# The Perception of Reading Online News among University Students in Sub-Urban Area

Persepsi Membaca Berita dalam Talian di kalangan Pelajar Universiti di Wilayah Sub-Urban

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\*Corresponding Author: Liana Mat Nayan, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, Kampar, Malaysia; Email: liana@utar.edu.my Abstract: In studying Internet, we need to take account for differences in places. This is because the Internet affords to show different patterns in which people in different types of places access and use the Internet. Meanwhile, many current studies proved that the Internet is changing the behavior of news readers. Instead of reading a copy of the local newspaper or watching the scheduled evening news, people increasingly turn to the Internet for daily news and this trend also included university students as one of the increasing readers. Therefore, we seek to explore how university students in suburban area differ in terms of the ways in which they read news, their levels of access to the Internet and the purpose of read online news. Findings suggested that few criteria must be considered in order to produce better online news in future.

Keywords: readiness; reading; online news; sub-urban; students

Abstrak: Dalam mengkaji internet, kita juga perlu mengambilkira akan perbezaan geografi. Ini kerana Internet juga mampu untuk menyumbang terhadap wujudnya kepelbagaian corak dalam kalangan penggunanya yang berada di lokasi yang berbeza. Pada masa yang sama, kajian-kajian lepas juga telah membuktikan akan perubahan tingkahlaku harian khalayak yang daripada membaca berita suratkhabar bercetak atau menonton siaran berita lewat petang, kepada membaca berita menerusi Internet. Turut didapati bahawa peningkatan perubahan ini juga telah melanda para pelajar universiti. Justeru, kajian ini dijalankan untuk mengenalpasti adakah pelajar-pelajar universiti di kawasan pinggir bandar berbeza dari segi kaedah membaca berita, tahap capaian Internet dan tujuan membaca berita atas talian. Hasilnya didapati bahawa beberapa kriteria perlu dipertimbangkan sekiranya penerbit berita atas talian mahu menarik perhatian lebih banyak pembaca di masa hadapan.

Kata kunci: kesediaan; membaca; berita atas talian; pinggir bandar; pelajar



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#### Introduction

The Internet and new technologies are changing the information behavior of news readers. Instead of reading a copy of the local newspaper or watching the scheduled evening news, people increasingly turn to the Internet for daily news (Yadamsuren & Erdelez, 2011).

With the advent of interactive media, which may be represented by the Internet, news audiences are not only able to receive news created and disseminated by news media, but also they themselves are able to participate in more diverse ways of news processing, notably by creating, re-contextualizing, and transmitting news (Choi, 2016).

Readers are now able to read articles, watch videos and evaluate other material that is attached to the news. These offerings are all enhanced by hypertext characteristics, links and other forms of technological interactivity such as search engines. Thus, the news in online newspapers involves multiple hybrid activities that allow users to participate in several ways (Johansson, 2014).

As mentioned by Pavlik (1997) previously, which stated that news content on the Internet has evolved in three stages. Briefly, the first stage which is still the most popular is characterized by simply the reproduction of content available through traditional printed news sources and includes early versions of sites like Thestar.com and Utusan.com in Malaysia. The second stage is characterized by the creation of original content with the addition of hyperlinks that enable access to additional information. In the third stage consumers are presented with original content designed specifically for the Internet. The last stage is characterized by a willingness to rethink the nature of community online and a willingness to experiment with new forms of storytelling and involves immersive storytelling which allows readers to navigate through content in ways that extend beyond linear presentation of information (as cited in Chung et al., 2012).

Obviously, news is maturing with the booming of the online media. The news sites have become more interactive and responsive. The potential of interactivity posed by online news has fuelled staggering anticipation over the adoption of a two-way communication model, especially in the news industry (Zamri, 2016).

As of July 2015, the China Internet Network Information Center estimated that 668 million people had Internet access and 83.1 percent of them consumed online news (CNNIC, 2015), indicating a boom in online news (Xu, 2017).

While in Malaysia, the decision made by the Mahathir's administration that the Internet will not be censored has given rise to the flourishing growth of online newspapers (Samani et al., 2015). It can be

concluded that the mainstream press has pioneered the approach of introducing online news portals. For instance, The Star Publications, the company that publishes the newspaper called The Star, was the first to introduce an online newspaper called the Star Online in 1995, and then followed by others such as the *Utusan Online, Berita Harian Online*, and *New Straits Times Online* (Kasim & Sani, 2016).

## Reading Online News in Malaysia

With the convergence of media technology, the amount of communicating online inevitably captured an ever increasing proportion of teenage time (Ang, 2017). Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) (2015) reported in their Internet Users Survey 2014, the most Internet users in Malaysia encompasses Malaysian higher education students who are normally around 20-24 years old.

This fact is undeniable because with the rise of the new media, the reading public now has a different source of information about the realities that happen in everyday life (Samani et al., 2015). From socializing online, to recreational Web surfing, to academic uses, students are comfortable using the internet as an information resource, a medium through which to pursue relationships and a source of entertainment (Jones et al., 2009). According to Wu (2014), information-seeking involve such as reading online news, Wikis, and relevant coursework positively predicted student performance.

Previously, Wok et al (2011) found that TV is perceived by Malaysian university students as the most credible mass media, followed by the newspapers, and then the Internet. This is because of the current news on national and public affairs that are disseminated by both media are reliable.

Later, Freeman (2013) found that most Malaysian university students choose the Internet as their main source of news. Then, Ayub et al. (2014) stressed that the Internet is widely used by Malaysian students in universities to seek relevant information and materials to complete their assignments or projects. In terms of Internet use for academic purposes, students in social sciences, agriculture and computer sciences scored the highest.

However, we should concern also that there are various barriers face by students while reading online news. Chiou & Tucker (2013) stressed that younger readers are more price sensitive, and as we all know, several large players in the media industry, including News Corp and The New York Times, have moved from providing online content free of charge to implementing 'paywalls' where readers are charged a fee for accessing content online.

As found by Akanda and Haque (2013), the major problems students face are frequent interruption of power supply, low speed of Internet, high cost of Internet subscription, etc. It is undeniable that all these problems can be found in rural areas, but it might also exist in sub-urban areas.

#### Reading Online News in Sub-Urban Area

Sub-urban offers qualities that are difference with what can be found in urban and rural environments, particularly in terms of scenery, peacefulness, lifestyle and community life. However, like urban and rural, sub-urban regions also present challenges to those who live, work or study there.

As define by Morganti et al. (2014), an urban area is a set of municipalities made up of an urban center with more than 10,000 jobs, where the distance between buildings is equal to or less than 200 m. While, a suburban area is a residential area within commuting distance of an urban center and connected to it by public transportation and main roads, and a rural area is any of the small urban units and rural municipalities outside urban and suburban areas.

Stern et al. (2009) which investigate the implications of place (geography) on TRTR digital inequalities and find that limited access to advanced technologies in rural areas affects the proficiency and use of the Internet for economics and other daily activities by rural dwellers when compared with individuals from suburban and urban areas.

When the Pew Internet & American Life Project first began surveying the Internet landscape in early 2000, 51% of urban residents were online, while 55% of suburban residents were online. But, when data collected between March and August 2003, data changed where 67% of urban residents use the Internet, while 66% of suburban residents use the Internet (Pew Internet & American Life, 2004). Even the difference is just a little, but it is interesting to know why suburban residents decreasing online.

In their research in a sub-urban community in Malaysia, Salman and Hasim (2011) found that newspaper is the main source of information with 96.1% of the respondents using it as a source of information, followed by the internet (92.4%). However, the main reason for sub-urban community members adopted the internet is for their work as about two-thirds use the internet in their work environment.

In 2012, Pew Internet & American Life Project found that those who live in suburban communities are like urbanites, which most of them are heavy digital participators who comment and share the news. However, these suburban residents rely mainly on the internet for information about local restaurants,

businesses, and jobs. They look to television news for weather and breaking news.

Both findings from developing and developed countries proved that the sub-urban communities used Internet not as their main source for news reading. Then question arise, do university students in sub-urban area also read printed newspaper than online news.

Meanwhile, it is undeniable that empirical online news research has been less "urban-centric," but it is still difficult to find empirical studies that devote meaningful analysis and discussion to the readiness of reading online news outside of core urban and rural areas, such as in suburban communities.

Miner (2015) explained that the costs of delivering the Internet to consumers in Malaysia can be divided into several categories. First is the cost of installing the backbone, the trunk lines, nodes, and routers that form the core of an ISP's network. In terms of geography, costs include digging trenches so that the fiber-optic cabling can be laid underground. These trenching costs depend on the terrain: it is much more expensive to lay fiber-optic through a jungle than alongside a road. As a result, all three backbones follow preexisting routes: roads and highways in the case of TM and Time, and railways in the case of Fiberail. Moreover, most landbased trunk cabling runs along federal and not state roads, since it is much less costly and time-consuming to secure a license from the federal government than from state governments.

From the study done by Miner (2015), we can conclude that the penetration of Internet in most of the sub-urban areas in Malaysia can be considered as not as good as in urban areas. Meaning that, the readiness to read online news also might affect. Therefore, it would be interesting to explore the perception of our university students in sub-urban area to read online news?

## **Uses & Gratifications**

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

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

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

## **Research Objectives**

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

- 1) To identify the frequency of online news reading in sub-urban area
- 2) To examine the respondents perception toward reading online news

## Methodology

University of Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR), Kampar Campus, was chosen for the study based on the consideration that this university developed in sub-urban area which is Kampar.

Survey research method was used for this study. Total of 300 respondents from 8000 students in Kampar Campus were sampled using simple random sampling techniques. Respondents have been selected from the list provided by each of the faculty. All faculties involved were Faculty of Arts and Social Science, Faculty of Business and Finance, Faculty of Engineering and Green technology, Faculty of Information and Communication Technology, Centre for Foundation Studies, and Institute of Chinese Studies. The questionnaire comprises two sections which is A and B. Section A contained general demographic information meanwhile, Section B contained key issues of the reasons for reading online newspaper. The questionnaires were then analyzed by using frequency distribution and percentage.

# Findings & Analysis

## **Demographic Profile**

This study recorded that 300 students have responded to the survey. All these respondents age are around 20-29 years old and they are also in the progress of doing their study in their respective faculty.

**Table 1. Dependency on Internet** 

Tuble 11 Dependency on internet			
	Internet		Total
	Yes	No	

Gender	Male	121	32	153
Gender	Female	138	9	147
Total		259	41	300

In discussing about the dependency on Internet, findings found by Jones et al. (2009), showed that male students spending more time online than their female counterparts. However, latest study by Ang (2017) found that use of the Internet is becoming ritualized among younger generation, especially in the female population. As a result, female adolescents who endorsed stronger Internet habits spent longer hours communicated online (Ang, 2017).

Data by Ang (2017) is parallel with the data from this current study, as in Table 1 which showed that male and female university students in this current study has a small gap in their dependency on Internet. We could relate this findings with the location of UTAR which is in sub-urban area, where lack of entertainment activities such as shopping at shopping mall, which encouraged them to read online news in order to fulfill their needs such as to be updated about current issues like entertainment.

## **Perception towards Reading Online News**

Method of News Reading

Findings in Table 2 showed that 11% of the respondents prefer to read printed newspapers compared to 49.7% which is only read online news. Another 39.3% chose to read both type of newspaper. This result is similar with Mathew et al. (2013) which also had minority of the respondents that prefer to read printed newspaper.

**Table 2. Prefer Method of Reading Online News** 

	Frequency	Percentage
Print	33	11
Online	149	49.7
Both	118	39.3
Total	300	100.0

However, it can be concluded that the combination of respondents prefers to read online news and the respondents prefer to use both method proved that majority of respondents have positive perception toward reading online new. This finding is quite relevant to be connected with results found by Freeman (2013) where university students in Malaysia are fairly intensive users

of online news sites with more than half of the respondents read online news regularly.

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

#### Frequency of reading online news

Findings in Table 3 showed that majority of university students in this study read online news once a day, which is 23%, then the second highest is 18.7% which is read online news several times a week, it shows that university students in sub urban area have a positive relationship with online news. Interestingly, 90% of the respondents are around the group of age at 20 to 24 years old. Previous findings found by Freeman (2013) has this similar result where university students between age 20-24 years old is the group that regularly reads more online news.

**Table 3. Frequency of Reading Online News** 

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

#### Perception towards Online News

It is interestingly to state that majority of students in this current study showed their tendency to read online news more than printed newspaper. This is undeniable due to online newspapers and alternative news sites are communicative settings that include different types of news genres, merged with novel genres adopted from social media (Johansson, 2014). However, it is expected to find that students have no tendency to subscribe online news as stated in Table 4.

Table 4. Tendency to Subscribe Online News

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	37	12.3
No	236	78.7
Don't Know	27	9.0
Total	300	100.0

Even majority of respondents prefer to read online newspaper compared to printed news, however when asked in open ended question about their opinion toward one reason that encouraging them to accept the existence of online news, the concept of free news as presented in Table 5, has been mentioned frequently. Similar result has been found previously by Stovall (2004) which confirmed that the important attractions stem from the (mostly) free access to online news sources, the accessibility of breaking news anytime during the day, the unlimited media choice in the form of text, audio and videos.

**Table 5. Opinion Toward Online News** 

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

In a study done by Chiou and Tucker (2013), results indicate that paywall sites experienced a large decline in visits after the introduction of paywalls. However, it is proved that the news media sources, primarily cable and internet source are dominated among elite people. Several researches attribute the electronic media

including news media news coverage contributing to the perception and attitude of public in such events and issues. Due to the availability and accessibility of enormous amounts of news sources, users are interested in a certain news source rather than others. Furthermore, the result indicted that the respondents are more attracted to the news sources that are more informative and objective (Same'e et al, 2014).

In discussing about to what extent the respondents trust the content of online news by referring to the name of news outlet and the journalist him/herself that wrote the news, majority of the respondents showed the tendency to trust the online news due to the name of the news outlet and not because of the journalist (refer Table 6). In other words, we can expect that when people read news articles from prestigious news agencies, such as BBC, The New York Times, or The Chicago Tribune, they are more likely to have positive perceptions of the news stories than if they had read the stories from less prestigious or less authoritative news agencies, such as The National Enquirer (Go, 2014).

Table 6. Extent to Trust

	Frequency	Percentage
Name of News Outlet	162	54.0
Individual Journalist	55	18.3
No Idea	83	27.7
Total	300	100.0

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

Table 7. Gratifications Obtained from Online News

Gratification	Mean
Information	164.7
Entertainment	117.6
Convenience	169.5
Social Interaction	142.5

However, majority of students in this study read online news because of they are satisfy with its convenience element (refer Table 7). This situation could be due to their responsibility as student which need them to involve not only in academic activities. With online news which is easy to read compared to journal or book, easy to use even with audio and video provided, can be read at any time such as through mobile etc., and less effort is needed especially when it can be linked to other relevant websites, students will feel that online news is really make their life easier not just as a student but also in their different role.

#### Conclusion

In touching about readiness to read online news, we have found that majority of the participants of this study know what online news is and will read online news at least once, though some agreed that they still want to read printed newspaper, however, most of them agreed that they have gained gratifications through reading online news.

The outputs of this study proved the readiness of reading online news among sub urban communities, especially university students. Here, Malaysia government needs to ensure that all Malaysia citizens have to be empowered to participate in the new digital society. The development of the digital society must be accessible to all Malaysia citizens. The digital society can be supported by effective policies aiming at closing the digital gap within the urban, sub-urban and rural areas in Malaysia.

We should understand that the assignments, projects and all other kind of activities involving students will need them to be updated with current news and information. Therefore, it is important also for higher education institutions in sub-urban and rural areas to consider the development of technology and Internet facilities as parallel with the development of teaching and learning activities. Collaborations with government and corporate sectors such as IT companies can be the best method in improving the technology and Internet facilities in the university.

Besides that, online news owners/publishers also must capable in preparing a guideline that can be considered in order to maintain their current readers and increasing their future readers. As stressed by Makaruddin (2006), young people are the group that publishers need to nurture, therefore, newspaper owners/publishers must be realistic enough to abandon what has not and will not work and be imaginative enough to find new ways of meeting their audiences' ever evolving need for information.

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