally and nationally and how the newspapers’ content they read affected and influenced them. The study adopted the survey research design with the questionnaire as instrument for data collection. The study found that majority of the readers, as well as respondents claimed that once they have read the newspapers at news stand, they will not bother to buy the paper again as there was no point in buying once all news was known already. It concludes that newspaper free readers are interested in current news for their gratification, and recommends that they should not only read but also buy the newspapers to encourage sales. The study is relevant because it is on the same subject of inquiry with the present study on free readers association.

Ifeduba Emmauels (2017) on the study “Selling Newspaper to Free Readers: Characteristics and Correlates of a New Buying and Selling Behaviour” set out to explore the characteristics and correlates of newspaper reading behaviour using interviews, obtrusive observation and questionnaire to collect data in Lagos, Nigeria. He discovered that gatherings at newsstands in Nigeria facilitate discussions and information sharing among readers, which can attract passersby who may subsequently purchase newspapers. However, he also noted that the practice of renting newspapers at these stands might lead to reduced direct sales for publishers, indicating a need for attitude change among readers to support the newspaper industry financially. The study concludes that newspaper free readers behaviour reduces the sales of the papers, and recommended that they should contribute in the buying of the papers. The study is related to this present study because it borders on the reading and selling of newspapers.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the survey design method, with the questionnaire as the instrument for data collection. The population of this study was 100, which consists of vendors of The Punch and The Nations Newspapers in Port Harcourt, with a sample size of 100 vendors in Port Harcourt, who sold, The Punch Newspapers and The Nation Newspaper in Port Harcourt. Census sample size was adopted because of the small size of vendors in Port Harcourt. The data gathered in this study were collated and presented in tables and analyzed using four point likert scale method based on frequency of response with a decision rule of 2.5.

Research Question 1: What influence does the free readers association of newspapers have in the marketability of national dailies in Port Harcourt?

Table 1: Influence of Free Readers Association of Newspapers of Nigeria (FRAN) and the Marketability of National Dailies in Port Harcourt.

Influence of FRAN in Marketing of National Dailies	SA 4	A 3	D 2	SD 1	Total	Mean (X)	Remark
I sample all national dailies for sales everyday	31 124	49 147	12 24	8 8	100 303	3.0	Accepted
I have more free readers who prefer Punch newspaper	47 188	24 72	18 36	11 11	100 307	3.0	Accepted
I have more readers who prefer Nations newspaper	32 128	30 90	36 72	2 2	100 292	2.9	Accepted
I have more readers who prefer other Newspapers	21 84	19 57	42 84	18 18	100	2.43	Rejected
Weighted Mean Score						2.8	

Source: 2024 Field Survey

The survey indicates that though vendors sample all national dailies, the free readers association tend to make a higher demand on the punch Newspaper. The weighted mean score of 2.8 also shows that there is indeed an influence from FRAN on marketability of National dailies.

Research Question 2: What is the level of patronage of free readers association of newspapers and the marketability of national dailies in Port Harcourt?

Table 2: Level of patronage of Free Readers Association of Newspapers and the Marketability of National Dailies in Port Harcourt.

Source: 2024 Field Survey

Degree of Influence	SA 4	A 3	D 2	SD 1	Total	Mean (X)	Remark
Free reading at newspaper stands is a common habit among people in my area.	46	42	10	2	100	3.32	Accepted
	184	126	20	2	332		
Most readers at newspaper stands prefer reading for free rather than purchasing newspapers.	45	26	19	10	100	3.06	Accepted
	180	78	38	10	306		
The presence of FRAN discourages many people from buying national dailies.	12	18	36	34	100	2.08	Rejected
	48	54	72	34	208		
Weighted Mean Score						2.82	

The survey result is a strong indication that FRAN has some level of significance, but low in patronizing, sales and marketing of national dailies in Port Harcourt.

Research Question 3: What type of News content does free readers association of newspapers in Port Harcourt find most interesting?

Table 3: What type of News content does Free Readers Association of Newspapers in Port Harcourt find most interesting?

Source: 2024 Field Survey

The	Influence of FRAN in Marketing of National Dailies	SA 4	A 3	D 2	SD 1	Total	Mean (X)	Remark
	FRAN prefer to read more of sports and political issues	28 112	32 96	29 58	11 11	100 277	2.7	Accepted
	The association has increased customer loyalty to certain national dailies, thereby affecting volume of sales	38 152	19 57	22 66	21 21	100 296	2.96	Accepted
	FRAN prefers to read more of other National Issues.	34 136	16 48	28 56	22 20		2.6	Accepted
	Weighted Mean Score						2.75	

Survey indicated that FRAN prefers sports and political News. Vendors equally experienced drop in sales of other national dailies in general, because of this.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1. What influence does the free readers association of newspapers have in the marketability of national dailies in Port Harcourt?

This study found that the members of the free readers association of newspapers have both positive and negative influence, but more of the negative. FRAN group gatherings, attracts passer- bys to a vendors' newspaper stand and some end up buying. On the negative influence, FRAN members read newspapers without much financial commitment, even though sometimes they rent. Their presence and choices creates some form of bias to prospective buyers of national dailies. This has affected the marketability of national dailies in Port Harcourt, which negates the business interest of the newspaper houses in Port Harcourt Nigeria. Hence the call for attitude change. This finding is in conformity with Ifeduba Emmanuel (2017) study on "Selling Newspaper to Free Readers: Characteristics and Correlates of a New Buying and Selling Behaviour" where he found that gatherings at newsstands in Nigeria facilitate discussions and information sharing among readers, which can attract passersby who may subsequently purchase newspapers. However, he also noted that the practice of renting newspapers at these stands might lead to reduced direct sales for publishers, indicating a need for attitude change among readers to support the newspaper industry financially.

Research Question 2: What is the level of patronage of free readers association of newspapers and the marketability of national dailies in Port Harcourt? This study found that FRAN presence doesn't make customers not to buy from vendors of newspapers, but does not patronize newspaper vendors as much as they read for free. This finding is in agreement with the findings according to ResearchCage 2017, 'Influence of free readers' activities on newspaper circulation in Nigeria', which shows that, majority of the respondents

claimed that once they have read the newspapers at news stand, they will not border to buy paper again as there was no point in buying once all news was know already.

Research Question 3: What type of news content does Free Readers Association of Newspapers in Port Harcourt find most interesting? This study found that the free readers association of newspapers in Port Harcourt come to newsstands mainly because of Political and sports news. This is consistent with Karx Elihu & Blumers (1974) 'Uses and Gratification theory' where the audience tends to be more associated and use media contents which gives them their desired gratifications. It equally agrees with Igbeka & Ola (2010) on a study titled "Use of Newspapers by Nigerian University Students: The Case of Delta State University, Anwai Campus" which examines how students utilize newspapers for information and recreation. The research indicates a high usage rate, with students favouring content related to their disciplines and unbiased reporting.

Conclusion

This research work arrived to the conclusion that in as much as there are few positive contributions of FRAN to Newspaper marketability in Port Harcourt, for instance; a push in sales for publishers of Punch Newspaper, which is the most sort for by FRAN, thereby making most actual buyers opt for it, but the excesses of free readers association of newspapers should be curtailed to give room for prospective customers of newspapers to have access to newspapers stand for patronage, if not handled properly, some Newspapers might go out of business, due to the negative influence of FRAN on the choices of genuine buyers. Therefore, newspaper houses generally should revisit its marketing strategies generally to stimulate increase in the sales of national dailies in Port Harcourt.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations of this study:

1. The study recommends for a binding legislation to guide the relationship between vendors and free readers of newspapers in order to minimize the rising conflicts between the former and the later, since the FRAN has some positive added value to national dailies marketability in Port Harcourt.
2. The study also recommends for reduction of national dailies' copy price to enable free readers association of newspapers pay at Newspaper stands in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.
3. The study equally recommends that newspaper vendors should identify constant free readers and agree for a subscription fee or an stipend to be paid to vendors before reading any newspaper at a newspaper-stand as a part of control mechanism to check the excesses of the free readers association of newspapers of Nigeria especially in Port Harcourt.

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