



# **TODAY'S READINGS IN MASS COMMUNICATION**

**issues, insights and perspectives**

**Edited By:  
Jonathan E. Aliede, Ph.D**

**Foreward By:  
Prof. Umaru A. Pate**

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CONTEMPORARY USES AND APPLICATIONS OF THE MEDIA AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

**Dr. Stella A. Aririguzoh**

Department of Mass Communication  
Covenant University  
Canaanland, Ota, Ogun State

#### INTRODUCTION

Wilson and Wilson (2001: 32) share the opinion that the mass media have narcotizing and escapist effects on the society; and have transformed our culture into articles for sale through producing contents that entertain. But McQuail (2005:500) tells us that the influence of the media is generally likely to be indirect. The media work to change public expectations, the possibilities of meeting needs, and examine the way things are done in our social institutions. McQuail points out that other social institutions are getting more dependent on the media to link with their different publics. Altheide and Snow (1991: ix) state that "today all social institutions are media institutions". Media attention profoundly affects the way the social institutions work. Altheide and Snow (1979; 1991:10) describe the media's way of seeing and interpreting social affairs as media logic.

The media world is comprised of the different forms of communication of the various media. This includes their novelty, ability to deliver immediacy, maintain high tempo, personalization, brevity of messages, conflict generated, dramatization and celebrity orientation.

Devereux (2003:9) observes that "the mass media have played and continue to play an important part in the transformation of societies from being traditional to modern and from modern to postmodern. The experience of living in modernity and postmodernity is shaped significantly by mass mediation".

Mass communication reaches millions of people at once with the same message. Hanson (2011: 9) points out that "it is a society-wide communication process in which an individual or institution uses technology to send messages to a large mixed audience; most of those members are not known to the sender". The sender of the message is separated from the receivers by time and space. Technology has changed the relationship between the producers and users of media contents. The presence of digital media and the rise of the mobile media devices have created access routes for the young people to access the media as they go about their daily routines.

In our contemporary society, the media permeate our daily lives. From our waking up to our bedtime, we are bombarded with various media messages asking us to do or refrain from doing one

thing or the other. The media messages appear to be unceasing.

Silverstone (1996:6) observes that "... we switch in and out, on and off, from one media space, one media connection, to another, from radio, to newspaper, to telephone. From television, to hi-fi, to Internet. In public and in private, alone and with others." Croteau and Hoynes (2003: 157) observe that all we are exposed to watch, read and listen to, are all media products even if they are packaged as movies, television shows, books, compact discs, Internet sites, newspapers or as magazines. As they add (2003:159), "media texts articulate coherent, if shifting ways of seeing the world. These texts help to define our world and provide models for appropriate behaviour and attitudes". Our media culture shapes our beliefs, values and perception of the world outside our immediate environment.

Straubharr and Larose (1997:4) point out that "communication and information technologies are increasingly important components of our lives. The sheer amount of time we expend on communication makes up a significant portion of our daily activities." New technologies are re-defining the media world and how we communicate with each other or even use the media. Gerbner (1967) sees communication as a "social interaction through messages". Carey (1989) observes it as the creation and transmission of shared beliefs resulting in the creation of a collective culture. For him, communication "is a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired and transformed".

How we communicate explains how we interact with the world through the words that we speak or write; our gestures, music, paintings, photograph or dance. The aim of communication is to create or share ideas by allowing for interaction and exchange between and among people. Through communication, people are carried along, evade disorientation, create dreams, improve and utilize the resources available to them.

Media usage is determined by several factors: economic, political, cultural and technological factors. These factors influence both the producers and the users. Most students generally are young people who make use of the media in various ways. They use the media as individuals, members of a class or even as group members. Gamble and Gamble (2005:A-9) present that we use the media to learn about things in general and to satisfy our curiosity. They say that in addition, people use the media to seek relief from boredom, vent out their emotions, relax, pass time, programme their days and fulfil their affiliation needs. They explain that the media met affiliation needs by providing the fuel for real life conversations, escape from feelings of loneliness, substitution for relationships, withdrawal from or postponing human contact. This work examines how students use the media in our contemporary world.

## **BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

Different kinds of people use the media for different reasons. Students are young people studying in the universities

or any tertiary institution of education. They are exposed to different types of media including the traditional and new media. The old media include the radio, television, films, newspapers and magazines. The new media are spawned by the digitalization of media technologies. The Internet is a major tool that both journalists and students use to send and receive information. Some students source for some of their study resources from the Internet. Others submit their assignments, pay their fees, buy books or even do their registration on line.

Media contents are determined by media technologies. Technologies define how media contents are produced and consequently used. McNair (2002:56) says:

*One of the greatest challenges to the media in recent years, and one that will intensify further in the twenty-first century, is the potential impact of the new information and communication technologies (NICTs) on the form and content of media and on the role of the media in society.*

In our contemporary world, students can choose whichever media type that they want to use from a growing list. The old media - the newspapers, magazines, television and radio - still present them with columns of news and hours of broadcast shows. The magazines give in depth analyses of events, including sports. Some magazines also carry human oriented soft news about celebrities: their

oddities, joys and photographs. The new media – the Internet, cell phones, the iPod, iPad, and game stations- are more interactive. They allow the students to get personal, creative and busy on social networks like Facebook, Yahoo or Twitter. These combine elements of the mobile text messaging, on line instant messaging and blogging. They also get immediate feedback when they send instant messages, especially when the receivers of their messages are also on line. The new media technologies have enabled students and other media users to get more personal. Personalization has brought new ways of using the media.

According to Ingle (1986:255):

*A shift from a mass-media emphasis to personal media was also noted because of the evolution of low-cost, portable technology which the individual user can control in terms of viewing/listening time, content and repeated exposure to a message. The video- and audio-cassette players, along with the microcomputer, were cited as illustrative media examples of these trends.*

Bivins (2009: 9-10) comments that the mass media are alike in a number of ways. But the common thread running through all of them is that they are all mass media channels delivering their messages to a mass audience that they seek to inform or influence. However, Devereux (2003:10) adds that the mass media are important agents in the society because

they reproduce the dominant culture of the time as well as other social norms, beliefs, discourses, ideologies and values.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

University students use both new and old media for both academic and social reasons. Although students form a small segment of the wider society, yet we do know that they are influential and they easily adapt to innovations and new technologies, even if it is just for the fun of it. Student communities using limited media devices can translate to a large number of people when their numbers are added up across the countries and continents. Student communities exist because they share common characteristics. Rifkin (2000:139) writes that communities exist by sharing common meanings and common forms of communication. According to him, communication cannot be divorced from the community and culture as neither can exist without the other.

Wilder (1979:171-186) is of the opinion that the act of communication is a transaction that goes beyond the physical act of communication to include the psychological acts where impressions are formed in the minds of the people who are communicating. What they think of and know about each other directly affects how they communicate. Hybels and Weaver (2004:14-16) agree that the communication transaction involves three principles. The first is that communication is continuous and simultaneous. The people involved in the communication process are sending messages

unceasingly and at the same time. The second is that all communications have a past, present and future. People respond to every situation from their own experiences, moods and expectations. In other words, past relationships might influence present expectations. The third principle is that all communicators play roles and these roles are defined by the society. The communication act may change to meet the role needs.

While radio, television, newspapers and magazines are still significant and relevant, the pertinent question to ask is if the new developments in media technology have affected how students use the media. What type of media do the students use most and for what purposes? The great question is which one of these media is most used by the students? This is the problem for investigation in this study.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Students have a variety of media to use in accessing information or in giving out same. Most of the widely circulated information is disseminated by the mass media. Who are the mass media? Baran (2009:6) answers that they are the section of the media explicitly planned to reach a very large audience of the population of a nation state. They reach thousands of people with the same message at the same time. Biagi (2003:348) tells us that the media industries include the newspapers, magazines, radio, television, movies, recordings, books and the Internet. Folkerts, Lacy and Larabee (2009: 4) agree with these but add books. In

addition, they add that most media companies employ professional communicators to construct, organize and deliver their mass channelled messages whether they are informative, entertaining or persuasive. Communication theorist, White (1950: 383- 390) calls these communicators the gatekeepers. The communicator's role is the gatekeeping of information, deciding what information to include or exclude from the messages that are being constructed.

The old media were all mass media channels that were in existence before the advent of the Internet. Ingle (1986:251-267) studied the old and new media to conclude that communication media can provide significant support for information diffusion, education, development and technology transfer in either the industrialized or non-industrialized nations of the world. He points out that educational development can gain from the old and new communication technologies. However, he observes (1986: 263) that educational planners tend to use traditional media. He describes these as ineffective and costly.

McQuail (2008:40) observes that the new media have some common characteristics including digitalization, convergence, divergence, adaptation, fragmentation and blurring of the media institutions. The new media also show reduced social control. Kung'icard and Towse (2008:3- 4) describe the Internet as a global system of interconnected computer networks using the standardized Internet Protocol Suite (TCP/IP). Millions of computers are connected together to

share and exchange digital information among. Neuman (1991:165) has earlier found out that the anticipated impacts of the new media are neither inevitable nor self-evident. He adds that the Internet is not likely to revolutionize the media industry, but to rather act as an important supplement to the old media. The Internet is contributing to the further fragmentation of the mass audience. Croteau and Hoynes (2003:303) emphasize that the Internet has widened the meaning of mass communication by blurring the distinction between individual and mass audience since people use this medium for both individual communication, for example e-mailing; small group communication on listservs; and mass communicating on web sites. They add that the senders may know the receivers of their information and any one can produce content.

Computer-mediated mass communication has three characteristics. Ruggiero (2000:3) identifies these as interactivity, demassification and asynchronicity. Williams, Rice and Rogers (1988:10) see interactivity as "the degree to which participants in the communication process have control over, and can change roles in their mutual discourse. Ruggiero (2000:16) explains demassification as "the ability of the media user to select from a wide menu...Unlike traditional mass media, new media like the Internet provide selectivity characteristics that allow individuals to tailor messages to their needs". Asynchronicity is the ability to access and use electronic messages at any

time. This is the power to send, receive, save or retrieve messages at one's convenience. Ruggiero (p. 16) says that "with electronic mail (e-mail) and the Internet, an individual has the potential to store, duplicate, or print graphics and text, or transfer them to an on-line Web page or the e-mail of another individual. Once messages are digitized, manipulation of media becomes infinite, allowing the individual much more control than traditional means".

Birkerts (1994) write that the new media technologies re-weave social and cultural lives by fashioning new modes of communication that require new ways of receiving and reacting to their contents. He explains that the electronic media give consumers a new sense of time and space because information now moves faster that people do not need to know the world, but rather need to know how to access the data that tells them about the world! This may have made Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft to exclaim that "the information highway will transform our culture as dramatically as Gutenberg's press did in the Middle Ages", (quoted in Harper, 1998:199). George Gilder's prophesises and adds that "the new computer-based technologies will overthrow television and be a major force for freedom and individuality", (quoted in Harper, (1998:196). Fourteen years later, Gilder's prophesy is yet to be fulfilled.

## **THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK**

Theories explain why some occurrences take place. The Uses and

Gratification theory explains why people use the media and under what conditions. People are gratified or pleased by using the media. In other words, media consumers actively pick what they want. Baran and Davis (2012: 296) say that this theory may prove useful in assessing how and why various computer-based or wireless communication services are used in addition to, or to replace the older media. McQuail (2008:423) and Baran (2009: 422) expound that media use is dependent on the perceived usages or satisfactions of the consumer. For them to do this, they must have a level of media literacy. Potter (1997) points out that people with high levels of media literacy have a greater deal of control over how they see the world because they decide what the media messages are to mean to them. Straubharr and Larose (1997:37) state that people are active and selective in their media use. Folarin (2002:72) agrees with these, but adds that in addition, the audience attend to receive and retain the media messages on the basis of such factors as their needs, beliefs etc. Folkerts, Lacy and Larabee (2009:10) share that people's different needs for information emanate from their different psychological states and understanding of their own identities in their families, local communities and nations. The media needs of people change over time. Nevertheless, some media channels are used more than others because more people turn to them for similar reasons: to meet their gratification, cognition, diversionary and social utility needs.

Straubharr and Larose (1997:-38) give details about these three needs. According to them, people consume media contents that they regard as useful or meet their own specific needs. They explain that people's use of the media and non-media evolve as they find out the specific media that gratify their needs. The cognition needs revolve around the desire to learn from or get more information. Cognition needs involve two issues: keeping up with current happenings through headline and top stories; and learning about things in general. The diversionary needs distract the people away from less pleasurable, routine and boring activities with entertainment. What the media offer stimulates them with new or different ideas to escape from their daily life challenges. Some people watch television and films or listen to music. The social utility need supplements the craving to have contact with other people and to be integrated into the society. What the mass media publish give many people conversational materials that enhance their social interactions.

### STUDY POPULATION

The population for this study are students in Covenant University, Canaanland, Ota. This University is located in the south western part of Nigeria. It is a Christian-faith institution established to raise new role models and leaders. The average age of the students is between 17 and 22. Indeed, they form 87.6% of the respondents. The youngest students are 15 and the oldest are above

25. These students are in different levels of study. They are enrolled into six different schools of studies: Business, Engineering, Human Resource Development, Environmental Studies, Natural and Social Sciences. Most of the students are Nigerians. However, there is a good representation of students from other countries, including non-African ones. All the students live inside the campus mandatorily.

### DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

The responses of the students to the copies of the questionnaire on their media usage are analysed and presented below:

**TABLE 1: The Most Preferred Media Used by Students Responses Percentage (%)**

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE (%)
Internet	56.0
Cell phone	30.8
Television	3.0
Radio	.6
Newspaper	.6
Magazine	.6
I pod	6.0
Removable Disk	2.4
<b>TOTAL</b>	100.0 n=166



From Table 1 above, it can be seen that the students in the university use a variety of media in getting, creating and storing media contents. But the medium that they use most is the Internet. The Internet's interactivity lends itself readily to students' use. This is distantly followed by cell phones. With some phones, users can access the Internet. Both the Internet and cell phones are products of the digital age. They are not time and space bound and therefore, can be used literally in any place. This confirms the Nielson's 2009 report on media usage that young people use and love mobile media. It is important to note that the students appear to avoid using the popular and traditional media channels of radio, newspapers and magazines. Similarly, their use of television is minimal. This is possibly due to the fact that they have to stay in one place to watch television.

The multiplicity of channels and their uses confirm Devereux's (2003: xii) assertion that "when we use different media, we create our own sense of identity, our awareness of social unity and our feelings of difference from others. We use the media consciously or not to create our unique place in an increasingly globalized world". It is, therefore, not surprising that different studies use different media that allows them to express their individualities.

**TABLE 2: Purposes for Which Students Use Media**

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE (%)
Call/Connect to people	24.7

Entertainment	56.0
Get News	30.8
Social media	3.0
Other	.6
<b>TOTAL</b>	100.0 n=166

What factors drive the students into using these media? Table 2 shows them. Primarily, they use the media to have continual exchange of information with others, whether there are emergencies or not. They share thoughts and feelings with others through telephone calls, e-mails or messages sent through the social media, like Facebook. Principally, students use the media for social communication, to call/connect to other people, for entertainment and to get news of current happenings. Communicating through the social media remains their most popular way of communicating.

**TABLE 3: Reasons for Using the Media**

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE (%)
To have constant/immediate communication	57.8
Sending and receiving e-mail	4.8
Checking Facebook	3.0
Playing Different Games	0.6
Using Software applications	4.2
To alleviate boredom	13.9
To complete class assignments	13.9
To have a constant feeling of comfort	13.9
<b>TOTAL</b>	100.0 n=166

From Table 1, it has been established that the students use the Internet and cell phones most for receiving and sending out information. Table 3 shows that the students use the media primarily for three activities - to call or get in touch with others; get some news; and entertainment. It is important to point out that their sending text messages or instant messages to each other, Twitting, Facebooking, Skyping or chatting are activities done on line or on phone. This further lends proof to why students chose the Internet and their cell phones as their choice media of communicating. As Craft, Leigh and Godfrey (2001: 3) has pointed out, "the cell phone is no longer simply a telephone; it has evolved into a personal digital assistant that function as a wireless computer terminal as well". Devereux (2003: xii) writes that through the media, we "create spaces we inhabit, we shape our conceptions of reality and spin out like spiders the collective common sense which underpins social life, the basic tissue of our prevailing sense of communality". Through the many media channels, students maintain a sense of belonging.

**TABLE 4: Students' Opinion on Whether They Can Do Without All or One of These Media in a Day**

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGES (%)
Yes	57.8
No	42.2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.0</b> n= 166

Majority of the students believe that they cannot do without at least one or all of these media in a day. This means that in a day, some students must read newspapers and magazines, listen to the radio, watch the television, browse the Internet or make a telephone call in order to complete a class assignment, alleviate boredom, get news or entertainment or share some information or ideas with others.

**TABLE 5: Students' Opinion On Whether The Absence of the Media Makes Live A Little Slower**

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE (%)
Yes	64.5
No	35.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.0</b> n= 166

Most of the students think that the absence of the media made their lives a little slower and their days to appear so much longer. Students use the media for entertainment, to play games, avoid boredom, get news and music, relate socially, call and co-ordinate with their friends and family members and even to do their school work. These might not be surprising since we live in a media-mediated society.

**TABLE 6: What Student Would Miss Most by Not Using the Media**

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE (%)
Not accessing your social network sites	27.1
Not completing class assignments on time	14.5
Missing social engagement	13.9
Not checking e-mail	4.8
Not listening to music	6.6
Not getting timely news items	11.4
Not watching favourite soap operas	1.2
Not following current news	20.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.0</b> n=166

Students tell what they may miss by not using the media. The foremost thing that they would miss is their inability to access their social networks like Yahoo and Facebook. Most students use their social media to keep in touch with their families and friends in different places. The next feature that they would miss more is not following current news because they would be unable to get updates on happenings around their immediate and faraway environments. The third thing they would miss is not completing their class assignments on time. Some of the students use on line databases to source for information to complete their class assignments, especially where they do not have access to the hard copies of the necessary textbooks.

**TABLE 7: Students' Opinion on the Medium That They Would Find Easier to do Without or to Disconnect from**

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE (%)
Internet	6.0
Cell phone	22.9
Television	14.5
Radio	21.1
Newspaper	18.1
Magazine	4.8
I pod	6.0
Removable Disk	6.6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.0</b> n=166

Consistent with the data in the earlier tables, students claim that they would find it easier to disengage or do without the traditional mass media channels of television, radio and newspapers. The fact that today's radio is personal, mobile and localized in contents did not change the students' desire to disconnect from it. This finding is in agreement with the representations made in Table 1. It is remarkable that the students said that they can disconnect from their cell phones inspite of the many tasks that they use their phones to do. However, reasons can be deduced for this. Students spend money to buy the handsets and airtime to use their phones to call, text or browse. Black berries phones are not only expensive, but are targeted by thieves. Most students

have limited financial resources and many unmet needs contesting for attention. Using phones may also distract them from their studies.

### **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

Students use an assortment of channels to communicate. The most preferred medium is the Internet. It is followed by the cell phone. The least preferred are the traditional mass media channels of radio, television, newspapers and magazines. They usually use the cell phones to call people, including during emergencies. They use the Internet to get news of recent happenings in their nation and in the wider world. Their preferred channels also offer them entertainment or amusement that distract their attention from boring and mundane issues of life.

Majority of the students claimed that they could not do without at least one of the medium for a day and even when they did, that particular day appeared to be longer. The hands of their clocks appeared to move slower than usual. They explained four things that what they would miss most by not using the media as their inability to use their social networks to connect with their family and friends, not getting timely news, not completing class assignments on time and missing social engagements. It appears that students' preference for the new media has made them to look at older or popular channels of communication with disfavour. They expressly said that they would find it easier to disconnect from the television, radio and newspapers and even their cell phones.

### **CONCLUSION:**

Advances in technology make students use assorted types of media at different times for diverse reasons. The different types of media have helped the students share their various experiences. However most of the respondents appear to lean away from the traditional and established media channels of radio, television, newspapers and magazines to the new media fuelled by the digitalization of media technologies. The interactivity of the Internet makes it a favourite among the students.

From the findings of this study, it is clear that students use the media to enhance their academic pursuits and to improve on their social relationships. The new media synergy rolls all the advantages of the popular media into one channel as users can use text:ictures, sound and video. However, it is further fragmenting the users into subcultures with each praising the merits of their favoured medium of communication.

The abundance of different channels of communication and the varied uses that they can be put to is encouraging creativity and making the different users learn and master how to use them. Importantly, more people are able to access and pass across pieces of information using their mobile devices. Because the traditional roles of the gatekeepers are diminishing, students can now create customized contents and share the same with whosoever they like.

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## ABOUT THE BOOK

*Today's Readings in Mass Communication: Issues, Insights and Perspectives* is a presentation of selected contemporary burning topics in Mass Communication and its related fields. Following exhaustive, painstaking and thorough scholarly exploration, dissection and critical assessments, the authors here offer analytical and fresh positions on how to eliminate the challenging situations facing mankind, through communication. Most of the myriad of problems facing humanity, especially in developing nations, can be overcome when effective application of suitable and right dosages of communication (traditional and/or modern) are made. The mercuric and diverse nature of the communication industry, profession and its related fields demand the professional and ethical readiness of practitioners and managers with the requisite formulated policies, strategies, tactics, techniques, skills and expertise, in order to prove the utility, relevance and efficacies of communication in all facets of human endeavour. This is so, whether it is used in political campaigns, product marketing, university administration and management, rural and national development, fighting corruption, or human rights, moreso in the face of the entrant of new information and communication technologies, exemplified by the social media with their wide range of positive and dysfunctional effects. *Today's Reading in Mass Communication: Issues, Insights and Perspectives*, therefore proffers the options and solutions, including how the difficulties facing communication and the media must, fundamentally and imperatively, be tackled and resolved, in order to put them in proper setting to effectively harness their potentials and achieve the envisaged objective of social engineering. Indeed, it is an embodiment of prescriptive measures of how communication can best be used to attain development. For long, there has been the dire need to fill the yearning gap of providing not just locally backgrounded texts, but also ones which meet the professional and scholarly aspirations of our teeming students and potential practitioners and managers. This volume stoutly fills that gap and as well provides the crucial theoretical and practical basis for their growth and development in the dynamic profession. It has something for everyone and everybody. The book, therefore, undoubtedly represents a dependable resource tool for all categories of stakeholders in the mega profession and other related callings: students, practitioners, managers, researchers, scholars, policy makers, politicians, bureaucrats, and in fact, the general reading public.



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ISBN 978-36959-5-9

