

Gender and Readership of Sports Pages of Mainstream Newspapers in UYO

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<p>Corresponding Author Nwokeocha Ifeanyi Martins</p> <p>Department of Journalism and Media Studies, Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa State.</p> <p>Article History</p> <p>Received: 06 / 10 / 2024</p> <p>Accepted: 17 / 10 / 2024</p> <p>Published: 19 / 10 / 2024</p>	<p>Abstract: This study is set out to examine the influence of gender on the readership of sports pages of mainstream newspapers in Uyo. The objectives of the study are to: determine the extent to which residents of Uyo read sports pages of mainstream newspapers; ascertain whether gender influences readership of sports pages of mainstream newspapers in Uyo; discover the extent to which gender influences readership of sports pages of mainstream newspapers in Uyo. In giving the study a theoretical underpinning, the Individual Differences and Uses and Gratifications theories were theorized. The survey research design was adopted for the collection of data. The population of the study comprised 487,887 as projected in the year 2024, with a sample size of 381 respondents drawn out of the population using Taro Yamane's formula. Using the multi-stage sampling procedures, respondents were selected across areas in Uyo. The findings revealed that most of the respondents read sports pages to a very great extent and that gender influences sports page consumption patterns. Other influencing variables that are affecting readership to a significant extent include the credibility of content, need for information, availability, and headline. The results suggest that sports page production should consider gender differences along with presenting credible and information-rich material with captivating headlines. Any improvement in availability may further increase readership. The study recommended among others that the planning of sports pages needs to be done in such a way that it gives significance to gender differences for greater readership.</p> <p>Keywords: Gender, Readership, Sports Pages, Uyo, Mainstream Newspapers</p>
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Introduction

Newspapers have been a source of relevant information to anyone for centuries. The first newspaper, under the name Acta Diurna, was published in ancient Rome and contained information about political and social events at that time. Gradually, the popularity of newspapers spread along with the number of subjects they covered. In particular, sports newspapers started to appear during the 19th century when different sports gained popularity worldwide (Ojo, 2019).

Sports newspapers majorly report on events in the world of sports, ranging from micro-local events right through to international events. They give information on teams in sport, their performances, events that have taken place, and upcoming games. The reason sports newspapers are well-read is that they target individuals who have an interest in sports (Philips, 2015; Ayo and Idowu, 2019; Mbeh, 2019; Irabor, 2022). While the target for these newspapers remains sports enthusiasts, the readership also extends to those people who are not passionate about sports but seek to keep themselves informed about the latest news and happenings in the world of sports. Indeed, this has been evidenced through research showing an increase in casual sports fans reading sports newspapers. Casual fans are those who may not necessarily

commit to a particular sport or even team; they usually have a general interest in sports (Martins, 2016). Sports newspapers target this particular audience by offering all types of sports news and information to make access to them easy for people with varying interest levels in sports. That makes the sports newspaper a preferred source for accessing information on news and events about sports.

Sports newspaper focuses on ways through which to get the attention of their readers. Their mode of information presentation is quite different from the typical styles adopted by other newspapers. They contain more photo displays and graphics that make the information specified to the readers appear more interactive (Aremu & Okoye, 2021). They make use of colloquial language in presenting their information so that the reader finds it easy to understand them, and at the same time distinguish themselves from other newspapers. When it comes to capturing the attention of readers, sports newspapers usually make their presentation of information uniquely different. Graphics and images are used together to complement their written content to make readers more interactive. The use of colloquial language also allows its readers to understand and get involved in what they are reading clearly.

Despite efforts toward attracting all demographics of readers, gender plays a paramount role in sports newspapers. Men will be more willing to read sports newspapers than women due to the roles expected by society concerning one's gender and the association of sports with masculinity (Ayo, Bamigboye & Akin, 2021).

Meanwhile, gender can be a good determinant of the consumption of sports newspapers. More men are likely to read sports newspapers than women. This trend has been in place for some time now, and several factors dictate this trend. Conventionally, society has associated sports with masculinity, and this has dictated people's attitudes towards sports, with men being perceived as the end consumers of sports news. As Uso (2022, p. 15) explained that, "gender inequality in sports newspaper readership has been a subject of research for several decades. Sports have traditionally been viewed as men's preserve, and this preconceived perception informed the way people viewed sports consumption by men and women". In some ways, gender roles identify individual social rules for the traditional consumption of various sport-related media. Such outlooks relegate men as the major consumers and beneficiaries of the media related to sports, while women assume a secondary position. The gender disparity in readership is also due to how sports-related media report on sports events. Most sport-related newspapers often report on sports information using masculine vocabularies and storylines, which propagate biased views concerning the involvement of women in sports. Uso (2022, p. 15) further mentioned that:

All too often, coverage of women's sports is relegated to secondary status or receives less attention than men's, reinforcing stereotypical gender roles through sports media. That, in turn, influences how women feel about their sports roles and the ways they can enjoy sport-related media.

The lack of involvement and representation in sports-related media goes a long way in contributing to the inequality within readership bases. Most women are often turned off by sports-related coverage owing to the specific convergence that portrays sporting events as a field for men. This, therefore, forms a vicious circle in which the sports-related media under-represent women because fewer women consume such press, leading to less coverage of women's sports events (Ekereobong, 2017). Moreover, products and services which advertisers offer are most often designed for men, so stereotypical perceptions of gender in sports media are more common. It makes female readers less likely to associate themselves with advertisements, decreasing interest and participation even more in consuming sports-related media. According to Uzor (2017), women's sports newspapers do not attract much attention from publishers, hence investment and support are poor. This could be because of less investment, given the disparity in readership demographics between genders. Therefore, there are limited avenues for gradual yet specific development in publications on women's sports.

Be that as it may, the way sports newspapers present information may also contribute to gender disparities in readership. Some scholars argue that sports newspapers cater to a male audience, and their articles, photographs, and headlines favour men (Cross, 2015;

Egeh & Tsokwa, 2017; Uzochukwu, 2019). This could alienate women from the material covered and make them unlikely to read such sports newspapers. The implications of a gender gap in readership within the sports newspaper industry may translate into significant consequences in the media sector. This would lead to a vicious cycle of the type of content the sports newspaper produces, the type of advertisements it targets, and also the revenue the industry is bound to generate. Only by realizing the cause of this gender disparity can truly effective strategies to bridge this divide and optimize readership within the sports newspaper industry be created.

Studies such as Ayo & Biodun, 2012; Dare, 2015; Idris, Haruna, Fatai & Lekan, 2018 have established that such gender stereotypes in sports media significantly influence the attitude of sports fans towards female athletes and women's sports. The male-dominated narratives of sports newspapers shape people's perceptions about the capabilities of women in sports and this influences their valuing and supporting them. The disparities in the readership of the sports newspaper could also make a difference in how the sports newspaper portrays female athletes. Events regarding women's sports are less likely to be given any attention in a sports newspaper, which of course will drive less exposure and promotion of it. It will also affect sponsors' and advertisers' investments in giving less funding and career opportunities for female athletes. They, therefore, play a huge role in shaping the interactions between gender and sports newspapers. The prevalence of gender stereotypes, which are related to the sports media and sports culture, is supported by sources such as the media and society. This paper, therefore, seeks to establish how gender influences the readership of the sports pages of mainstream newspapers in Uyo.

Statement of the Problem

Sport newspaper readership has remained a point of concern among scholars with an interest in mass media studies due to various factors. Sports newspapers are popular among both sports enthusiasts and non-passionate end users since they act as a rich source of information concerning sports teams, their performances, as well as events that have taken place and forthcoming games. Despite being primary sources of events and news concerning sports, there is always a gender disparity concerning their readership. While women's participation in and viewership of sports are increasing, sports are still largely associated with men, who consequently become the direct consumers of sports newspapers, whereas, for women, this role is largely subsidiary or even absent. This is one problem the proposed study aspires to address: the uncertainty regarding whether there is a gender link in the reading of sports pages in mainstream newspapers. While some scholars argue that presentation in sports newspapers militates against women readers, this paper looks to ascertain if this is indeed the case. This study also attempts to examine the factors, such as social expectations about roles and stereotypical portrayals in sports-related media coverage, responsible for the gender differences in the readership of sports newspapers. The study tries to close the gap in the doubts by asking a fundamental question: Does gender influence the readership of sports pages in mainstream newspapers in Uyo? Herein lies the thrust of this study.

Research Objectives

The research objectives of this study are to:

- i. Determine the extent to which residents of Uyo read sports pages of mainstream newspapers;
- ii. Ascertain whether gender influences readership of sports pages of mainstream newspapers in Uyo;
- iii. Discover the extent to which gender influences readership of sports pages of mainstream newspapers in Uyo;
- iv. Investigate the other factors that influence the readership of sports pages of mainstream newspapers in Uyo aside from gender.

Research Questions

The following research questions are raised in this study:

- i. To what extent do residents of Uyo read sports pages of mainstream newspapers?
- ii. Does gender influence the readership of sports pages of mainstream newspapers in Uyo?
- iii. To what extent does gender influence the readership of sports pages of mainstream newspapers in Uyo?
- iv. What are the other factors that contribute to the readership of sports pages of mainstream newspapers in Uyo apart from gender?

Literature Review

Newspaper Readership

There is a rapid increase in research activities in the newspaper business. Newspaper readership research has gained popularity due to the many uses resulting in the industry. Research in this area has been conducted to solve the problem of declining circulation and changing newspaper readership patterns. Research efforts in this area have been put to use by advertisers, editors, and publishers. Wimmer and Dominick (2018, p. 53) have identified five basic studies of newspaper readership patterns to include: reader profiles, item selection studies, reader-on-reader studies, uses and gratification and editor-reader comparison studies.

It is due to their education, income, age, sex, race, occupation, religion, political interest and ethnicity that the patterns, habits and preferences of readers differ. A reader's profile research will unravel if a newspaper is read by a particular class of people with a high income bracket, or by people of a high educational attainment. It is education that boosts the readership of newspapers (Udoakah, 2017). Since the newspaper is the medium that attracts only the literate class, the more the number of educated people in a locality is the more the amount that would have read newspapers. Unfortunately, most Nigerians are not educated and might not comprehend the English Language used in producing newspapers in Nigeria.

Readership pattern research also helps in indicating the age bracket of those reading and their preference. Baskette, Scissors and Books (2016, p.33) observe that young adults show a marked difference in

lifestyle than older people who are more inclined to read newspapers. According to them, older people read above 20 per cent of news items while younger men read above 15 per cent. They also commented that people of age 35 and above are concerned about development and progress in their countries and the world, thus they read news items about government at local, state, national, and international levels. Apart from demographic segmentation that had dominated readership patterns and market research until the 1970s, the psychographic variable is now a strong research area for its impact on newspaper preferences. Whereas, demographic classification of readers, categorizes them by age, level of income, level of education and other quantitative variables. Psychographic categorization focuses on variables like attitudes, opinions, personal interests and values of individuals. Consumers are heterogeneous in opinions, attitudes, interests, and perceptions of the various media organs. Various people form attitudes and opinions about specific psychological objects such as newspapers. Baskette et al. (2018, p. 82) acknowledge individual differences. This can be asserted by some of these writers when they say:

No two audiences are alike, so it is reasonable to assume that reader's tastes differ from city to city. Audiences may differ even within a city. Readers of the New York Times for example may have taste that differs significantly from those of readers of the New York Daily News. Good editors have a feel for the interest of their audience.

Nickles (2015) is of the view that the attitudes, actions, interests, and emotions of consumers have a direct influence on all social organizations; personal interests and attitudes, therefore, determine a reader's preference for a particular newspaper. The uses and gratification readership study is used to determine motives that lead to newspaper reading and the personal and psychological rewards that result from it. One underlying root of the study of reading as a social process cited in McQuail (2012, p. 2) emphasizes the predisposition of a reader to be significant in any effect that accrues from reading a particular newspaper. The study observed two principles in the study of the reading effect, the first is "who the reader is and what does he want to get?" The second is: "What and how does the publication contribute to his wants?" It goes further to add that the uses and gratification paradigm is concerned with social and psychological origins and needs which generate expectations of the mass media or other sources that lead to differential patterns of exposure, resulting in needs for gratification.

From the foregoing, it becomes clear that there is an intrinsic value in a newspaper that the consumer is after. This goes a long way to reveal that when people read a newspaper, they are gratifying certain needs. It, therefore, follows that when a reader decides to buy a particular newspaper as opposed to others, he is influenced by the satisfaction he is likely to obtain and derive from it. The main goal of readership research, as can be deduced from the foregoing, is to enable those who produce newspapers to satisfy their existing readers and expand readership by incorporating those items and segments that would attract more readers. It helps advertisers to determine the audience they target by knowing their preferences, attitudes, and tastes.

What People Feel About Visual Elements and Newspaper Readership

Many people read the newspaper each day. This is due largely to its relative importance to our everyday life. But the reasons for reading newspapers are varied as they are many. This reading is a result of people's demand for news, features, cartoons and other items in the newspaper. The reasons for reading newspapers however differ with individuals and with families. But scanning the headlines hastily at the breakfast table or newsstand, reading in buses, and the more leisurely perusal of the paper at home - where dad is in the financial section, mum peering over the women's pages, children devouring the comic, nearly everybody has something laid away for a careful read is among the familiar phenomena of daily life among literate families in Nigeria (Anaeto et al, 2009).

However, it has been observed that the readership of newspapers has gradually declined with each passing decade because people read newspapers less and less. This view is supported by the opinion of Beckett and Kyrke-Smith (2017, p. 91) when they say that :

In many African countries, recreational reading is not a mass hobby and for obvious reasons: besides the low levels of literacy, the practice of sharing of newspapers by many people limits newspaper circulation, lowers advertising revenues and makes it harder for newspapers to survive economically. Until a culture of reading is developed, until literacy rates improve, until more Africans can afford a newspaper, it thus makes sense to put more emphasis on radio since radio sets are considerably cheaper than television ones and since listening to radio is not dependent on the availability of electricity that in many African cities and villages is either non-existent or irregular.

Smith and O'Connell (2016) observe that newspaper readers fall into three broad categories, namely, the die-hard newspaper readers, the information seekers, and the news scanners. The former category comprises individuals who gain some pleasure from their papers and at the end of a particularly hectic day look forward to settling down and perusing the news. Newspapers are an integral part of their lives; the greater proportion of this group is aged 35 years and upwards. On average, they devote 45 minutes to the weekday newspapers, although they usually do something else as well, such as eating their breakfast, while they are reading the papers. The second category of newspaper readers includes information seekers. For them, the issue is not necessarily to seek pleasure when they read the newspaper. They go for the information therein. They need to be informed citizens who are abreast of what is happening in the world around them. They require serious news that is well-reported. News scanners constitute the third category of newspaper readers. This segment of the public merely wants to get the news with the least amount of work on their part. They scan the pages, looking only at pictures, informational graphics and headlines, and stopping occasionally to read several paragraphs of a story. Smith and O'Connell add that some researchers label the last two groups "at-risk readers," meaning that if newspapers do not satisfy their needs, they may

join the crowd of newspaper dropouts. If newspapers skimp on hard news, they lose the information seekers, but on the other hand, if the papers appear to be too much work, they can kiss the news scanners goodbye. Since this is impossible to cater to one and lose the other by a margin, in the planning of the design and contents of the newspaper, the groups concerned must take into consideration all the groups so as not to lose any group, since every individual reader is so important, especially in this social media era (Matthew, 2023).

According to Hoenisch, (2022), various factors influence the readership of newspapers. Some of these factors include education and literacy level, income and occupation, household composition, geographical trends in housing - whether the majority of the people live in the suburbs or the city, leisure time, especially the amount people can devote to reading and competition from other media. These are discussed in greater detail below:

Of the variables mentioned above, age is probably the most critical variable in establishing newspaper readership. The age factor is generally regarded as an important determinant of the need for information. It follows that the age group containing the most newspaper readers lies roughly between the ages 35 and 65, with readership lower among those younger than 35 and tailing off for those older than 65. Those in the group between 35 and 44 have traditionally had the highest level of readership, but despite the increase in titles and perceived newspaper circulation, the percentage of readers in the 35-65 age group decreased by a rate of 17 per cent between 1980 and 1990.

In trying to forecast a readership situation for American newspapers by the year 2010 from collaborative studies, Hoenisch (2022) said that one more alarming trend was the rate of change in newspaper readership among two younger age groups 18-24 and the 25-34 age groups. Members of these two groups, especially the former, comprise the prime newspaper readers of tomorrow when the 18-24 age group will be between the ages of 38-44 in 2010. It also revealed that only 24 percent of those under 35 years of age admitted to have read yesterday's newspaper, compared to 67 percent in 1965; and that another survey showed that readership among the 18-24 group declined in the past 20 years by a rate of 71 percent in 1970 to 57 percent in 1990. The implication here is that unless more members of this group begin reading newspapers, by 2010 the decline in readership among newspaper's prime reading group will be substantially more than it is today.

As a result of this decline in readership within these age groups, since they are a sizeable proportion of the population, newspaper readership and, eventually circulation are not seen to be in the best of state as far as its future is concerned. These statistics serve as a sort of wake-up call to newspapers to immediately take steps to capture and retain potential readers from these age groups. If the newspapers make an effort now to reach these younger readers, then all is not lost. Although readership studies conflict with the exact age, they suggest the newspaper reading habit is acquired before age 30. The reading habits of today's youths are a key factor in trying to determine who future readers are likely to be. Today's teenagers read the newspaper less than their teenage counterparts of a decade or two ago. Newspaper readership among teens slipped

over the past decade from 45 per cent to 41 per cent. Cobb and Dennis (2006) list several factors which contribute to adolescents' apathy towards newspaper readership including the level of literacy and the amount of time spent on reading; competition from television; changing lifestyles - including how leisure time is spent; a weakened tradition of reading in the home. Although literacy has generally improved over the years, a slackening of the student's interest in reading is lamented by observers. What this portends is that newspaper readership may fall in the future. Be that as it may, people will continue reading newspapers for information about their interests or work-related matters. Newspapers will therefore have to make their content more consumer-friendly with increased use of informational graphics, charts, and photographs.

Even if teenagers emerge from secondary school as non-newspaper readers, they may still become readers, since newspaper-reading habits rise with age. A further study provided a different insight and suggested that people older than 18 were unlikely to acquire the habit of reading the newspaper. Newspaper reading habit is formed in adolescence, especially before 18 and is often determined by the reading habits of the child's parents (Oro, Femi & Daniel, 2023). The study found that the more the parents read the newspaper, the more likely the child would pick up the habit. With household penetration of newspapers declining and with the family structure also altering, the situation presents some problems for newspaper readership. The assumption here is that since the newspaper reading habit is closely associated with that of the parents, changes occurring in family structures and the use of time by parents are likely to result in reduced newspaper readership in the future unless this trend is curtailed. Supporting this view, Alao (2016, p. 58) observes that:

Newspapers in developed countries such as the United States of America and Britain are read by almost all people daily, whereas in Nigeria and most African countries, the readership is very low due to the high rate of illiteracy. Illiteracy among women and the elderly in rural communities and among members of poor households is still high, especially in developing countries.

UNESCO (1981) cited in Obasi (2018) reports that of 771 million adults with less than minimum literacy skills, the great majority live in the following three regions: South and West Asia, East Asia and the Pacific, the Sub-Saharan Africa. The report further enumerates that three-quarters of the world's illiterate population live in just twelve countries, namely: India, China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Egypt, Brazil, Iran, Morocco, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, in that order of dominance. Of this number of illiterates, Nigeria had a 2.7 per cent share of the world in 1990 but recorded 2.9 per cent between 2000 and 2004. Even with an acceptable adult literacy level in Nigeria, gender discrimination which favours male child education over female child education is still strong. And as in many other countries, men have better reading and writing skills than women. This illiteracy seriously limits the development of a person's potential and capabilities as a whole. Any written material, for instance a newspaper, which is of interest to him would become useful if a reader has a good level of literacy and an equalling ability to read. Conversely, if one has poor reading ability, written materials would be poorly utilized. Little wonder that UNESCO

(2016, p. 51) notes that "literacy means reading the world, rather than reading the word." This presupposes that the consumer must first be literate enough to read the newspaper for him to be able to decode newspaper messages. This means that those who cannot read or write would not understand broadcast press reviews, let alone need to read the newspapers.

Cobb and Dennis (2006) observe that newspaper non-readers are everywhere and the ranks are swelling, making it more problematic to the future of the newspaper industry, than among the teenage population. They came away with this conclusion in their study of teenage non-readers after finding that the newspaper image was one of the factors, which made teenagers not read newspapers. Their findings simply reiterate earlier research that had it that teenagers and young adults of college age think of newspapers as a traditional, middle-aged medium which assumes a rather insignificant place in the adolescent's life. About the preferred content in newspapers, Cobb and Dennis (2016, p. 33) presented:

- i. Most teenagers believe that newspapers do not consider what teenagers want to read;
- ii. Most of the teenagers felt that there were not enough articles relevant to their hobbies;
- iii. Many teenagers wanted newspapers to be like magazines in size and colour;
- iv. Most teenagers think of newspapers as boring.

Although some have stuck to their traditional ways, many newspapers have begun responding to at least one of the above misgivings. Many newspapers have redesigned their pages over the last couple of years by adding more colour and graphics, giving the newspaper a more modern look. That is a good beginning, but they need to go further. They need to decide what today's teenagers want to read and then put that kind of information on the newspaper pages. Without attempting to act to draw today's teenage readers to get them hooked on reading the papers, the business future of newspapers seems bleak. Nwosu (2017, p.257) corroborates this position when he stated that the "contents of a newspaper greatly determine its acceptance and readership". In his words, "to capture and retain readers and so remain in business, newspapers must offer interesting, attractive, and useful contents". This is where press reviews play a very important role in newspaper reading. They highlight the content through news selection and thus act as guidelines on which newspaper to read; they also help the reader choose what to read. To publishers, the reviews challenge them to package and present their papers in such a way as to attract the greatest readership. In particular, if the newspaper is to survive in the decades ahead, it must do so based on offering the consumer a product which would fulfil their needs. After all, the major purpose of designing the newspaper pages is to "entice readers to read the reviews by making it look interesting and easy to find; making the news more understandable; and conveying the personality of the paper" (Smith and O'Connell, 2019, p. 150).

One of the things that could motivate reading a newspaper is circulation. Okpala (2009) explains that circulation can be viewed as the strength of the readership of a newspaper. It is in this regard

that newspaper reviews in the electronic media of radio and television tend to be helpful in the reading of newspapers since, in those instances where they have been reviewed and catch the interest of the viewer and listeners, they can eventually get into their hands. Okpala, (2019, p. 94) however said that:

Income in newspaper circulation and readership assessment is relatively unimportant. The price of newspapers does not impinge on readership. Unlike effective demand in economics which must be backed up with the ability to pay, in newspaper readership, effective demand is simply the newspaper's effective outreach regardless of whether it was bought, scanned or borrowed from the library, vendor, or even office. What this means is that while sales figures may be indicative of the number of copies sold, they do not show the number of people who actually read the publications or the number of readers per copy; it can then be said that the actual readership of a newspaper is about three to four times more than the number of copies sold.

Following the explanation above, it can safely be deduced that in case the father buys a copy of the newspaper, every other literate member of the family can read it without paying any price. The same is the case while borrowing it from any other source. It therefore follows that income does not affect readership adversely, and the price will have little or no effect in determining readership, for people can gain access to newspapers without necessarily buying them. Okpala 2019 then concludes by stating that as much as prices may reduce sales, they do not reduce readership; if anything at all, it is about accessibility. Hoenisch (2018, p. 77) suggests that:

If at all students develop a taste for information and news, such an appetite, if sustained long after they graduate, may revive their interest in newspapers as the only medium currently capable of delivering a range of in-depth, international news with up-to-date information daily, which no other medium is capable of providing. This will increase not only the future readership of newspapers but also will attract advertisers to newspapers and new educated and most likely affluent readers.

Provided that newspapers can deliver these readers to advertisers in an effective and cost-efficient manner, it is reasonable to believe that newspapers will continue to prosper well into the century. That prosperity, however, is unlikely to reach the level attained during the newspaper boom years of the several decades.

Gender and Readership of Sports Pages of Mainstream Newspapers

Sports pages have always formed one of the essential components of newspapers and online news portals. However, for quite a considerable period of time, it was felt that readership to the sports page was male-dominated. But over the years, the trend appears to have altered. Baro, Smith & Onu (2019, p. 86) state "that over the years, women's readership of sports pages has increased. As far back as in 2020, a survey conducted by SportsBusiness Journal showed that an estimated 45 per cent of all sports fans were women". In a different survey taken in 2018 by the Pew Research Center, it was estimated that about 37 per cent of women watched

sports regularly and about 33 per cent of men read about sports. It is thus crystal clear that the readership for the sports pages is not confined to only male groups, and the female viewers are also very interested in following news about sports.

It is observed, however, that history has concentrated sporting pages on male sports: football, baseball, and basketball. Consequently, this has been associated with the underrepresentation of female athletes and events in sports. According to Deni & Patrick (2023, p. 42), "traditional media has one-sidedly covered sports, where the basis of coverage is male-dominated sports such as football, baseball, and basketball, which eventually has made female sports and athletes underrepresented". It alienates media coverage to women's sports, despite the recorded growth in viewership and participation, while funding increased; female athletes still gained scant airtime, recognition, and financial remunerations compared to their male counterparts. The underrepresentation of women in sports coverage has been a traditional factor that truly needs consideration if equality between genders is to be achieved and women athletes given due recognition. The best case is that of the publicity done for the Women's World Cup. While the tournament is among the most-viewed sporting events around the world, women athletes remain severely underrepresented in the media, receiving less airtime and recognition compared to male athletes competing in other events. During the 2018 Men's World Cup, female athletes received a mere 4% of the total airtime the tournament received. In addition to their achievements simply becoming obscure events, this deprives female athletes of their rightful recognition and further-establishing fanbases and might insinuate that accomplishments by female athletes are less significant as compared to those of male athletes. One article published in *Communication & Sport* proved that only 4 per cent of the newspapers and online news feature women in sports, while up to 96 per cent are men's sports. Although sports pages are read not only by males, judging by the tendency in sports reporting, there exists a gender bias in the coverage of sports. Publishers should accord equal importance to the sports needs of males and females, and publicize both the female and male athletes equally for the events taking place amongst them (Martins, 2022).

Theoretical Frameworks

The following theories are discussed in this study:

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)

Uses and Gratifications Theory was a theory of communication developed in the 1940s. It was highly utilized in the field of mass communication, as well as in the study of the media effects. According to Blumler and Katz (1974) cited in Duru (2019), UGT proposes that "people use media based on their needs and desires and are generally motivated by the gratifications they can derive from the media". The authors further clarified that UGT assumes that people are active participants in media consumption and make active choices about using media based on their goals, values, and interests. UGT has been one of the major theoretical frameworks that make sense of the relationship between media and audience because it explains how members of an audience actively engage with media. It gives evidence that audiences are not passive recipients of media messages; rather, they are active participants

who consciously decide on the media to be consumed and how to make use of that media. According to Blumler and Katz, 1974, in Kelly (2015), UGT postulates that people use media to gratify their social, psychological, and information needs. In simple form, the theory postulates that individuals consume media depending on their needs and wants, and they are driven by the gratification they may gain from the media.

UGT is, therefore, highly relevant to this study as it helps explain factors that influence gender differences in readership. According to UGT, people use media to satisfy their social, psychological, and information needs. In the framework of this research, it can be argued that sports pages gratify psychological needs; that is, entertainment and enjoyment, and social needs; that is, a sense of belongingness and affiliation. It has also been elaborated by the theory that people make choices of what media to consume based on their personal goals, values, and interests, and this perhaps justifies why males will be more likely to read sports pages than females in the context of this study.

Individual Differences Theory

The Individual Differences Theory is one of the theories in communication that tries to explain how individual characteristics predict media behaviour through demographics, personality, social status, and education, among other factors. In the early 1970s, Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur proposed the IDT. According to this theory, individual differences play a big role in shaping media behaviour. IDT assumes that individual characteristics are the base on which people use media for the gratification of their various needs and interests (Bassey, 2017). The theory furthers this assertion by noting that individual characteristics of individuals determine the choice, uses, and effects of media. The theory postulates that various attributes belonging to a certain individual may predispose them towards either the usage or response to specific media forms. For instance, such characteristics as individual age, sex, earnings, and education might form the critical basis on which people base decisions to make choices on the kind of media they consume. About this, for example, people in different income groups can have preferences for some contents of the media over others, because they vary both in the type of information they need and also in the type of gratification they require from the media. Individual differences in things like personality traits can shape how people relate to the content of the media. Introverted people, for instance, will want their media consumed in solitude and may seek information and ideas in the media that allow self-directed exploration. Conversely, extroverted people may prefer media content consumption in groups and may seek such content that can allow and enable social interaction and bonding.

The theory also postulates that individual differences can change the ability of an individual to respond to information represented through media and its overall impact. Individuals with varying levels of education, for example, are likely to interpret information from media and respond differently because they have varying levels of understanding and also belong to different cultural and social backgrounds. Also, individual differences in personality traits, such as emotional stability, may explain how people respond to media messages, including ads and other persuasive messages.

The theory of individual differences can, thus, be used to explain why people who differ in characteristics are found to exhibit differential readership of sports pages. The theory postulates that demographics form a great basis for affecting media behaviour (Igwe & Erasmus, 2019). According to the theory, people use media based on their unique characteristics, which help them to satisfy their needs and interests. This might be a case of males having more interest and need for sports information than females and, therefore, the male/female differences in readership. Another aspect of IDT is personality, also known to influence media behaviour. Personality concerns the distinctive patterns of thinking, emotional feeling and behaviour of a person. For this study, extraversion and openness to experience are personality traits that may lead an individual to read sports pages (Okon, 2015). The extroverted individual might consider reading the sports page to be a social activity. An open-to-experience person will seek out unusual and exciting information about newsworthy items that catch their attention, such as sports pages.

Research Methodology

The research design adopted was the survey research design. The population of the study comprised 487,887 as projected in the year 2024, having 400 respondents using the Taro Yamane formula. The multi-stage sampling procedure was used, where the researchers, in different stages of sampling, used two various sampling techniques. They were the cluster and available sampling techniques. In the first stage, cluster sampling was used where Uyo metropolis was divided into eight clusters, with each cluster representing the different axes in Uyo metropolis as shown below:

- i. Wellington Bassey Way Cluster: This included Wellington Bassey Way, Brooks Street, Ekpeyong Street, Asutan Street, Paul Bassey Street, Eka Street, Udo Street, Akpakpan Street and Old Stadium Road.
- ii. Aka Road Cluster: This covered Aka Road up to Champion Breweries, Aka-Etinan Road, Nepa Line, Nkemba Street, Udotung Ubo Street, Ukana-Offot Street, Kevin Street and Kevin Lane, Udo Ekpo Inyang Street, Itiam Street and Udo Eduok Street.
- iii. Itam Cluster: This included Idoro Road, Ikot-Ekpene Road, Calabar-Itu Road, Afaha-Ube Street, Nelson Mandela Street and Ekpuk Street.
- iv. Federal Housing Estate Cluster
- v. Ewet Housing Estate Cluster
- vi. Osong- Ama Housing Estate Cluster
- vii. Shelter Afrique Housing Estate and Extension Cluster
- viii. University of Uyo Cluster: This included Udi Street, Ibiam Street, Oku Street, Ikot Ekpene Road, Ikpa Road, Ikpa Lane, Itu Road, Udoette Street, Urua-Ekpa Road, Uniuyo Town and Annex Campuses.

Since the sample was 400, each of the eight clusters produced 50 respondents as shown in the table below:

S/N	Cluster	Sample Size
1	Wellington Bassey Way Cluster	50
2	Aka Road Cluster	50
3	Itam Cluster	50
4	Federal Housing Estate Cluster	50
5	Ewet Housing Estate Cluster	50
6	Osong-Ama Housing Estate Cluster	50
7	Shelter Afrique and Extension Cluster	50
8	Uniuyo Cluster	50
	Total	400

In the second sample, the 50 respondents were selected based on their availability, meaning that the researchers administered the instrument to whoever qualified for participation in the study from the age of 18 who must have been reading sports pages/newspapers. The data were gathered using the questionnaire. The questionnaire copies were assigned to the four hundred (400)

subjects that formed the sample of the study. Out of the 400 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 381 copies were approximately filled and returned, representing a retrieval rate of 95%; 19 copies (5%) either got missed on transit or were adjudged invalid for use. However, the data for this study were analyzed using frequency tables and simple percentages.

Data Analysis

RQ1: To what extent do residents of Uyo read sports pages of mainstream newspapers?

Option	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Low	87	23
Great	96	25
Very large	198	52
Total	381	100

From the data presented in RQ1 above, the majority of respondents agreed to the fact that they do read sports pages to a very great extent.

RQ2: Does gender influence the readership of sports pages of mainstream newspapers in Uyo?

Option	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	284	74
No	60	16
I can't say	37	10
Total	381	100

The data presented in RQ2 above showed that the majority of the respondents 201, representing 71%, agreed to the fact that gender influences their readership of sports pages.

RQ3: To what extent does gender influence the readership of sports pages of mainstream newspapers in Uyo?

Option	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Low	36	9
Great	64	17
Very large	252	66
I can't say	29	8
Total	381	100

The data presented in RQ3 above showed that the majority of the respondents 252, representing 66%, agreed to the fact that gender influences their readership of sports pages to a very large extent.

RQ4: What are the other factors that contribute to the readership of sports pages of mainstream newspapers in Uyo apart from gender?

Option	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Content credibility	32	8
Need for information	61	16
Striking headlines	48	13
Availability of the papers	41	11
All of the above	199	52
Total	381	100

Data presented in RQ4 above showed that the majority of the respondents 199, representing 52%, agreed to the fact that they do read sports pages because of content credibility, the need for information, the availability of the papers and striking headlines.

Discussion of Findings

The data analysis indicates that the majority of the respondents read sports pages of mainstream newspapers to a very great extent. This finding accords with the Uses and Gratification theory. According to the theory, individuals consume media that satisfies their needs and motives (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974) cited in Olayinka & Azeez (2022). Therefore, the respondents who read sports pages to a great extent consider reading as fulfilling their needs or desires. The present study's findings indicate that people consider reading sports pages in mainstream newspapers as a means of fulfilling their needs or desires. In all probability, respondents who read sports pages to a large extent are doing so to get fulfilment in the form of entertainment, knowledge, or escapism. They might want to track their favourite teams or athletes, or they might want to be part of a social group that shares similar interests. The desire to satisfy their individual needs and motives essentially shows that reading sports pages in mainstream newspapers forms a significant area of concern within the respondents' experiences in daily life (Okoye, 2019).

On whether gender influences how people read sports sections in popular newspapers in Uyo? The information in the table for RQ2 shows that gender plays a big role in what people like to read in sports sections. This matches what other studies have found, which is that men are more likely to read sports news than women (Gantz & Wenner, 1991; Koivula, 2001). Also, the Individual Differences Theory says that people use media differently because of their unique personalities, values, and beliefs (Rubin, 2009). In view of the above claims, Nwodu (2017) explains that visual elements in newspapers and magazines have the power to compel people to read the pages of the papers. In this study, the reason men and women read sports sections differently is that they have different personalities, values, and beliefs.

On the extent to which gender influences readership in the sports pages of mainstream newspapers in Uyo, it is clear that more respondents agreed that gender influences them to read the sports pages of newspapers to a very large extent. Also, from the data analyzed, it is shown that people have different needs and motives for reading sports pages. As such, the Uses and Gratification Theory explains that the respondents indicating that gender influences their readership may do so because the sports pages they consume serve their motives and gratification. In the words of Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, (1974), this finding confirms the

indication that gender is an important factor for readers when making their choices of sports pages.

For research question four, the data analyzed in the study also expounds on those factors that contribute to readers' sports page consumption patterns besides gender. A greater percentage of the respondents agreed to read sports pages because of striking headlines, the need for information, content credibility, and availability of the papers. These reasons come in line with the Uses and Gratification Theory, where it has been states that people consume media for a lot of gratifications depending on their needs and motives (Anthony, 2022). Consequently, this finding would imply that the readers' motives to read sports pages are not singular but multidimensional and cannot be characterized by gender alone.

Conclusion

This study investigated the influence of gender on the readership of sports pages of mainstream newspapers in Uyo. It is evident that the sports pages of mainstream newspapers in Uyo are indeed read and this reading is related to gender. Also, other significant factors influence the reading of sports pages of mainstream newspapers in Uyo aside from the gender factor. They include credibility, need for information, availability, and headline. The production of sports pages in mainstream newspapers should, therefore, consider these factors if the readership is to be improved and the readers meaningfully engaged.

Recommendations

- i. Mainstream newspapers should improve sports pages that are credible, informative and catching to attract the attention of readers.
- ii. The planning of sports pages needs to be done in such a way that it gives significance to gender differences for greater readership.
- iii. The availability of newspapers should be improved to achieve a wider readership.
- iv. Headlines are to be attractive and striking for the readers.

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