

Influence of Personal Experience on Readership of Local Contents in National Newspapers Among Residents of Select Communities in Anambra North



Peter Chierike Ikegbunam¹, Chinenye Nwabueze², Ph. D, Emmanuel Odishika, Ph. D³

¹Department of Mass Communication Paul University Awka Anambra State, Nigeria

²Contributing Editor National Newsbreak Newspaper Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria

³Department of Mass Communication Novena University, Ogume, Delta State, Nigeria

Abstract: This study is a response to over concentration of media studies on media effect. Premised on the negligence of what personal experiences and social ties can do to media consumers. The study examined whether personal experiences stimulate the need for information among respondents; if personal experience of issues informs readership of local news in national newspapers; determine whether community attachment encourages exposure to local news in national newspapers and establish whether people who are more involved in a community read local contents in national newspaper more than those who are less involved. The study applied survey and FGD research methods using questionnaire and interview guide to gather data from 400 respondents purposively selected from a total of 1,554,095 residents of the study area. The community attachment and sense of community theories were used to provide theoretical background for the study. Findings revealed that personal experiences of an issue in a community involvement of the resident encourage the desire for media interpretation of the issues already known. Drawing from available literatures and field data from the study, the researcher equally found that the more closely tied and committed one is to one's community, the more one desires to know about that community. The two null hypotheses tested and rejected provided more statistical support to the research findings obtained from the study.

KEYWORDS: Personal experience, community attachment, local communities, local news contents, social structures, newspaper readership

INTRODUCTION

Previous media effects researchers (Sotirovic & McLeod, 2001; Jeffres, 2002; Mersey, 2009) have argued that personal experience with issues or prevailing problems in a given community diminishes media use among those who are closely attached to the community, a situation which in turn reduces the rate or level of media effect among the members. Community attachment studies Finnegan and Viswanath, 1988; Janowitz, 1967; Park 1923; Stamm, 1985; Stone, 1987; Stamm and Campbell, 1983 all cited in Perloff, (2010) maintained that personal attachment with issues and events in a community will increase media usage. Their reason was drawn from the fact that the citizens who have been acquainted with the problems and events that are conversant with the community will need more of background information which they cannot provide for themselves except from the press. By this, the press is seen as possessing some technical skills in information gathering that can make them secure the much needed information and disseminate same for public consumption. This role is seen as something the interpersonal communication among the people cannot provide, given the nature of journalism profession and the investigative requirements therein.

Here, the local newspapers which according to Atkins (2016) are providing the people with local news about their community become pertinent to every kind of information that can appeal to the information need satisfaction of the people. This stems from the fact that since the people have known about the problem in the society, they strive to get interpretations to certain prevailing issues in the community through the media since that is the only trusted source that can provide a reliable clue for an informed decision among the citizens which in turn stimulates civic engagement and facilitates community participation among readers (Jeffres & Kumar, 2014).

The above postulation was further supported by McCombs (2014) who maintained that although all media carry the potentials to affect public opinion, the close, frequent and regular personal interaction of the citizens with prevailing communal issues creates the desire for getting journalistic interpretation of issues among them. In consideration of the relationship between community

Influence of Personal Experience on Readership of Local Contents in National Newspapers Among Residents of Select Communities in Anambra North

attachment and citizens, Lauterer (2004) argues that lack of connection between community newspaper and the citizenship leads to detachment from the community, less credibility and fewer readers.

From the above argument, it is pertinent at this point to recall that as public agenda influences media content, media content also influences public agenda. Hence, the symbiotic relationship between media agenda and public agenda cannot be underestimated in the context of media effects studies. In trying to establish the relationship between the variables above, the study explores the concept of community attachment model as a panacea to examine the level at which personal experience and social ties among the citizens can influence their newspaper reading behaviour.

Considering early scholarly postulations on community attachment, reading of a particular local newspaper is positively associated with home ownership, involvement in community organizations and the neighborhood (Stamm and Campbell, 1983 Janowitz, 1967; Park 1923 all cited in Raza & Parvez 2015). The import of the scholarly postulation above is that the closer one is to community activities, the more likely one is to be patronizing locally produced newspaper contents which have been found sound enough to satisfy the information need of the people within the rural community. Similarly, in a recent study, Harcey (2014) while citing Stamm & Guest (1991) argue that reading depends more upon social ties than the other way round and concluded that reading of local news content correlates with involvement, feeling of closeness to the community and the extent to which residents identify with community.

Moreover, contrary to position of the agenda setting school of thoughts, literature from community attachment model, supports the view that participation in public affairs increases as self-exposure to local information in national newspapers rises (Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1980, p. 71 cited in Yamamoto 2011). This information is similar to the majority of information collected on newspapers. However, as the authors point out, that is based on data collected predominantly from metropolitan newspapers. Studies conducted at the community level, however, are consistent with these findings. Yamamoto (2011) found in an analysis of survey data collected on the northwestern region of the United States that community newspaper reading promotes social cohesion and community engagement. Park (1929) in Lowrey *et al.* (2008) found that local contents readership is related to community organization and membership which usually facilitate individuals' integration into community activities and participation. They further suggest that local news contents, including daily local news contents of newspapers, facilitate meaning-making about community and help readers understand community structure. That understanding leads to community participation, as demonstrated by Paek, Yoon, and Shah (2005) who found that regular daily newspaper readers are more active and engaged with their communities than non-newspaper readers.

It was against the premise of these arguments and diversified scholarly propositions that this research set out to examine if personal experiences of people in select communities in Anambra north increase or decrease readership of contents of national newspaper among residents.

STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM

Mass media effects on audiences have been extensively studied by media scholars and used as a basis for building theories and testing of hypotheses (Jonah, 2015 xx). In contrast, there is relatively little scholarship on personal experiences of the individuals in the community and the relationship these experiences have with the local contents readership in newspapers. Justifying the above postulation, Smith, (2015) argues that there is little scholarly work on community journalism. From the above, it has been clear that the line between personal experience influence on readership of local contents newspapers among community dwellers and the identification of issue salience in the media as an aspect of media effects study have been areas that had little or no serious research interest among media scholars.

The correlation found between the media agenda and the public agenda could be interpreted in two ways: Does the media agenda cause the public agenda, or vice versa? From the above position by famous media scholars, the relationship between personal experience in the select communities and readership of local contents of national newspapers among community dwellers, with a view to ascertaining whether this variable increases or decreases readership of local contents in newspaper among the residents, cannot be ascertained without an empirical study of this nature. Against this backdrop therefore, the researcher developed interest in evaluating whether social ties and personal experiences in the select communities influence the readership of their local newspaper or decrease same among residents.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main purpose of the study is to explore the relationship between personal experience of rural dwellers and readership of local contents in national newspapers. The specific research objectives of the study are to:

1. Ascertain whether personal experiences stimulate the need for information among respondents.
2. Find out whether personal experience of issues informs readership of local news in national newspaper among respondents.

Influence of Personal Experience on Readership of Local Contents in National Newspapers Among Residents of Select Communities in Anambra North

3. Determine whether community attachment encourages exposure to local news in national newspapers among residents of select communities.
4. Establish whether people who are more involved in a community read local contents in national newspaper more than those who are less involved.

SCOPE AND DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This study covered only the residents of select communities in Anambra North. The study examined their personal experience as resident members and their readership of local news in national newspapers which are expected to be publishing information about the happenings and events in the society. This research does not cover other senatorial districts in Anambra and any finding and recommendations that are put forward as a result of this research can be used for generalization on all rural dwellers.

In another development, since the population of the select communities in Anambra North is enormous to be studied, it could be possible that the sample size used for the study is not a perfect representation of the population of the communities under study and the researcher's effort in controlling such error places difficulties in the study.

The diverse nature of the locations of the select towns under study also challenged the researcher in trying to reach out to the sampled participants in the study. The above challenges were surmounted by the researcher through multitasking.

JUSTIFICATION FOR THE STUDY

While the effect of media on the audience members of a community has been at the center of media scholars' attention, the influence and relationship between personal experience in a community and readership of local contents in national newspapers remains relatively unnoticed.

Over the years, media scholars have concentrated on media effects on the audience members thereby ascribing greater power to the mass media. In line with this, many theories have been developed or even advanced in the area of media effects. Little have they identified that the experiences people have over a particular issue may have direct or indirect influence on their media use (Putnam 2000).

From earlier mass communication scholars, the emphasis has been on how communication variables are woven into models predicting community participation mostly controlled by personal experiences of the citizens. Here this study shifts attention to how newspaper reading fits into a network of predictors of community involvement that begin with values (experiences) among the people. Research through the decades has consistently linked previous personal experiences and social ties to a community with newspaper reading, especially of local contents (Jeffres *et al.* 2007). Community ties and organizations themselves are likely to reinforce each other, so a decline in the latter could have negative effects on the strength of the local newspaper relationship (Lee, 2004).

Moreover, between the two schools of thought that share divergent views on previous personal experience of the people in the community and their news consumption in the newspaper, none has any empirical backing to their claims. This study therefore has come to provide statistical and empirical data as proof on the relationship between personal experience and local news contents consumption using select communities in Anambra North senatorial district of Anambra state.

The importance of personal experience to media exposure and media effects with regard to select communities seems important because it is one way of investigating basic components and relationships that make up modern society (Becker & Fredin, 1987, p. 25 cited in Atkins, (2016). The current study is a preliminary investigation that questions whether personal experience of the members of a community increases or decreases readership of local news contents in national newspaper.

This line of argument was developed following the quest to ascertain the relationship between personal experience, community attachment and reading of newspapers among the residents of select communities in Anambra North. This study calls the attention of media scholars to the area of local news contents consumption and personal experience studies with a view to examining and establishing a clear empirical relationship between what personal experience and level of attachments of citizens in a community have to do with their desire for satisfaction of information need from the media. This study also reveals the technicality of the media practice and builds on the skills that journalists have that make them more disposed to provide the required interpretation of issues to the citizens in the community.

The study as well provided an empirical explanation to the long-lasting argument on whether personal experience and social ties in a community increase or decrease local news contents consumption in national newspapers among residents especially those who are closely attached to the community under study. In another development, the study is an addition to research literature in the area of media effects and issue obtrusiveness in the media.

Influence of Personal Experience on Readership of Local Contents in National Newspapers Among Residents of Select Communities in Anambra North

COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT THEORY

Community attachment theory was developed by Stamm and Fortini-Campbell (1981) but was later presented by Stamm in 1985. Attachment is defined as a feeling that links individuals to their community of residence through sentiment, involvement, and friendship (Goudy, 1990; Kasarda & Janowitz, 1974; Sampson, 1988; Stinner *et al.* 1990). The theory therefore evolved as a response to the yearning interest in community attachment which lasted throughout the 1970's and 1980's among communication and social science scholars. The theory posits that newspaper reading habits are both pre-established and developed. According to the proponents of the theory, as people become more attached and tied to their community, the more they feel they belong to such community, and their reading of local news contents in national newspapers about their community therefore, increases.

Applying this theory to the current study, the author believes that the individuals' closeness to the community will enhance their attitude to subscribing to local newspaper in respect to their tie to the place where they settle. In this case, those who are closely tied to the society remains the very ardent consumers of local newspapers since everybody wants to be seen in the news or see his people's activities reported in the news.

SENSE OF COMMUNITY THEORY

Sense of Community Theory or in its original vernacular Psychological Sense of Community Theory (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) is not a communication discipline theoretical construct, although it is applicable to the field (Mersey, 2009). It is, as its original name suggests, born out of social psychology as a means to study both geographic and interest-based communities (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Sarason, 1974). A sense of community, as described by Chavis and Wandersman (1990), is an overarching value, or "a phrase commonly used by citizens, politicians, and social scientists to characterize the relationship between the individual and the social structure."

Sense of Community Theory is a widely applicable theory often utilized as a lens through which different communities, shared values, symbols, and commonalities among its members are examined. It helps quantify seemingly intangible feelings and serves as a means to measure and compare one group to another. Relating this theory to the current study, it is the views of the researcher that the higher the relationship between an individual and his societal ties, the higher chances of the individual to patronize local news contents from national newspapers. By implication, it can therefore, concluded that there are greater chances of those residents in select communities in Anambra North to patronize the local news contents published in national newspapers in respect to the fact that they wish to get more information about themselves and their activities.

Empirical review

Harcey, (2014) conducted a study on whether local news counts with focus upon local news and its effects on community attachment. This study examined the extent to which a focus upon local news contents might significantly improve individuals' attachment to their community and the effect of a focus upon local news on community attachment using a conceptual model informed by three sociological approaches: linear-development, systemic model, and social capital. The study found that at the applied level, given technological advances, a focus upon local news can provide a supplemental contribution to community development. It was also found that building upon previous efforts of community development, a focus upon local news might provide a tangible, inexpensive, and timely way to promote greater community attachment which might ultimately lead towards sound community development.

Citing Besser (1994), the author indicates that, although potentially frivolous or superficial, newspapers have the potential to strengthen attachment. Given the role of a focus upon local news on community attachment within this research, it is evident that a creation or improvement of a weekly paper within a community could lead to greater development.

Based on the above findings, the researcher recommended that organizations within Iowa should try to help local newspapers create networks. The Iowa Newspaper Association, for example, is a useful way to disseminate this research to all Iowa newspapers and suggested that she will write a brief summary of findings, potentially a news report, and send it to the Iowa Newspaper Association to distribute to its members to ensure that the recommendation gets to the concerned citizens for implementation. This study is related to the current study in the sense that both are centered on community newspaper and its audience.

On the other hand, as this study is centered on what community news could do to the community when focused on by the people; this current study is focused on what personal experience of the individual members of the community could do to the content of community newspapers. This point makes this current study academically relevance because it is exploring an area that is almost forgotten by numerous social science and communication scholars as can be seen from the empirical studies so far examined.

Finally, Demers, (1996) study is designed to ascertain whether personal experience among members of a community increase or decrease newspaper reading among them. The study was an experimental study with two groups one for the community and another

Influence of Personal Experience on Readership of Local Contents in National Newspapers Among Residents of Select Communities in Anambra North

for the metropolitan residents. The study adopted a survey research method using phone interview in the study of a randomly selected sample from the university community and the metropolitan community. Findings revealed that personal experience increases media use among people but not in all cases. It increases media use if the content is in cognizance with previous knowledge or social structural linkage.

This study is different from the current study in that the current one is premised in Africa while the previous one is premised in Europe. It is also pertinent to state that as this one is concerned with the readership of local and national newspapers among residents over issue that concerns them, the previous study under this review is focused on the readership of only community newspapers among residents of a community. It is also good to establish that as the previous study is an experimental research, the current one is not.

METHOD

This study adopted the survey (quantitative) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) (qualitative) research methods using the questionnaire and the in-depth interview guide as data collection techniques. The essence of using these two methods was to ensure that any lapses created in one are addressed by the other. The researcher decided to use the two methods in the study in order to secure viable and reliable information concerning the people's information seeking behavior controlled by their already acquired personal experience in relation to their community.

AREA OF STUDY

This study is premised in Anambra North senatorial district. The choice of the area is because they have some salient issues on ground ranging from local/town leadership tussle, Fulani herdsmen issues and flood disaster. According to 2006 census figure as projected in 2015, Ayamelum has 203,200 inhabitants; Anambra East has 195,500 inhabitants, Anambra West has 214,900 inhabitants; Ogbaru has 286,900 inhabitants; Onitsha North has 161,800 inhabitants; Onitsha South has 176,200 inhabitants where Oyi local government has 216,100 inhabitants making a total of 1,454,600 people projected to 1,554,095 in 2018. These are the seven local governments that the affected towns fall in. The choice of these select communities in this research was based on the fact that the communities have one salient issue or the other that are capable of generating media attention either in the local or national newspapers. The choice of the towns was also motivated by the researcher's discretion on where to premise the study. The towns covered in this study are Nkwelle Ezunaka which is battling with intra-community crisis over shortage of land as they have almost sold and resold all pieces of land in their area. Nteje town was also selected following their local leadership tussle which turned bloody in the middle of 2017. Ogbaru town in Ogbaru local government area of the zone was also selected for their flood prone environment. The towns of Omor, Anaku, Omasi, Umerum Umumbo and Igbakwu were selected for the flood disaster that hit the area in 2017, the conditions of road networks connecting the local government and other special leadership problems rampant in the area (The Omor Igweship and town union crisis). The entire Onitsha North and South were affected in this study because of the Agbuyim Chieftaincy title-taking which almost tore the traditional institution apart in Onitsha. Mmiata Anam and Umuoba Anam were selected in Anambra West while Aguleri and Umueri were selected in Anambra East following the effect of the communal war and flood rampant in the area.

POPULATION OF STUDY

Being a study carried out in select towns in Anambra North, the population of study is the number of people that reside in the affected local governments harboring the towns where the study was premised.

In this regard, the population of this study is therefore, the population of the people in the seven local governments that harbor the select towns in Anambra North which according to the projected population in 2018 is 1,554,095 persons (NPC, 2018; National Bureau of Statistics, 2018). Meanwhile the sample for this study was drawn from this population. Moreover, the sample selected from the entire population is shared among the local governments in the area using proportionate sampling technique.

SAMPLE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

Due to the fact that the entire Anambra North residents cannot be studied for this research, a sample was drawn for easy and manageable reasons. This figure is projected to 2018: thus $PP=GP \times PI \times T = 1,554,095$ from where the sample size for this study is 400. Taro Yamani's formula was used to get the sample.

The study used purposive sampling technique in choosing the select communities under study. This was based on Wrench, Madodox, Richmond and McCroskey (2008, p. 291) that it is a sampling technique that allows the researcher the opportunity to ensure that participants recruited for a study have knowledge of the phenomenon under study. Based on the above position by these scholars, the researcher adopted the purposive sampling technique to select respondents who read newspapers. This was done by asking the

Influence of Personal Experience on Readership of Local Contents in National Newspapers Among Residents of Select Communities in Anambra North

participants whether they read newspapers before issuing them the research question or categorizing them among the FGD groups. Residents who decline reading newspapers were not among the participants studied in the work.

INSTRUMENT FOR DATA COLLECTION

The study used a well-structured questionnaire which was distributed among the sample. The questionnaire instrument had two sections namely: the demographic section and thematic section. The demographic section was used to elicit information about the bio-data of the respondents, while the psychographic section supplied information on the research questions. The questionnaire contained 20 questions constructed in simple sentences to avoid ambiguity. The study also applied the use of in-depth interview (FGD) as a data gathering technique to buttress the information obtained from the questionnaire.

METHOD OF ADMINISTRATION OF INSTRUMENT

The questionnaire instrument was administered directly to the respondents by the researcher and his assistants through hand-delivery. This is called paper-based-hand-delivery method to administer questionnaires to the selected participants. The reason for hand-delivery of research instrument is to boost return rate of the questionnaire from respondents. As well, the in-depth interview was carefully controlled by the researcher with the aim of encouraging precision by providing support or justifying errors originating from any sort of bias resulting from the questionnaire information as obtained.

DATA PRESENTATION ANALYSIS WELL-STRUCTURED

Table 1: A 5-point Likert-scale responding to the five research questions posed for the study

Variables	SA	A	UN	D	SD	T	X
Personal experiences of an issue in local communities inform newspaper readership of local news contents among community dwellers	78 390	67 268	89 267	34 68	21 21	1014	3.5
Personal experiences generally informs residents readership of local contents of newspapers?	98 490	76 304	57 171	25 50	33 33	1048	3.6
Personal experience encourages non exposure to local news contents in national newspapers?	47 235	57 228	67 201	82 164	34 34	862	2.9
Those who are more involved in a community read local news contents in newspapers more than those who are less involved.	69 345	59 236	82 246	60 180	19 19	1026	3.5
Those who have strong personal contact with a social system have greater chances of reading local news contents in newspaper more than those who have not?	96 480	75 300	68 204	35 70	15 15	1069	3.6
The more popular an issue or event is, the lesser the people sought to know about the issue?	45 225	54 216	49 147	86 172	55 55	815	2.8

Source: Researchers' field survey, 2021

Table 1 above responds to the five research questions posed for the study using the 5-point likert scale measure in accepting or rejecting hypothetical statements made in respect to the research objectives. Looking at the table, the first, second, fourth and fifth hypothetical statements were accepted for being able to secure 3.6, 3.6, 3.5 and 3.6 respectively as their mean score in the table whereas the third and sixth hypothetical statements failed to meet the 3.0 average score on a 5-point likert scale measure and were therefore, rejected. All these hypothetical statements were accepted or rejected based on the data above attached to each of them as obtained in the field.

Table 2: Different reasons respondents read newspapers

Do you like to be seen or heard in the newspapers?	Frequency	Percent
National information	89	30.7
Entertainment information	86	29.7
Community information	75	25.9
Education information	39	13.7
Total	289	100

Source: Researchers' field survey, 2021

Considering the reasons for the respondents' local news contents readership in national dailies, it was observed that the respondents seek more of national information which they believed will be more authentic and reliable on issues that requires interpretation and clarifications. From the table, 89 respondents accounting for 30.7 percent of the population admitted that their reason for reading

Influence of Personal Experience on Readership of Local Contents in National Newspapers Among Residents of Select Communities in Anambra North

newspapers is to get national information. This was followed by 86 other respondents representing 29.7 percent of the population who admitted that they read for entertainment and fashion. Community information gathered 75 respondents accounting for 25.9 percent of the population under study while 39 respondents accounting for 13.7 percent read for education. Unarguably, this table demonstrated that personal attitude of readers individuals with different predetermined motive directs their information seeking in the media. It equally cast a light on the already existing personal knowledge and social ties existing between an individual and his community of origin.

Table 3: Establishing whether respondents read newspapers to justify their earlier knowledge of the community

Do respondents read newspapers to justify their earlier knowledge of the community?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	154	53.4
No	46	15.9
Can't say	89	30.7
Total	289	100

Source: Researchers' field survey, 2021

While probing to ascertain if the respondents read newspapers to justify their earlier knowledge of issues and events in the community, it was found that greater percent of the population under study read to authenticate what they have known already about their community. From the table, a total of 154 respondents accounting for 53.4 percent choose the "Yes" response category to mean that they read to justify their earlier knowledge of their respective communities whereas 89 other respondents accounting for 30.7 percent are sitting on the fence by choosing the "Can't Say" response category leaving the "No" response category with only 46 respondents accounting for 15.9 percent of the total population. This finding corroborates earlier finding by Deamers (1996) where he states that, actually the people are knowledgeable to the things that are happening in the community but requires interpretation to it from the media. This detailed interpretation of the event or issues in a locality may not be satisfied through interpersonal communication among the residents, hence the resolve to subscribe to local contents in national newspapers for further clarifications.

Table 4: Whether respondents like reading about their community or her activities in the newspapers

Do you like reading about your community in newspapers?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	248	85.8
No	15	5.1
Can't say	26	8.9
Total	289	100

Source: Researchers' field survey, 2021

On whether respondents like to read about their communities in the newspapers, table4 revealed that 248 respondents accounting for 85.8 percent of the population under study like to read about their community in the newspapers. This figure was followed by 26 respondents accounting for 8.9 percent of the population where 15 respondents controlling 5.1 percent admitted that they do not like to read about their communities in the newspapers. Further probe from the FGD revealed that those who like to read about their communities in the newspapers only like to read good stories about their communities and not something that can demean the integrity of the community or the personalities of the area. This manifested in the response from discussants from Onitsha, Nkwelle Ezunaka and Nteje whose stories are mostly of negative implications to their town.

To this effect, a discussant from Nkwelle Ezunaka, said "the life of our people have been into an impending danger of explosion following this time bomb of selling and re-selling the same piece of land to different individuals by the youths." To him the actions of different factions of the youths in the town of selling and another group re-selling the same piece of land is a time bomb waiting for explosion. The mood of the individuals from Onitsha is also of disappointment as the chiefs are divided along interests on the conferment of chieftaincy title to a non indigene.

Table 5: Whether respondents like to be seen or heard in newspapers

Do you like to be seen or heard in the newspapers?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	214	74.0
No	0	0
Can't say	75	25.9
Total	289	100

Source: Researchers' field survey, 2021

Influence of Personal Experience on Readership of Local Contents in National Newspapers Among Residents of Select Communities in Anambra North

Considering if the respondents like being read about or heard in the media, table 5 above demonstrated that virtually everybody- the goods, the bad and the ugly wants to be seen or read about in the newspapers. From the data collated, a total of 214 respondents accounting for 74.0 percent of the population admitted that they like to be seen or heard about in the newspapers, followed by 75 other respondents accounting for 25.9 percent of the population who choose the “Can’t say” response category where no respondent said No to the question.

This finding supports an earlier statement by Udeze (2016) that everyone likes to be read about in the news even the insurgents. The scholar further asserts that this reason account for continuous Boko-Haram attacks and subsequent release of photographs of their captured Chibok victims for the media to feast on.

Table 6: Respondents newspaper readership stimulating factor

Respondents newspaper readership stimulating factor	Frequency	Percent
Close contact	171	59.1
Desire for information	62	24.4
Knowing about community	56	19.3
Total	289	100

Source: Researchers’ field survey, 2021

Considering the stimulation factor for respondents’ newspaper readership, table 11 revealed that 171 respondents accounting for 59.1 percent of the population are stimulated into reading local news contents in national newspapers by their level of close contact to their various communities. This figure was followed by a total of 62 respondents representing 24.4 percent of the population who are stimulated to read newspapers by their desire to know more about their community where the desire for information among respondents came third with 56 respondents accounting for 19.3 percent of the population. From this data, it is observed that close ties to one’s community stimulates local news consumption among them.

Table 7: Respondents’ content preference in newspapers

Respondents contents preference in newspapers	Frequency	Percent
Intra-community crisis	51	17.6
Inter-communal crisis	75	25.9
Development issues	56	19.3
Environmental hazard	5	5.1
Local politics	92	31.8
Total	289	100

Source: Researchers’ field survey, 2021

On which activities that commands the respondents’ newspaper readership most, the table 7 above revealed that 92 respondents controlling 31.8 percent of the population are attracted to national newspapers by local politics followed by 75 respondents representing 25.9 percent whose newspaper readership is controlled by inter-community crisis. Development issues in the community command newspaper readership of 56 respondents accounting for 19.3 percent of the population under study where Intra-community crisis controls the newspaper readership of 51 respondents accounting for 17.6 percent of the population. Only 5.1 percent of the population which is 5 respondents is attracted to newspaper readership by environmental hazard. This table highlights the level of respondents close relationship to their communities and attention to local politics of who wins what and in what manner

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The data collection and analysis have provided answers to different research questions posed for the study. In consideration of the first research question which sought to find if personal experiences stimulate the need for information among respondents, the researcher found that personal experience of the respondents to issues in their communities stimulate the desire to read more about their community (see table 6 for more details). Personal experiences of the people according social community scholars (Boyd and Nowell, 2014; Bohus, Woods and Chan, 2005) to a large extent encourage high level of community attachment which in turn stimulates social ties. This finding lends support to an earlier finding by Deamers (1996) who concludes that when people are closely tied to their community, their information need satisfaction can hardly be met by interpersonal communication. For this reason, the people are likely to resort to the media for interpretation of the activities within the environment. This finding equally agrees with the proponents of community attachment theory which postulates that, as people become more attached and tied to the community, the more they feel they belong to such community and their reading of the local news contents in national newspaper therefore, increases (Figliomeni, 1991). Meanwhile, the finding disagrees with the position of earlier media effect scholars who according

Influence of Personal Experience on Readership of Local Contents in National Newspapers Among Residents of Select Communities in Anambra North

Raza and Parvez (2015) measure media effect based on issue obtrusiveness rather than salience of an issue to the people. This finding therefore, makes the reader to affirm that already acquired personal knowledge of people of a particular community increases their local news content consumption in national newspaper.

On the second research question which sought to ascertain if personal experience of issues inform local news contents reading in national newspapers, it was found that personal experience inform local news content readership among the respondents (see table 6). This finding is in tandem with the position of proponents of the sense of community theory which presupposes that greater the relationship between an individuals' personal experience and his societal ties, the higher chances of the individual to patronize home made news from the community related news media (Abfalter *et al.*, 2012; Tonteri *et al.*, 2011).

Here the personal ties of the individuals become the determining factor that controls their attention to certain issues in the localities. In another development, this finding equally has significantly buttressed an earlier finding made by Yamamoto (2011) who found that individuals with strong personal ties and deep relationships with other individuals within a community are more likely to subscribe to newspaper readership. From this, it could be clear that the nature of the Northern part of the state (the nature of infrastructures- road, farmers-herdsmen crisis, electricity, water, flood disaster, local leadership tussle, unemployment etc.) could have been instrumental to readership of newspapers among the residents to enable them know what next the government wants or is planning to do to better their conditions.

Further information obtained from the FGD revealed that the deplorable condition of the road network, the flood disaster (see appendix IV) rampant in the zone and the local political tussle in this area of the state subjects the people to look for information especially this period that the governor is from the area. This fact shows some level of commitment and relationship to the people's community. The import of this is that the people needed to get interpretation on the latest development about their road and light, leadership and survival from the damage done by the flood that submerged their cash and food crops. The FGD also revealed that people are more eager to disclose to the press issues that challenge their communities when it will bring about development rather than when such issues will lead to humiliation or capable of doing some damages to the image of the community. This was observed in the reactions of some participants from Onitsha and Nkwelle Ezunaka where there were social crisis of image damaging to the society.

On whether community attachment encourages exposure to local news contents consumption in national newspapers among residents of select communities, it was found that attachment to one's community increases information need satisfaction among residents. This is because, in as much as the people are aware of the development that is coming or have come, they need expert information on how they came and how to handle the developments. This information cannot be provided by interpersonal communication, hence, the subscription to the press either at the local or national level.

In one of the FGD group conducted in Omor, a discussant from Anam said that they read newspapers on salient issues of the moment. In his words, "I personally look for newspapers that carry some community related information on development. The reason is that politicians have been using our people during political campaigns. So we read to know what they have done for other communities to know how we are going to follow them in the next election". It is not out of place to recall that the select communities in Anambra North has one development problem or the other and these challenges make them vulnerable to different political promises from any politician. Another discussant from Omasi said that because of the deplorable condition of the road leading to Ayamelum, they rely on the national newspapers to know when the government said any good thing about the road. He further stated that interpersonal communication among them is not enough to provide trusted information to them and that is why they clamor for "authentic" source of information which is the newspaper. Another discussant who is a native of Omor said that their interest is to know what the government had said about the Igweship tussle in the community (See appendix V). In another development, a discussant from Ogbaru, said that they live in fear of flood disaster (See appendix IV) because series of warnings upon warning have been issued to the riverine areas over an impending flood disaster. From these views expressed in the FGD, it is pertinent to state here that the various communities are motivated to look for media information on the key problems challenging their existence and survival in their area.

From this finding, it could be observed that knowing about a given issue is not enough neither is their interpersonal communication on issues in the community enough to provide the local community dwellers the necessary information satisfaction needed to be equipped in a community. This stems from the fact that since the people have known about the problem in the society, they strive to get interpretations to these prevailing issues in the community through the media since that is the only trusted source that can provide a reliable clue for an informed decision among the citizens which in turn stimulates civic engagement and facilitates community participation among readers (Jeffres & Kumar, 2014). This finding justifies the height of reliance on media among local dwellers. This reliance however places the media on the need to ensure credibility in their reports especially when it concerns the

Influence of Personal Experience on Readership of Local Contents in National Newspapers Among Residents of Select Communities in Anambra North

local people. It equally, challenges the newspapers to be more responsible and committed to local dwellers information need satisfaction through publishing local news contents from the localities.

The above postulation was further supported by (McCombs, 2014) who argues that although all media carry the potentials to effect public opinion, the close, frequent and regular personal interaction of the citizens with prevailing communal issues creates the desire for getting journalistic interpretation of issues among them. In consideration of the relationship between community attachment and citizens, Lauterer (2004), argues that lack of connection between community news and the citizenship leads to detachment from the community.

This idea corroborates earlier finding by Deamers (1996) where he found that though the people are aware of the event that have taken place, their interpersonal communication among themselves may not be sound enough to provide them with the level of concrete information that may be needed. This reason forms the fulcrum for patronizing the any news medium that carries any local news from the communities. In one of the Focus Group Discussions, a discussant from Umueze Anam, said that he reads newspapers because the villagers are no longer trusted. In his words, “why I struggle to read newspapers is that the people who are in the village are all fake news carriers. So to be sure of what is happening I relate to newspapers. They tell you anything at their convenient time”, the man who admitted reading newspapers from his neighbor whose son is sending newspapers twice a week made a mark in his quest for the authentic information. The above finding has psychological implication. It demonstrates that the people’s desire for development guides what they need to know from the media. This was why some are interested in local politics where other are interested in communal crisis. This was captured more vividly in Davison and Cotter (1997) cited in Everingham (2001) who explored the possible relationship between psychological sense of community and interest in reading local news contents in national newspapers.

Considering whether people who are more involved in a community read local newspaper more than those who are less involved, table 6 revealed that the more people are involved in a community, the more they struggle to read about their community in the newspapers. This is because, everybody wanted to be heard or read in the newspapers. Considering early scholarly postulations on community attachment, reading of particular local news content is positively associated with home ownership, involvement in community organizations and the neighborhood (Stamm & Campbell, 1983; Janowitz, 1967; Park 1923; all cited in Raza & Parvez, 2015). The import of the scholarly postulation above is that the closer one is to community activities; the likely one is to be patronizing newspapers with local information which have been found sound enough to satisfy the information need of the people within the community. This finding was also supported by the responses from the FGD where majority of the respondents stated that residence does not necessarily control readership rather, attachment does. In the word of a discussant from Anambra West, irrespective of where you are, if your interest is in any matter taking place in the village, you must be forced to read newspapers on such topics of interest to you. In his word, “can you tell me that our people who reside in Abuja and other areas have not heard about the Fulani attack here in our area? Won’t that make them read any news from this side in any national newspapers to know if we have been consumed by their attack?”

Similarly, in a recent study, Harcey (2014) while citing Stamm and Guest (1991) argues that reading depends more upon social ties than the other way round and concluded that reading of local contents of national newspapers correlates with involvement, feeling of closeness to the community and the extent to which residents identify with community. Drawing from the above postulation, the researcher capitalized on involvement to justify why politicians who are at the political circle buy newspaper despite being aware of what had happened in the state. Simple, they need to see how the media viewed and interpreted what they had done. Same thing applies to the residents of local communities.

Considering how the people love media publicity, Udeze (2016), states that virtually everyone wants attention from the media and that accounts for why the insurgents will always struggle to launch one attack or the other in order to ensure that the media will report about them and through that they will send out the information they needed to the crowd. So, the local political power mongers and gladiators subscribe to local news content for them to see how the media interpreted their actions and activities in the locality where they operate from.

SUMMARY

The statistical analysis of data observed as presented in frequency tables and percentages have exposed readers to various discoveries from the study. Key findings of this study are hereunder summarized. Empirical evidence from the statistical analysis showed that personal experiences of the residents of a given community increase their need for local information from the newspapers. Based on the evidence on the field study, the information need of the people who are closely tied to their community cannot be perfectly satisfied by interpersonal communication among them. This is because everyone needs sound information and interpretation of salient issues in the community and this can only be provided through the media. It has also been revealed that the more vulnerable

Influence of Personal Experience on Readership of Local Contents in National Newspapers Among Residents of Select Communities in Anambra North

a given community is to adverse weather and poor facilities, the more they subscribe to media messages seeking for information about their community from the government. Research evidence also has shown that the more that people are tied to their community, the more they read about the community. This is because their interests are all vested in the success of the said community for one reason or the other

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings as discussed in Chapter Four above, the researcher concluded that there is a strong relationship between local news consumption from national newspapers and personal experience of the people depending on the nature of the issue and the people's level of commitment or attachment to the community. The researcher also concluded that the more the people are closely attached and tied to their community, the more likely they are to subscribe for local news content to help them know about their community for effective participation in community affairs. It could be seen equally from the research that, people likes to be seen, read about or be read about their community or people they know in the media. Finally, the researcher concluded that those who are more involved in a community activity love to read about such issues in the society more than those who are not deeply involved.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the above research findings and conclusion, the researcher recommended that:

1. Since the people in rural areas rely on newspapers interpretation of local events, the newspapers should as a matter of necessity ensure that events from the local areas are given media space in national newspapers.
2. Communities should provide enabling environment for journalists to be able to access their events for such events to see the light of the day. Relying on the newspapers for local information is not enough without making ones community accessible to the media.
3. Since this research have proved that there is little attention to the influence of pre-determined personal experience on local news consumption in national dailies among rural dwellers, media scholars should look into this area of study in another direction. This will support or disagree with findings made in this study.
4. That further research should examine if social ties and personal experiences of urban dwellers encourage or discourage city-based news contents in national newspaper readership city dwellers.

CONTRIBUTION TO FUTURE STUDIES

While the effects of media on the audience members of the community have been at the center of media scholars' attention, the influence and relationship of personal experience, social ties with a community and readership of local news contents in national newspapers remains relatively unnoticed. Over the years, media scholars have concentrated on media effect on the audience members thereby ascribing greater power to the mass media. In line with this, many theories have been developed or even advanced in the area of media effects. Little have they identified that the experiences people have over a particular issue can directly or indirectly influence their media use (Putnam, 2000).

For mass communication scholars, the emphasis has been on how communication variables are woven into models predicting community participation. Here we shift attention to how local news contents consumption in national newspapers fit into a network of predictors of community involvement which begin with values (experiences) among the people. Community ties and organizations themselves are likely to reinforce each other, so a decline in the latter could have negative effects on the strength of the local news contents in national newspapers (Lee, 2004).

In the academic industry, this work has attracted the attention of media scholars to an area that had suffered negligence over the years. The study had equally provided new communication scholars with the relationship between personal experience and social ties one side and media content consumption on the other. This study reveals the issue salient rather than its contingency in the media can reduce and or increase media use among the people but relative to the nature of the issue under coverage and disposition of the people.

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