

ONLINE NEWSPAPER USES AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract

Many current studies approved that online newspaper is more popular compared to traditional newspaper, and this trend also included university students as one of the increasing readers. Therefore, this paper discusses the uses of online news among university students in Malaysia by specifically looking at their background which is gender, course of study, and the gratifications gained from the reading. Findings suggested that these three criterias must be considered in order to produce better online newspaper in future.

Keywords: online newspaper, student, gender, course, gratification

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, as of July 2012 internet users reached 25.3 million. Out of that number, there are 5 million broadband users, 2.5 million wireless broadband users and 10 million 3G subscribers (Salman et al., 2013).

According to Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) (2015) in their Internet Users Survey 2014, the mode age group falls to the cohort of 20-24 which covered almost a quarter of user base, which is 24.2%, followed by 25-29 years old, which is 19.3%. The most popular reason of using Internet is getting information, even statistic also showed an incline towards social networking and entertainment.

This fact is undeniable because with the rise of the new media, the reading public now has a different source of information about the realities that happen in everyday life (Samani et al., 2015). Newspaper as one of the imperative media which play a vital role in disseminating and spreading information concerning the latest trends and happenings on the national and the international events (Akanda & Haque, 2013), has been found by most research that there is a decline in newspaper readership among youths (Freeman, 2013). However, the latest trend showed that the majority of young adults prefer online news instead of traditional news media (Freeman, 2013).

Pavlik (1997) stated that news content on the Internet has evolved in three stages. Briefly, the first stage which is still the most popular is characterized by simply the reproduction of content available through traditional printed news sources and includes early versions of sites like Thestar.com and Utusan.com in Malaysia. The second stage is characterized by the creation of original content with the addition of hyperlinks that enable access to additional information. In the third stage consumers are presented with original content designed specifically for the Internet. The last stage is characterized by a willingness to rethink the nature of community online and a willingness to experiment with new forms of storytelling and involves immersive storytelling which allows readers to navigate through content in ways that extend beyond linear presentation of information (as cited in Chung, Nam & Stefanone, 2012). In Malaysia, the decision made by the Mahathir's administration that the Internet will not be censored has given rise to the flourishing growth of online newspapers (Samani et al., 2015).

1.1 Problem Statement

Statistics reported by MCMC (2015) revealed that the most Internet users in Malaysia encompasses Malaysian higher education students who are normally around 20-24 years old. As mentioned by Ayub, Hamid & Nawawi (2014), the Internet is widely used by students in universities to seek relevant information and materials to complete their assignments or projects.

From socializing online, to recreational Web surfing, to academic uses, students are comfortable using the internet as an information resource, a medium through which to pursue relationships, and a source of entertainment (Jones, Johnson-Yale & Millermaier, 2009). In addition, Freeman (2013) found that most Malaysian university students choose the Internet as their main source of news. Meanwhile in German, the frequency of traditional news device use (radio/TV/newspaper) is much lower among undergraduate students, while mobile

devices has been found extend news usage to a broad range of new situations, and thereby completely penetrate the everyday lives of users (Struckmann & Karnowski, 2016).

The question then is why do university students read online news?

In discussing about need and motives behind traditional and online media usage, uses and gratifications (U&G) theory is among the theory that has been applied extensively (Florenthal, 2015).

The motivations revealed by U&G studies have been largely categorized into four kinds: “diversion (i.e., as an escape from routines or for emotional release), social utility (i.e., to acquire information for conversations), personal identity (i.e., reinforce attitudes, beliefs, and values), and surveillance (i.e., to learn about one's community, events, and political affairs),” as was initially conceived by Katz and colleagues in 1974 (Ruggiero, 2000, p. 26).

However after referring to a series of exploratory factor analyses and the study of Kaye and Johnson (2001), in which a variety of motivational factors were presented from Internet uses and gratifications research, Ko (2002) postulates that there are four major motivations for using the Internet, which is information, convenience, entertainment, and social interaction. Therefore, this study adapted these four motivations in order to identify the uses of online news among university students.

1.2 Research Objectives

This study set out 2 main objectives in order to explore the uses of online news among university students.

- 1) To identify the criterias that influence the uses of online news
- 2) To find out the gratifications gain through reading online news

2.0 METHODOLOGY

University of Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR), Kampar Campus, is made up of six faculties and one foundation program, which is Faculty of Arts and Social Science, Faculty of Business and Finance, Faculty of Science, Faculty of Engineering and Green Technology, Faculty of Information and Communication Technology, Institute of Chinese Studies and Foundation Studies. Kampar campus was chosen for the study based on the consideration that most of the courses of study are offered in this campus compared to other UTAR campuses.

Survey research method was used for this study. Total of 300 respondents were sampled using purposeful and random sampling techniques. The questionnaire was administered with the help of two research assistants. A structured questionnaire was used in the collection of data from the respondents. The questionnaire comprises two sections which is A and B. Section A contained general demographic information such as gender and course of study. While Section B contained key issues of the reasons for reading online newspaper. The questionnaires were then analyzed by using frequency distribution and percentage.

3.0 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

3.1 Demographic Profile

Table 1: Gender of Respondents

	Frequency	Percentage
Male	153	51.0
Female	147	49.0
Total	300	100.0

Table 2: Course of Study

Faculty	Frequency	Percentage
Faculty of Arts and Social Science (FAS)	97	32.3
Faculty of Business and Finance (FBF)	111	37.0
Faculty of Information and Communication Technology (FICT)	31	10.3
Faculty of Engineering and Green Technology (FEGT)	12	4.0
Faculty of Science (FS)	7	2.3
Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS)	4	1.3
Foundation Studies	38	12.7
Total	300	100.0

This study recorded that 153 male students and 147 female students have responded to the survey. All these respondents age are around 20-29 years old, and they are also is in the progress of doing their undergraduate and foundation study in their respective faculty. Majority of the respondents are taking course from Faculty of Business and Finance.

Table 3: Prefer Method of Reading News

	Frequency	Percentage
Print Newspaper	33	11.0
Online News	149	49.7
Both Print & Online	118	39.3
Total	300	100.0

Meanwhile, findings in Table 2 showed that 11% of the respondents prefer to read print newspapers compared to 49.7% which is only read online news. Another 39.3% chose to read both type of newspaper. This result is similar with Mathew, Ogedebe & Adeniji (2013) which also had minority of the respondents that prefer not to read online news.

However, it can be concluded that 89% of the respondents read online news, and this findings is parallel with results found by Freeman (2013) where university students in Malaysia are fairly intensive users of online news sites as more than half of the respondents read online news regularly.

Meanwhile, the reason to use both method can be connected to findings found by Struckmann & Karnowski (2016) where newspapers are more often used in the early morning hours, and their non-usage decreases significantly in the late hours after 6pm, presumably when their content is not up-to-date anymore. Besides, as a student, respondent must be alert with all type of sources in getting credible information. Both print and online news can be considered as assisting each other in providing information to the readers.

Table 4: Frequency of Access Online News

	Frequency	Percentage
Several times a day	52	17.3
Once a day	69	23.0
Several times a week	56	18.7
Once a week	48	16.0
2-3 times a month	29	9.7
Once a month	8	2.7
Less often than once a month	11	3.7
Don't know	27	9
Total	300	100.0

The connection between age 20-24 years old and university students has been proved previously by Freeman (2013), where this is the group that regularly reads more online news. Therefore, when the findings in Table 4 showed that majority of university students in this study access online news once a day, which is 23%, then the second highest is 18.7% which is access online news several times a week, it shows that our university students have a positive relationship with online news.

Table 5: Reading Local Online News

	Frequency	Percentage
Thestar.com	125	41.7
Berita Harian	13	4.3
China Press	44	14.7
Guang Ming Daily	54	18.0
Harian Metro	1	.3
Others / Don't know	63	21
Total	300	100.0

Table 6: Reading International Online News

	Frequency	Percentage
Yahoo! News	37	12.3
CNN	120	40.0
NBC	22	7.3
MSN News	46	15.3
TIME.COM	7	2.3
The Guardian	6	2.0
Others / Don't know	62	20.7
Total	300	100.0

Findings revealed that the most consulted local online news by both male and female students are Thestar.com, Guang Ming Daily, and China Press, while the most consulted international online news by both students are CNN, MSN News, and Yahoo! News. These three international online news can be assumed as popular due to their capabilities in providing news content from a wide range of online sources and offer links to other news sites (Chung, Nam & Stefafone, 2012).

The rank of Thestar.com as the top Malaysian online news sites has also been proved previously in a report produced by Open Society Foundations (Ding, Koh & Surin, 2013). However, the listed of Guang Ming Daily, and China Press in this study can be assumed as due to the majority of respondents which is Chinese. Meanwhile, item others/don't know the name of online local news read by the respondents have been identified as unknown which can be due to the inconsistent reading online news activity.

3.1 Online News Uses

3.1.1 Gender

Table 5: Gender & Dependency on Internet

	Internet		Total
	Yes	No	
Gender Male	121	32	153
Female	138	9	147
Total	259	41	300

Findings found by Jones, Johnson-Yale & Millermaier (2009), showed that male students spending more time online than their female counterparts. This is difference as in Table 5 and Table 6 which showed that male and female university students in this current study has a small gap in their dependency on Internet.

Table 6: Gender & Method of Reading News

	Way			Total	
	Print	Online	Both		
Gender	Male	16 10.5%	74 48.4%	63 41.2%	153 100.0%
	Female	17 11.6%	75 51.0%	55 37.4%	147 100.0%
Total		33 11.0%	149 49.7%	118 39.3%	300 100.0%

Table 7: Gender & General Opinion Toward Online News

	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Technology Advancement	32	29	61
Free News	40	46	86
Breaking News	17	23	40
Youth News	8	4	12
Interactive News	5	6	11
News for Everyone	19	13	32
Watchdog News	5	10	15
Modern News Medium	12	8	20
Development of News	2	2	4
Others / No Idea	13	6	19
Total	153	147	300

Interestingly, this study also found that even some of male students admitted their less dependency on Internet, however, majority of male students show their tendency to read online news more than printed newspaper. While, female students showed the balance pattern between tendency on Internet and read online news.

The tendency of male and female students to read online news can be explained through respondents general opinion toward online news which is free news. Therefore, even there is some respondents prefer to read printed newspaper compared to online news, however, the concept of free news has encouraged them to accept the existence of online news.

3.1.2 Course of Study

Table 8: Faculty & Method of Reading News

Faculty	Number of Respondents	Method		
		Print	Online	Both
FAS	97	11.3%	61.9%	26.8%
FBF	111	10.8%	41.4%	47.7%
FICT	31	9.7%	41.9%	48.4%
FEGT	12	8.3%	25.0%	66.7%
ICS	4		50.0%	50.0%
FS	7		57.1%	42.9%
Foundation Studies	38	15.8%	55.3%	28.9%

Table 9: Course of Study & Frequency of Access Online News

	Faculty							Total
	FAS	FBF	FICT	FEGT	ICS	FS	Foundation Studies	
Several times a day	18	16	8	1	0	2	7	52
Once a day	22	26	6	3	0	1	11	69
Several times a week	20	21	4	4	2	0	5	56
Once a week	17	17	3	0	0	0	11	48
2-3 times a month	10	8	2	2	1	2	4	29
Once a month	1	6	1	0	0	0	0	8
Less often than once a month	3	4	2	1	1	0	0	11
Don't know	6	12	4	1	0	2	0	25
Never	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
Total	97	111	31	12	4	7	38	300

In terms of Internet use for academic purposes, students in social sciences, agriculture and computer sciences scored the highest (Ayub, Hamid & Nawawi, 2014). However, in this study regarding the uses of online news, students in arts and social sciences, business and finance, and information and communication technology, shown high interest in reading online news.

The high number of students in business and finance could be due to the need to get information about current economic condition either local or international. While, for students in arts and social sciences, their programs/subjects such as journalism, public relations, and

advertising needed them to be exposed to current issues. This requirement can be seen through the frequency of access online news where students in arts and social science is the highest in accessing online news several times a day.

3.1.3 Gratifications

Table 9: Gratifications Gain From Online News

Gratification	Items	Frequency	Mean
Information	Learn	165	164.7
	Useful	148	
	Research	181	
Entertainment	Pass time	132	117.6
	Habit	104	
	Like	119	
	Enjoyable	112	
	Entertaining	121	
Convenience	Easy to read	161	169.5
	Convenient to use	180	
	Can read anytime	179	
	Less effort	158	
Social Interaction	Current issue	152	142.5
	Keep up	184	
	Express	107	
	Share	127	

A few studies have examined the question of what drives students to use online news and revealed associated motivations such as to obtain information on public affairs, politics/governments (Akanda & Haque, 2013). Majority of respondents in study by Mathew, Ogedebe & Adeniji (2013) read online news because they are up-to-date, current and cheaper. And, this study also found the same pattern with a little bit different data. Gratification over the information gathered from online news still been considered as important.

However, majority of students in this study read online news because of they satisfy with its convenience element. This situation could be due to their responsibility as student which need them to involve not only in academic activities. With online news which is easy to read compared to journal or book, easy to use even with audio and video provided, can be read at anytime such as through mobile etc., and less effort is needed especially when it can be linked to other relevant websites, students will feel that online news is really make their life easier not just as a student but also in their different role.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The outputs of this study may provide useful information for the better online news development in future. By considering the current generation gratifications, online news owners/publishers are now capable to prepare a guideline that can be considered in order to maintain their current readers and increasing their future readers.

As stressed by Makaruddin (2006), young people is the group that publishers need to nurture, are revolutionizing the way they access news. Therefore, newspaper owners/publishers must be realistic enough to abandon what has not and will not work and be imaginative enough to find new ways of meeting their audiences' ever evolving need for information.

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