

Readership of Newspapers among the University Students at the wake of Covid-19 Pandemic in Nakuru County.

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Abstract

Covid-19 pandemic has adversely affected the newspaper sector. Majority readers, especially among the students, have since opted to use social media, television, radio, and online for news updates. Most of the students avoid reading the newspaper due to fear of contracting the disease. The study used both qualitative and quantitative methods of research designs. The quantitative design helped in identifying the readership magnitude of the hardcopy, online and broadcast versions before and after the Covid-19 pandemic while; the qualitative design helped identifying the causes of variation in magnitude in hardcopy newspaper readership. The study collected data from the primary source using a questionnaire with a sample of 50 respondents picked through convenience sampling method. The findings indicate that majority age of students interviewed ranged between 18-22 years and majority were male at 68% compared to female, 32%. Also, most students, 94%, read the newspapers before the outbreak of Covid-19. 56 percent of them preferred the Daily Nation, 24% the Standard Newspaper while the rest went for the Star, the Nairobiian and other versions of print media. However, after the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, most students, 90%, feared reading the newspapers and instead 68% went for Facebook, 24% used twitter while 8% used other forms of social media for news update. In conclusion, the use of traditional media like television and radio is still common among the students. The study indicate that majority 58%, of students used television sets for news update, 24% used radio, 10% used online media while 8% used other forms of media.

Key terms: COVID-19 pandemic, newspapers, readership, social media, university students

How to cite this article in APA (6th Edition)

Kuria, J. K. (2021). Readership of Newspapers among the University Students at the wake of Covid-19 Pandemic in Nakuru County. *Editon Cons. J. Media Commun. Stud.*, 3(1), 189-196. Doi: [10.51317/ecjmcs.v3i1.199](https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjmcs.v3i1.199)

INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic in Kenya has caused many negative effects in the economic sector. Most companies, both public and private, have experienced some economic respite resulting in desperate measures to withstand the “storm.” The worst of the measures undertaken are laying off their employees so as to cut down expenses. In print journalism sector for example, the hardcopy newspaper readership has been adversely affected by the pandemic with majority of university students opting for softcopy versions. This has been because of fear of contracting the disease, which easily spreads from one infected person to another. The fear of contracting the disease has also seen majority of newspaper readers opting for broadcast media like television and radio.

According to Manatu Hauora, (2020), Covid-19 disease can spread from one person to another through coming into contact with already infected surfaces. This happens when an infected person coughs talks or sneezes. The droplets containing the virus are more likely to spread to the surrounding surfaces.

WHO (2020) further observes that the disease can also spread through coming into contact with either an already infected person and surface or using objects already used by an infected person. As a result, majority of university students have since ceased buying hardcopies for fear of contracting the disease and opting for online and broadcast media. The shift from hardcopy to online and broadcast consumption has adversely affected the sector in terms of revenue generation. As a result, many employees of the sector have been laid off thus pushing them to resort to other alternative means of livelihood.

The research study tries to identify the following key objectives.

- i. The current magnitude of readership of newspapers
- ii. The usage of new media at the wake of covid-19 in Kenya
- iii. Causes of reduced newspaper readership

Literature review

The current magnitude of readership of newspapers

According to Shivaji, (2020), Indian nationals are more used to newspapers than any other mode of media. This is due to higher credibility accorded to print media as compared to other forms of electronic and online media. The wake of Covid-19 in India, which occasioned the lockdown of newspapers readers, triggered an upheaval.

The habitual readership of newspaper in India is not different from Kenya. It was one of the common ways of getting news updates among the university students and general populace before the wake of Covid-19.

The usage of new media at the wake of covid-19 in Kenya

Bryan and Agnieszka (2018), observes that the internet has changed the fortunes of the world. Since the inception of the internet, the academia, which encompass the university students and lecturers, regard the internet as an ideal tool for meeting their academic goals and objectives. The two scholars further suggests that the society also uses the internet for monitoring and consuming news on both new and traditional media platforms. As of January 2020, it is estimated that almost 4.54 billion of the world's population are active internet users. It is also cited that the global population internet will reach 5.3 billion users by 2023, which equates to 66% of the entire population (Statista.com, 2019).

Abdenour, 2016, observes that traditional media platforms such as TV, radio, and newspapers in the immediate past

were seen and classified as the preferred choice when it comes to authentic news broadcast. However, there has been a recent change where the traditional media news outlets copy news items from social media without authenticating the genuineness of such news before putting in the public domain for consumption.

Other scholars have made similar observations. Gearhart & Kang, 2015, finds out that traditional media outlets were previously entrusted by a huge audience for news updates just because they followed a strict code of conduct, editorial standards and guided regulations in news production and dissemination for public consumption. However according to them, the traditional media currently depend on social media for news stories in a bid to compete for breaking news headlines and attracting a huge followership.

Causes of reduced newspaper readership

India's first Covid-19 patient was found on January 30, 2020 in Kerala. A student from Wuhan University in China returned to Kerala and tested positive. The Union Ministry of Health tweeted this information. After this, COVID19 was introduced in India. As the number of COVID-19 patients increased, the Central and State Governments declared a lockdown. This hit the country's print media, (Unnithan, 2020).

Banerjee (2020), observes that the lockdown cooled the production of newspapers and magazines. There were also problems with the distribution system. As a result, the print media across the country was disrupted. Fear of the corona virus spreading through newspapers was expressed on social media. Many readers stopped handling newspapers. Distributors also refused to distribute newspapers. Transportation of newspapers were also shut down due to the lockdown. In this unfavorable situation, the management had no choice but to stop the production of newspapers.

The viewership of electronic media and mobile consumption increased during the period when the distribution of newspapers was stopped. At the same time, Indians used web media extensively to meet the need for information, (Laghate, (2020).

González, D., (2020) further identifies how social media has an upper hand in quick dissemination of educational content in the COVID-19 era. Consequently, faster dissemination of information concerning preventive measures has many capacities. He further cites that the publications and dissemination of scientific literature on social media platforms like the Facebook and Twitter increases the number of downloads queries, and citations of these articles. With the current COVID-19 pandemic, González, D., (2020) further observes that social media is characterized by rapid dissemination of knowledge worldwide, in addition to markedly reduced editorial times, which have gone from months of processing to days or weeks since its reception.

Research design

Approaches to social research can be qualitative or quantitative. Philosophical assumptions, strategies of enquiry and specific research methods define the variations between the two (Creswell, 2003). According to Robinson, (2016), a quantitative research study starts by identifying and defining the variables of interest, including how to measure them in a reliable and valid manner.

ACAPS, (2012), further yields that information collected through quantitative research methods can be analysed numerically and presented by use of tables, statistics and graphs. In addition, information analysed quantitatively can either approve or disapprove stated research premises as well as quantify the magnitude of an effect.

On the other hand, the qualitative design will help identify the reasons behind the variation of magnitude in the

hardcopy readership. ACAPS, (2012), indicates that qualitative research is by definition exploratory. It is used when we do not know what to expect, how to define the issues, or lack an understanding of why and how affected populations are impacted by an emergency. Qualitative data like quantitative data is based on empiric investigation and evidence. However, qualitative research explores information from the perspective of both groups and individuals and generates case studies and summaries rather than lists of numeric data.

As a result, the study used both qualitative and quantitative methods of research designs. The quantitative design helped to identify the magnitude of consumption between the hardcopy, online and broadcast versions before and after the Covid-19 pandemic while, the qualitative design helped identify the causes of variation in magnitude in hardcopy newspaper readership.

Methods of data collection

Within quantitative social science research, questionnaires are a popular and effective method for collecting primary data. These involve participants responding to a number of questions or statements (“items”) about focal variables, using standardised measurement scales, to indicate the level of a variable in a particular context or scenario (Hinkin, 1998).

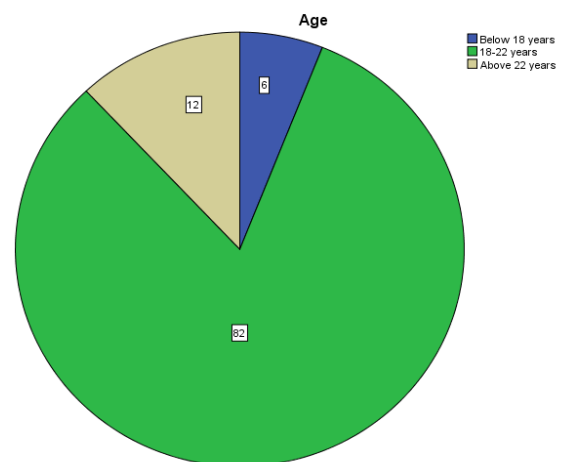
The study collected data from the primary source using a questionnaire. A sample of 50 respondents were picked through convenience sampling method. This happened following the challenge of reaching out majority of the students since the universities were still closed. However, all the interviewees contacted were willing to respond. ACAPS, (2012), describes primary data as data gathered from the information source and which has not undergone analysis before being included in the needs assessment. It is collected directly from the affected population by the assessment team through fieldwork.

Bulmer (2004) describes a questionnaire as a well-established tool within social science research for acquiring information on participant social characteristics, present and past behaviour, standards of behaviour or attitudes and their beliefs and reasons for action with respect to the topic under investigation.

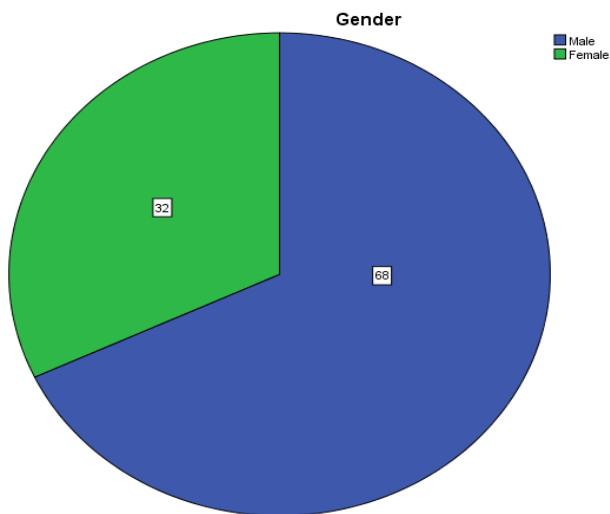
Milne (1998) affirms that questionnaire method is a relatively quick way of collecting potential information from a large portion of a group. However, this potential is not often realised, as returns from questionnaires are usually low. The return rates can only be dramatically improved if the questionnaire is delivered and responded to in class time. Also in some situations, questionnaires can take a long time not only to design but also to apply and analyse.

Findings

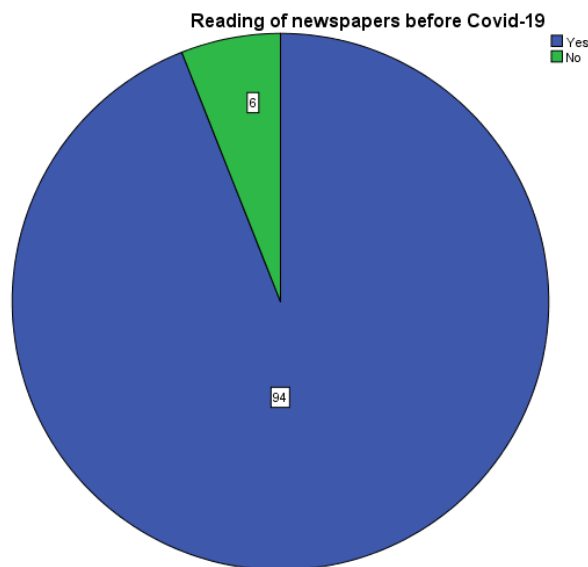
The age of students interviewed ranged from below 18 years to above 22 years. Majority, 82%, of the students fall under the category of 18-22 years followed by those above 22 years while those below 18 years were only 6%.



Majority of the interviewees were male at 68% compared to 32% female students.

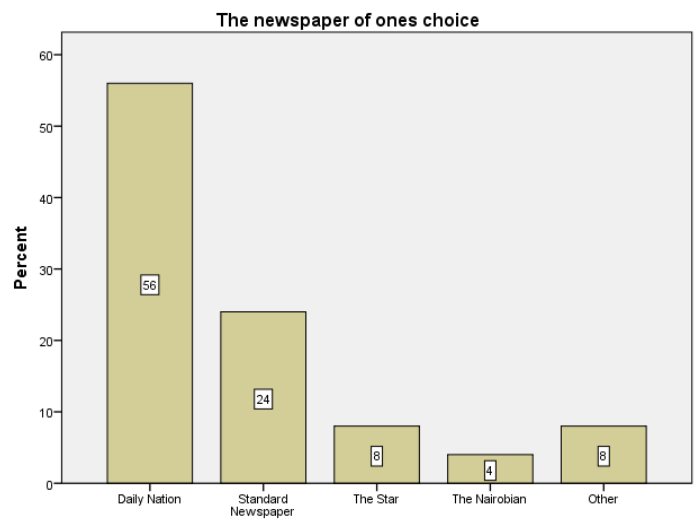


Most students, 94%, read the newspapers before the outbreak of Covid-19. However, 6% of them didn't read the newspapers as shown in the figure below. The finding concur with Shivaji, (2020), that although information is available through electronic and web media, the credibility of print media is still highly regarded.



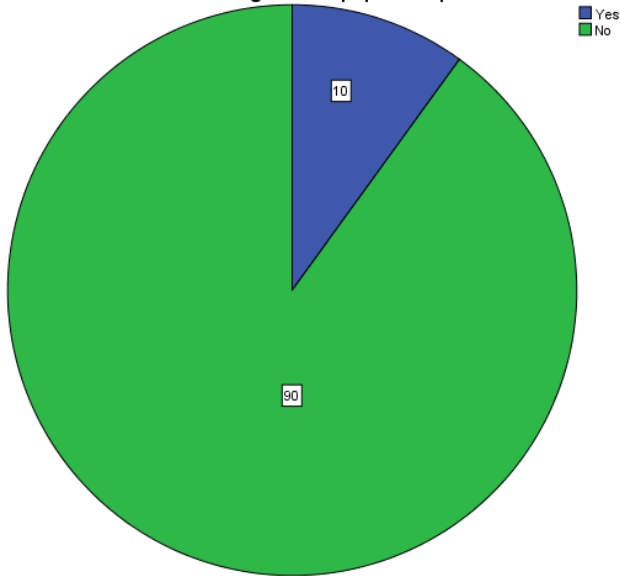
As shown in the figure below, majority, 56%, of the students preferred the Daily Nation, 24% the Standard

Newspaper, 8% the Star Newspaper, 4% the Nairobiian Newspaper while 8% preferred other versions of print media. The finding indicate that the Daily Nation, which is published by the *Nation Media Group* is popular among the university students in Nakuru County.



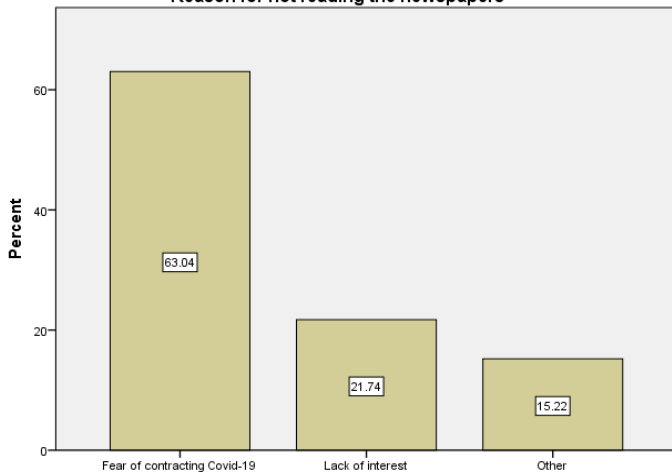
After the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic in Kenya, majority of students, 90%, ceased reading the hardcopy version of the newspaper. Only 10% of the students continued reading the newspapers as shown in the figure below. The finding thus is quite similar to the Indian case. Banerjee (2020), finds out that the outbreak of Covid-19 reduced the production of newspapers and magazines. The distribution systems of the same put in place suffered challenges while people also feared contracting the virus. This resulted to a huge reduced readership of the newspapers.

Reading of newspapers inspite of Covid-19



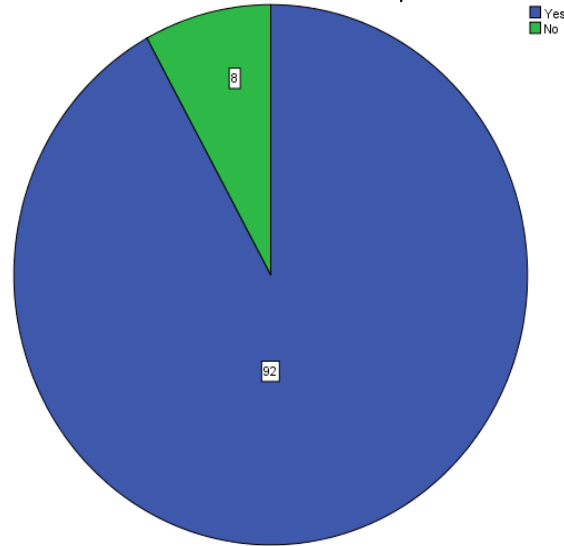
Majority of students, 63.04%, stopped reading the newspapers for fear of contracting Covid-19, 21.74% did not have interest in reading the newspapers while 15.22% indicated other reasons of not reading the newspaper after the outbreak of covid-19 in the country.

Reason for not reading the newspapers



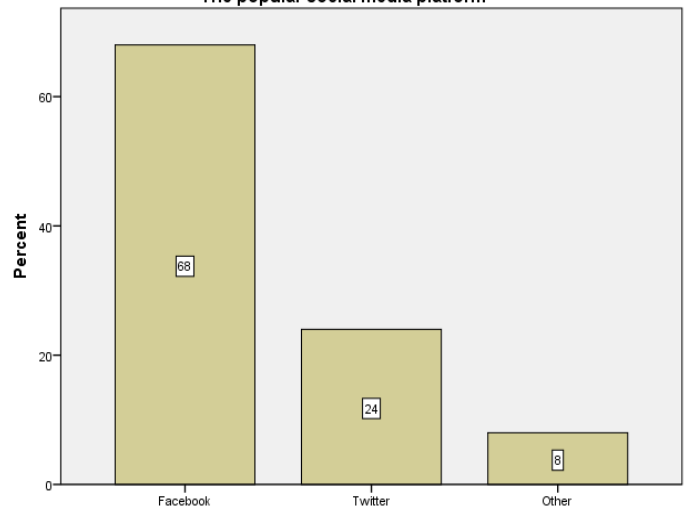
In addition to use of newspapers, 92% of the students used social media. Only 8% of the students didn't use social media as shown in the figure below.

Use of social media platforms

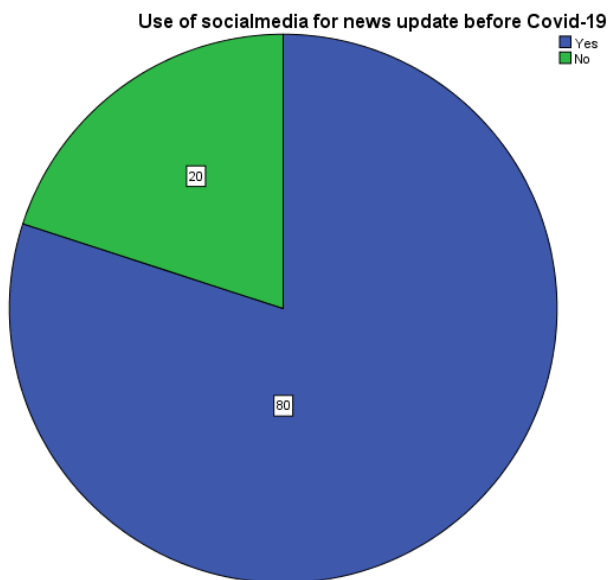


The figure below indicate that Facebook is the most popular social platforms as compared to the rest. 68% of those interviewed preferred the use of Facebook, 24% used twitter while 8% used other forms of social media.

The popular social media platform

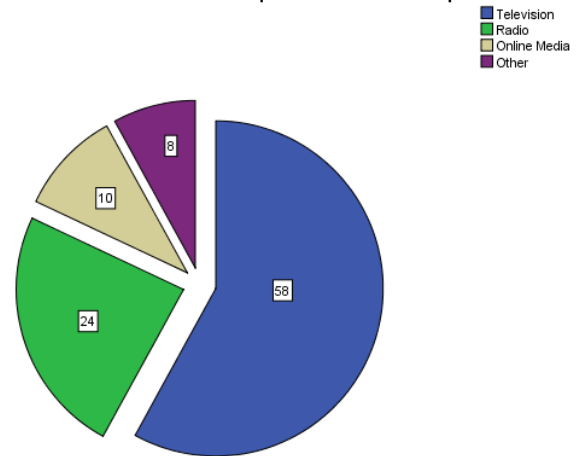


Majority, 80%, of the students used social media platforms for news update before the outbreak of Covid-19. Only 20% did not use social media platforms for daily news update as shown in the figure below.



In spite of the use of newspapers and social media platforms, majority 58%, of students also used television sets for news update, 24% used radio, 10% used online media while 8% used other forms of media for the same purpose. The finding indicate that television is still popular among the students as a news source.

Use of other media platforms for news update



Summary and Conclusion

The fear of contracting the Covid-19 virus has caused the reduction of newspaper readership among the university students in Nakuru County. As a result, the newspaper sector has been adversely affected in spite of its significant role in economic building. In the interim, majority of students have gone for alternative sources of information like social media and electronic media.

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