

Uses And Gratification Theory And The Optimization Of The Media In The Privatization Of State Owned Enterprises In Nigeria

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Abstract

The study was on the uses and gratification theory in the media landscape and environment in Nigeria with focus on the optimization of the media in the privatization and commercialization of state owned enterprises in Nigeria. The objectives were to determine Public Relations application of the principles and practices and concepts inherent in the uses and gratification, how communication messages were couched, decisions to choose a particular medium for communication with their audiences, the audiences active roles and dispositions in deciding which medium to be exposed to based or not on uses and gratification. A survey design was used and a population of 60 media houses while primary and secondary data were collected, analysed and presented. The findings were that no pattern for placing news, no target audience but general publications believing varieties of the publics read the papers. The recommendations were to have the need for Newspapers to subscribe to the Audit Bureau of Circulation, NIPR to monitor members on professional practices, and organizations to key into ICT and effectively deploy it to the services of the customer and general public.

Keywords: Gratification Theory, Optimization, Media, Privatisation, Nigeria

1.0 Introduction

Today's society is fast shrinking into atomized whole or global village through the internet or world wide web (www), with so many channels that have emerged to advance a mass-mediated means of communication between and amongst the peoples of the world, including the traditional media, the internet and the social media that have found outlets in mobile phones, e-gadgets, gaming consoles, chat rooms, blogs, micro-blogs, and computers.

The seeming communication labyrinth has given the audiences the latitude to navigate, and determine which medium to expose themselves to, in order to satisfy their communication needs. Therefore, no other period more than now is the Uses and Gratification Theory, developed by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974) best suited for examination and analysis. The Uses and Gratification theory suggests that audiences are responsible for selecting the media organization that would best serve their needs; and that media outlets are used by the audiences to fulfill specific gratifications. In the submission of Katz et al (1973-1974) the media compete against other information sources for viewers' gratification.

Incidentally, opinions differ on the notion of active audience participation as it relates to the U & G theory. Some critics believe the theory cannot measure an active audience (Blumler, 1979). For some researchers, the media serve specific purposes and it is left for the audiences to key into these and then locate which amongst the media activities is relevant to their use, and consequent gratification. West and Lynn (2010) paraphrased Blumler (1979) and listed four of these activities to include utility, Intentionality, selectivity, and imperviousness to Influence, but Katz et al (1973-1974) had four primary factors for which one may use the media diversion, Personal Relationships, Personal Identity or Individual Psychology, and surveillance. In spite of the immeasurableness of the concept of active in the audiences, Lin (1993) posits that "viewers who were most active had a greater expectation of gratification and also reported obtaining greater satisfaction".

Invariably, the audience would attempt to understand the gratification in order to maximize the media for this purpose, hence Wimmer and Dominick (2010) submit that the gratification sought by the audience form the central concept though there are however, many antecedent variables such as media structure, media technology, social circumstances, psychological variables, needs, values, and beliefs that all relate to the particular gratification pattern used by the audience.

Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) argue in favour of utility, passing time, seeking information, convenience, and entertainment. This study had earlier been carried out for the traditional media and the result seems to be what the internet study replicated. Berelson (1949) submit why people read newspapers were reading for information, social prestige, escape, a tool for daily living, social context, while Wimmer and Dominick (2010) suggest many were inspired by the practical needs of newspaper publishers and radio broadcasters to know the motivations of their audience in order to serve them more efficiently.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

There is a general lack of understanding amongst public relations practitioners in public enterprises or agencies of government in Nigeria that their audiences are essentially all citizens of the country. The oft-mistaken assumption is that they are in one way or another affected by the policies of government, hence the common practice to couch all communication messages in a generic way; as well as giving little or no thought to communication vehicles which carry these messages.

The Public Relations practitioners seem to have failed to appreciate and deploy their understanding of the uses and gratification theory as it applies to their profession, and may have also failed to embark on public relations research to determine the media most of its audiences use, and why they have made that choice. As Papacharissi (2009) suggest media uses are for different reasons and each uses gratifies a particular need offered by the media. Accordingly, Lule (2012) concord these could be determined by researchers.

Given the above stated problem, the study was conducted to examine the way the Bureau of Public Enterprises (BPE), an agency of the federal government of Nigeria with the mandate of privatizing state-owned-enterprises, optimizes the media in getting its stories across to its target audience; and if indeed it understands its audience from the perspective of providing the gratification they seek through message content and proper media segmentation.

In other words, the study sought to know if PR practitioners in Nigeria truly understand the Uses and Gratification theory as it applies to the job of defining their target audience, segmenting them along lines the choices they make regarding exposure to particular media as a result of the gratification they seek that is met by these media; and how has this understanding and knowledge made the PR person choose the right media and necessary message content to use are the subject of this study.

1.2 Objective of the Study

This study focused on BPE use of uses and gratification theory during the privatization of state owned enterprise in Nigeria with the following objectives to determine:

1. Public relations practitioners' application of the principles, practices and concepts inherent in Uses and Gratification Theory;
2. How their communication messages were couched;
3. The decision to choose a particular medium for communicating with their audiences;
4. The audiences' active roles and dispositions in deciding which medium to expose themselves to as a result of the gratification they derive from the media.

1.3 Research Questions

To address this concern, the study raised a number of research questions from where our hypotheses were drawn from. The questions are as follows:

1. Do PR practitioners in Nigeria place their stories in the media in such a manner to target specific audience?
2. Does media contents or messages determine the choice of media in communicating with ones target audience?
3. Does placement of stories in any media significantly determine the caliber of people who are drawn to the media as a consequence of the story?
4. Are business investors likely to be drawn to the social media network for information sources regarding investments in Nigeria?

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study was on the content of newspapers in Nigeria and some social media in which the Bureau of Public Enterprises places its messages. The study covered published national newspapers and other media for the period the BPE advertised for the sales of public enterprises in Nigeria.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This Study focus on measuring categories of gratification for individual exposure to the media, including an organization's choice of media based on gratification derived from it by the audience, as informed by media's proclivity to satisfying or meeting the sought gratification in content and relevance as against the use of inducements such as "Brown Envelope." The relevant literatures and research studies reviewed and some of their postulations were supported with the findings in other studies such as those of Swanson (1987), Babrow (1989) and Van (1990) that exposed the relevance of the media as a critical factor in the gratification of the audience. This study will benefit the media users, the media owners, and students of communication studies, the publics and government and the society on the uses and gratification theory concepts and how these could boost the various interests in their needs for the media.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.0 Introduction

2.1 Bureau of Public Enterprises

The Bureau of Public Enterprises (BPE) is the secretariat of the National Council on Privatisation (NCP), which is the body statutorily empowered to privatise state-owned-enterprises (SOEs) in the country. Available statistics show that Nigeria established over 1000 State-owned enterprises with over N1 trillion and has invested over N800billion in maintaining them without a corresponding return on investment. It is estimated that in power supply alone, for instance, "the nation may have lost about 800million US dollars due to unreliable power supply... and another 440 million US dollars through inadequate and inefficient fuel distribution" (Privatisation Handbook:2000)

The federal government statutorily appointed the Vice President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as chairman of the Council, with some key members of the Federal Executive Council of Nigeria as members, including the Secretary to the Federal Government, Central Bank Governor, Minister of Finance, Attorney General of the Federation, The President of the Nigeria Labour Organisation and the Organised Private Sector. Essentially, the TCPC emerged on a global economic trend of privatization, exported to the world by the Margret Thatcher administration in the United Kingdom. (Matthew Bishop et al, 2004). For Nigeria, there was the conviction in "...the absolute necessity to realign ourselves with these global trends" (Privatisation Handbook:2000)

Following Nigeria's transition to democracy in 1999, the Decree No 25 of 1988, which was amended as Public Enterprises (Privatisation and Commercialisation) Decree No 28 of 1999 by the regime of General Abdusalami Abubakar was adopted as an Act of the National Assembly to now read Public Enterprises (Privatisation and Commercialisation) Act 1999, further giving impetus to the programme, (Privatisation Handbook:2000). From then to date, the agency has done a total of 120 transaction for which it paid the sum of 149 billion Naira into the national treasury.

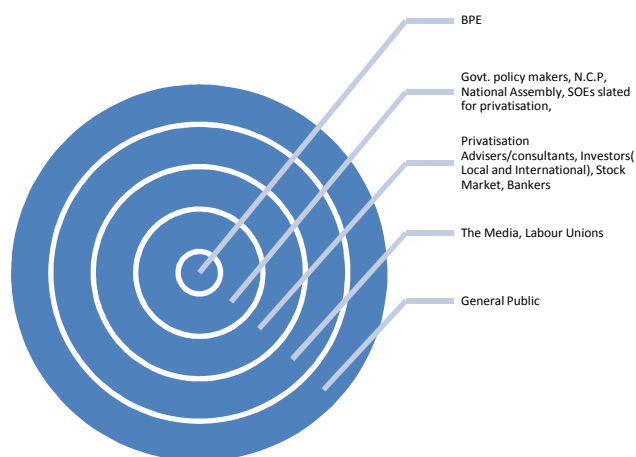
2.2 Privatization Audience

The Agency's mandate was graphically captured by Mallam Nasir el-Rufai, BPE's first Director General, in the different goals that motivate privatization in different countries including improving a government's cash flow, enhancing the efficiency and performance of the SOE sector, promoting 'popular capitalism', curbing the power of labour unions in public sector, redistributing incomes and rents within society, and satisfying foreign donors preference for redefining the role of government in the economy. (el-Rufai (2011).

The communication goal of the Bureau has centered largely on the above stated organizational goals. The messages to its target audience reflected these and other issues that would promote investment in the country through privatization and commercialization. This suggests that in content and form, the messages it sends out limit the audience that expose themselves to it, as Lattimore et al., (2007) argue that messages in the mass media will be shaped, selected, and interpreted in multiple ways if these messages are seen or heard at all, while to Katz, Gurevitch and Haas (1973) mass media is the means by which individuals connect or disconnect themselves with others.

A BPE audience would likely expose itself to international journals and magazines as a platform to attract foreign direct investment in an open, fair and transparent manner, Omoleke and Adeopo, 2005. The prediction that audiences are drawn to media for benefits they would derive, or what has been reduced to the gratification they seek for the use they put the media to, was first mooted by Marshall McLuhan (1964) when he posited that “the medium is the message” being instrumental in shaping human and cultural experience. This postulation informed a lot of media-audience research, and arguably the thematic expression of the U & G Theory. What perhaps seems doubtful is whether the BPE factors in such media mapping into its communication plan or whether it conducts audience research to find out if its preferred channels are providing the kind of gratification its audience seeks.

Figure 1: BPE Audience Mapping



source: BPE

Fig. 1 The audiences that the BPE deals with as contained in the Privatisation Act, 1999.

Source: BPE

A close look at the figure shows that the general public orbits at the outskirts of the cycle, and may not be unconnected with the agency’s assumption that they contribute little or nothing to achieving its mandate which is attracting net-worth investors who have the financial and technical ability to invest in the SOEs. Expectedly, its messages may have toed similar line.

2.3 Development of the Uses and Gratification Theory

The accounts of the development of the U & G Theory are varied. Early studies focused on the mass media role in propaganda and persuasion, which later veered into looking at the behavioural sciences for explanation of the possible effects of the media and communications on society (Lule, 2012). Other studies sought to see patterns under the perspective of the uses and gratification theory in radio listeners (Lazarsfeld, 1940); while Lasswell (1948) introduced the dimension of a four-functional interpretation of the media on a macro-sociological level. These are the functions of surveillance, correlation, entertainment and cultural transmission for both society and individuals. However, Wright (1960) extends the position of Lasswell by adding the mobilization function and his concept is paraphrased as thus:

Surveillance provides news and information, correlation presents the information to us after they select, interpret, and criticize it. The cultural transmission reflects our own beliefs, values, and norms, and media also entertains and provides an escape from everyday life. Mobilization is promoting society's interest especially in times of crisis (<http://www.uky.edu/~drlane/capstone/mass/functional.htm>)

As stated earlier, McLuhan gave form to media-effect study. According to Stille (2000), his works brought the idea of media-effect to limelight and to the attention of the public, thus helped in creating a new way for the public to consider the influence of media on culture. Lule (2012) corroborates this assertion when he wrote that

“the internet and its accompanying cultural revolution have made McLuhan’s bold utopian visions seem like prophetic”.

Wikipedia however sought to explain this development in its identification of the four stages of the Theory. It stated thus:

Stage 1

- In 1944 [Herta Herzog](#) began to look at the earliest forms of uses and gratifications with her work classifying the reasons why people chose specific types of media. For her study, Herzog interviewed soap opera fans and was able to identify three types of gratifications. The three gratifications categories, based on why people listened to soap operas, were emotional, wishful thinking, and learning.
- In 1970 [Abraham Maslow](#) suggested that Uses and Gratifications Theory was an extension of the [Needs and Motivation Theory](#). The basis for his argument was that people actively looked to satisfy their needs based on a hierarchy. These needs are organized as [Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs](#) in the form of a pyramid with the largest, most fundamental needs at the base and the need for self-actualization at the tip. From the bottom-up the pyramid contains Biological/Physical, Security/Safety, Social/Belonging, Ego/Self-Respect and Self-actualization at the top.
- In 1954 [Wilbur Schramm](#) developed the fraction of selection, a formula for determining which form of mass media an individual would select. The formula helped to decide the amount of gratification an individual would expect to gain from the medium over how much effort they had to make to achieve gratification.

Stage 2

- In 1969 [Jay Blumler](#) and [Denis McQuail](#) studied the 1964 election in the United Kingdom by examining people's motives for watching certain political programs on television. By categorizing the audience's motives for viewing a certain program, they aimed to classify viewers according to their needs in order to understand any potential mass-media effects. The audience motivations they were able to identify helped lay the groundwork for their research in 1972 and eventually the Uses and Gratifications Theory.
- In 1972 [Denis McQuail](#), [Jay Blumler](#) and Joseph Brown suggested that the uses of different types of media could be grouped into 4 categories. The four categories were: diversion, personal relationships, personal identity and surveillance.
- In 1973-74 McQuail, Blumler and Brown were joined by [Elihu Katz](#), [Michael Gurevitch](#) and [Hadassah Haas](#), in their media exploration. The collaborative research began to indicate how people saw the mass media.

Stage 3

- The most recent interest surrounding Uses and Gratifications Theory is the link between the reason why media is used and the achieved gratification.
- UGT researchers are developing the theory to be more predictive and explanatory by connecting the needs, goals, benefits, and consequences of media consumption and use along with individual factors.
- Work in UGT was trailblazing because the research of Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch built on Herzog's research and caused a paradigm shift from how media influences people to how audiences use media, diminishing the dominance of the limited effects approach to mass media studies.

Interestingly, the authors of the theory seem to have captured the development in stages which they term “historical development” (Palmgreen, 1984). The fourth stage is the development of the Uses and Gratification Model by Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974). We have lifted Wikipedia’s account extensively, to guide discussion on the development of this Theory. While this may not be a universally-accepted flow of the development of this Theory, (Lule, 2012; Lazarsfeld, 1940; Lasswell,1948; McLuhan,1964; Stille, 2000), it gives a much organized pattern of the Theory’s development and the expanded version of the Blumler and Katz’s effort, thus establishing a seminal direction to understanding the Theory.

2.4 The Theoretical Constructs of Uses and Gratification Theory

According to Katz et al (1974), “Uses and Gratifications theory asserts that people are active users of media and select how they will use it”, but more specific was Lattimore et al., (2007) that people use media as entertainment; scan the environment; a diversion; a substitute for personal relationships; and a check on personal identity and values. However, Ruggiero (2000) suggests variability of involvement and ritualistic or habitual use, but Levy and Windahl (1984) espoused that “individuals are differentially selective and goal-directed at different times: before, during and after exposure to media”. On the involvement factor, Galloway and Meek (1981) submit that motivation to use any mass medium is also affected by how much an individual relies on it.

Most studies on Uses and Gratifications centered on the ‘active audience’ claim, as Windahl (1981) suggest the audience as “superrational”, whilst indeed audience activity “covers a range of possible orientations to the communications process, a range that varies across phases of the communication sequence” (Levy and Windahl, 1984). Ruggiero (2000) puts it more graphically: “Different individuals tend to display different types and amounts of activity in different communication settings and at different times in the communication process.”

The emphasis on the active nature of the receiver led Mings (1997) to conclude that U & G Theory is a receiver-based communication theory, while Evans (1990) defined Uses and Gratifications as “a framework in which “audience...gratification [is] primary,” and “media consumers [are] seen as rational agents whose various uses of media offerings depend upon how these offerings serve various social-psychological functions”. In Katz (1959) the question is not “what do the media do to people?” but rather “what do people do with the media?”

Uses and Gratification criticisms abounds especially for its overly assumptions, which Wimmer & Dominick (1994) listed as media selection initiated by the individual, expectations that are produced from individual dispositions, social interaction, and environmental factors; and active audiences with goal-directed media behavior, though these had very limited acceptability amongst scholars (Ruggiero, 2000). In Japan, for instance, scholars like Cooper (1997) notes that “communication researchers view media’s individual-level impact as a limited effect perspective, in that media serve only to reinforce preexisting attitudes and behaviours”, thus aligning with Klapper’s minimal effects position (Klapper, 1960, Mings 1997, Elliot, 1974; Swanson, 1977; and Rubin & Windahl, 1986, Dozier & Rice 1984, Schramm (1949).

Scholars may argue on the side of strong media effect as in Hypodermic Syringe model or Magic Bullet theory effect (Berger, 1995; Croteau & Hoynes, 1997) or the little effect (Klapper,1960) ; but the Uses and Gratification theory in all the positions maintain that the audience is key, and takes the critical decision of what is wanted out of the medium.

3.0 Research Method and Design

The study used survey design and a content analytical method and is supported by Holsti (1969) that defined content analysis as any technique of making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages. The study therefore adopted the Relational Analysis statistical approach (Palmquist et al, 1997). Primary and secondary data were used. A total of six newspapers was analyzed. Three specialized newspapers (business publications) and three general interest newspapers were chosen and analyzed on the basis of their being national newspapers in terms of spread, reach and editorial slant. To obtain data of BPE audience, we looked at the subscription pattern of a total of 60 companies surveyed across the six geopolitical zones in the country. The type of newspapers or publications they subscribe to were coded, the markings of the papers were ranked to obtain information on their exposure to other stories aside from BPE’s, thus giving insight to why they choose the medium or the gratification they obtain by choosing these media.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSES

4.0 Introduction

The presentations of findings were done in tables and charts.

Table 1: Code sheet of the exposure pattern of 60 companies who are BPE key audience

Categories of Analysis	Guardian	ThisDay	Daily Sun	BusinessDay	Fin. Standard	Economist
Adverts/EOIs	37	15	0	8	0	0
Stories on BPE	11	19	9	12	6	3
Exposure to other stories on the same newspaper carrying BPE news	11	17	16	7	6	3
Stories by BPE in business publications	17	20	5	9	7	2
Stories by BPE in general interest publications	15	22	7	7	6	3

Where:

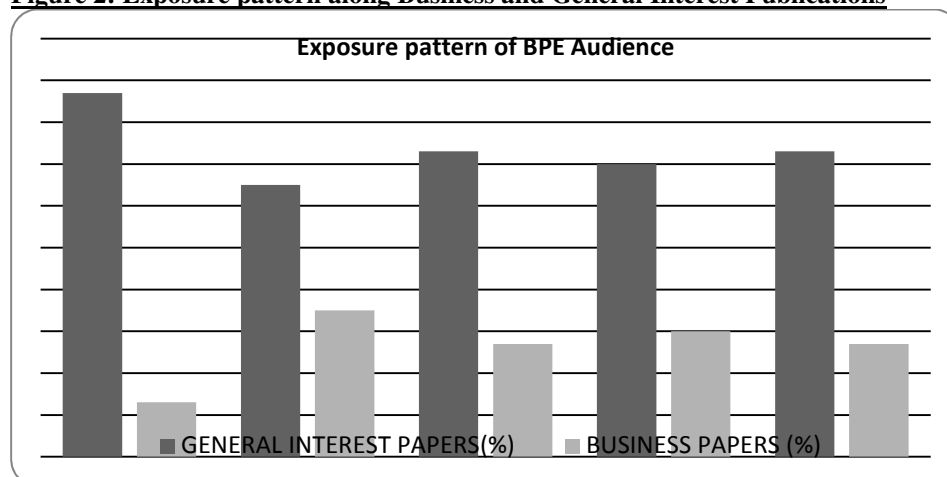
General Interest Publications = Guardian, ThisDay and Daily Sun

Business Publications = BusinessDay, Financial Standard and Economist (International)

Source: Field Survey

The Table 1 above shows that out of the 60 companies whose exposure to the media was content analyzed, an average of 74% exposed themselves to General Interest publications as against 26% that would rather choose the Business publications. A breakdown of this exposure choice pattern is shown in the chart below:

Figure 2: Exposure pattern along Business and General Interest Publications



Source: Field Survey

According to our chart, in all the categories, BPE audiences are drawn more to the General Interest publication, which by deductive inference suggests that BPE places more of its stories in these newspapers.

Table 2: Placement of stories in Newspapers by the BPE

BPE News	Business publications	General Interest Publications	Social Media	Total
Adverts	12 (25%)	36 (75%)	0	48
News Stories/features	21 (2156" column inches) 22%	73 (2305") 78%	0	94

From the table above, we were able to establish the pattern of news placement by the BPE, which as predicted given the deductive inference, is slanted towards the general interest magazine. According to the table, BPE published a total of 36 adverts out of 48 adverts within the 6 months period of review representing 75% as against 25% or 12 adverts that were published in the business publications. Similarly, 73 stories accounting for 78% of regular stories were published in the general interest newspapers inside 2305 column inches, while stories in the business publications accounted for 22% or 21 stories within 2156 column inches.

4.1 Media Placement: Segmenting the Audience

The BPE, according to data generated, published its stories at random and more in general interest publications, whose contents cut across diverse interests and can be read by anybody that is likely to find one or many topics interesting. There is no conscious effort to segment its audiences and target the media they are likely to use and derive gratification from.

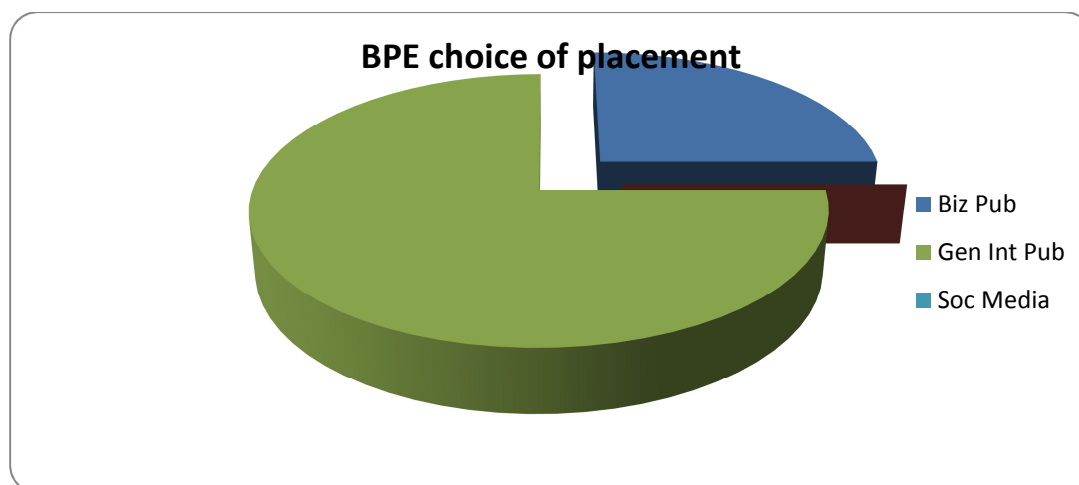


Figure 3: BPE choice of story placement in Business and General Interest Publications

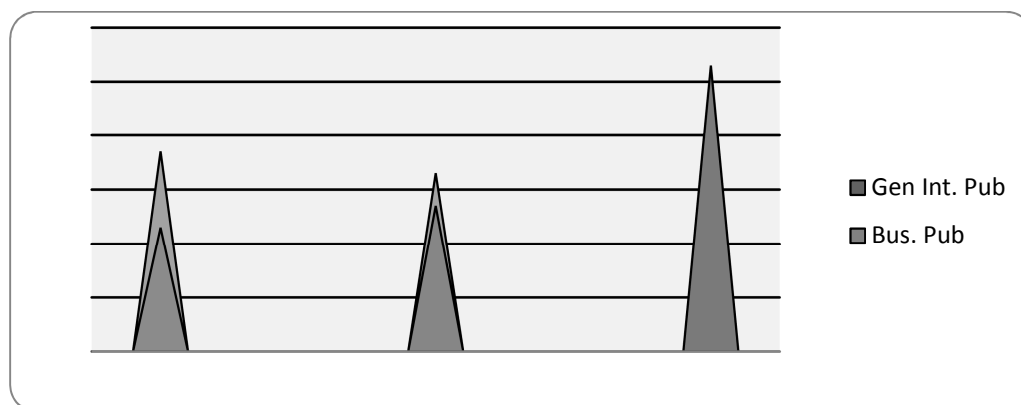


Figure 4: Subscription pattern of BPE Audiences

Source: Field Survey

4.3 New Technologies and Social Media in Nigeria

The social media network is a significantly veritable information source for business investors in Nigeria. Table 3 below shows the statistical analysis of our findings.

Table 3: Audiences' information on BPE through Social Media

	Blackberry Chat	Twitter	Facebook	Linkedin	Netlog
Yes	6 (10%)	2 (3%)	0 (0%)	5 (8%)	4 (7%)
No	54 (90%)	58 (97%)	60 (100%)	55 (92%)	56 (93%)

Average %

Yes = 94% No = 6%

From the statistics above, 94% of those surveyed who accepted having used the above listed social media (Blackberry Chat, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and Netlog) said they have never heard of the BPE mentioned in these social sites, as opposed to a mere 6% that said they have come across the name of the organization.

4.4. Discussion of Findings

A content analysis of BPE stories published in these newspapers within the 6 months period of survey revealed that it placed more stories in the general interest newspapers than it did the business publications. Table 2 above graphically illustrates this. BPE may be emboldened in this position in figure 3 considering Van (1990) position that “the use of the medium is considered along with the amount of viewing, presence of information alternatives and perceived reality of the medium.”

Our study shows that the stakeholders of BPE exposed themselves more to the general interest publications as seen in Table 2, even as Figure 3 equally points to BPE’s preference for that media type. However, data generated revealed that the audiences who are categorized as High and Credible investors would rather subscribe to business publication as Figure 4 depicts. What this means is that the BPE does not have a deep understanding or knowledge of the media choice pattern of their audiences. Perhaps, what accounts for the audiences’ exposure rate towards general interest publications may be to satisfy the use for the media (searching for BPE stories and adverts) and not necessarily the gratification they seek from the publications (which explains why their subscription pattern is tilted to the business publications). The above observation questions the activeness of the audiences in the entire Uses and Gratification Theory. If the audience is key, and therefore directs the message or placement, this has not been shown remarkably.

However, none of the 60 companies surveyed maintain a formal and structured social media policy in their communication plan. Incidentally, the findings from table 3 of our study corroborates Babrow (1989) who suggests in his theory “that audience attitude toward media behavior is an important factor in media use”.

5.1 Summary of Findings

The study found that stories placed in newspapers by public relations practitioners do not follow any known pattern or deliberately aimed at targeting a specific audience which an organisation wishes to reach out to. Rather, the practitioners merely go for general interest publications in the belief that readers cut across varied interests. This perhaps explains why a highly net-worth, policy-centered agency of government like the BPE, till date, does not use the social media in spite of trendy communication shift from traditional media to online communication, in global communication studies.

5.3 Conclusion

The Uses and Gratification theory may be an old communication theory that has continued to find relevance in modern communication studies, more so as it has aptly posted major challenges to theorists and professionals in the field though in Nigeria, the problem lacks definition.

5.2 Recommendations

Given the findings of this study, we recommend as follows:

1. There is an urgent need for the regulatory agencies of the media and the public relations profession to insist that all newspaper subscribe to, and publish their Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC) report quarterly, together with the details of the analysis
2. The Nigeria Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) should step up the monitoring of its members in respect of their professional practice and conduct. Sequel to the above, the National Assembly should enact laws that will strengthen the regulatory agencies of both the Media and the Public Relations profession.
3. Finally, companies in Nigeria should be encouraged, even if by way of policy pronouncement, to deploy ICT services in their communication plans.

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