Approaches to mass communication educational researches in universities and polytechnics of Nigeria

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Abstract. In Nigeria, many Universities and Polytechnics offer Mass Communication as a course for many of its students. But the different education institutions find many difficulties to classify mass communication as a discipline in the humanities, arts or the social sciences. There is no doubt that this quagmire has affected the direction and pattern of research teachings, literature and practice. This has called for the unbundling of Mass Communication courses from the arts, humanities or social science faculties or colleges. This work is to take an analysis of past mass communication research academic projects to establish the most frequent methods, theories and sectors of mass communication researches by students of Wellspring University and Heritage Polytechnic located in Southern Nigeria for generalization of findings. The research method adopted was content analysis to obtain quantitative data from 155 copies of past academic students projects. Findings was that 121 or 78 percent of projects was by choice of survey methods while 91 or 59 percent prefer social responsibility theory in mass communication researches. Recommendations are that tertiary institutions should expand the scope of teaching mass communication with varieties of research methods and theories to reflect the interdisciplinary nature of Mass Communication as a distinct academic discipline.

Keywords: education, communication, humanities, research, theories

1. Introduction

It is not in doubt that education occupy a cardinal place in the progressive efforts of countries across the globe. Education is the major social industry that controls the fulcrum of human endeavours. Many countries make huge investments to promote, highlight and sustain the significance of education for the attainment of progress. It can be ideal to look at education as human capital development for economic, social or political growth of any society. Education particularly in the formal aspect, can precisely serve as an abstract instrument of expansion in the ever changing World. Formal education can be regarded as the recognized part of training through the schools, which can be at the primary, secondary, college, high school of monotechnic, polytechnic or university. Kapur [18] says that formal education is the education that is provided in educational institutions and training centers. Suitable teaching-learning methods are used in the educational institutions. There are appropriate rules and processes.

In all the levels of educational learning, it is at the university level that people get to attain specialization in the different fields or disciplines. It is at the university level of education that individuals have the opportunities of exploring the theoretical and the practical aspects of fields.

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It is the exposure of the students or intakes in universities that allow the matching, comparing, contrasting and opposing of statements, hypothesis, theories and claims through systematic and orderly researches on different topical areas. One of the many courses in universities especially in Nigeria, is the study of Mass Communication. Sometimes, it is being studied as pure journalism, advertising or public relations, media technology or digital communication or media theater education. The significant issue is that though there are slight differences, either can be practiced after school with the knowledge of a part or the whole of one another. Chukwuemeka [9] affirms that while the overall public frequently use the two or either of the phrases interchangeably, there are vital similarities and dissimilarities that any student should be aware of to make an informed career selection. The major part of each of the course is that it involve the application of channels of communication to educate, inform, entertain, interact, share information. It is one course that has come to receive greater attention with the beginning of the social media or the digital era. A serious look at the handbook of most universities, mass communication studies fall under the Faculties or Colleges of Management science, Social Science, Arts, or Humanities. This is the reason that the graduates of this course are regarded as all-rounders in the fields of social science, management, arts or any related discipline that affect human existence of personnel administration and industrial relations. Aririahu [5] hints that the noble news is that a career in communication is highly lucrative. It opens the graduate to the entire world, to fit into any industry or career as an employee in corporate, government, or non-government organizations. The graduates can also follow up a career by building personal business. With a degree in mass communication and commensurate communication skill, it is comparatively easy to move across industries and career paths. Azamosa [6] adds that even broader fields like finance, healthcare, information technology, and government parastatals are fields where you can pitch your tent as a mass communication graduate. It can also be argued, that the study of mass communication has sections that can avail the graduate a fair knowledge of pieces or elements of natural and applied sciences. This is because in mass communication, it is a prerequisite for graduates to have a pass mark on natural and applied sciences under General studies at the second year level of training. More so, there are core courses that center on science, health, energy and environmental reporting or management which mass communication graduates are expected to provide evidence of proper tutelage. At the final year, mass communication graduates carry out researches and come out with various findings and recommendations on wide areas of social, management, science and technology.

In the light of this, mass communication graduates have ideas about a little bit of everything. It is expected that each of the graduates ought to be a problem solver to the myriads of challenges facing communities and institutions in Nigeria. The respective graduates are expected to adopt approved skills, ideas and knowledge of findings and recommendations provided in researches carried out at the final year of graduation. But against the backdrop of the many researches done by mass communication students, there seems to be no direct relationship between the researches and the expected solutions to social problems still facing the country. This situation may not be unconnected with the approaches to researches by mass communication students from the methods, the theories and the specific sector of mass communication studies preferred by students. Therefore, the core side of this work is to find out the specific sector of human live that mass communication graduates have affected through researches using global theories and methodology.

1.1. Situation of the problem

There are over 153 private and public universities in Nigeria. Almost all the universities undertake programmes on Mass Communication. The programmes are mounted to train and turn out professionals primarily in the fields of journalism, broadcasting, film production, advertising, communication development and public relation. Mass Communication training is basically under faculties and colleges of arts, humanities, management and social sciences. The essence is that at the end of training, the products are fit to serve both as managers of men and material in governmental and non-governmental institutions. A greater number of the graduates can also be self-employed or be employers of labour. At the end of the four year programme, it is a mandatory requirement for each of the student to write a research project in any of the fields of mass communication. These projects are expected to pass through the process of supervision by internal and external examiners. The academic projects at the first degree, masters and the doctorate graduate levels, largely determine the area of specialization of the students. Putatively, the higher the number of students taking to write an academic research in one sector above another, the higher the number of students turned out in that sector above others. It therefore means that the less number of students staying off from carrying out academic projects in a certain aspect of mass communication, the paucity of specialists in certain vital sectors of mass communication. The attendant effect can largely be imagined than experienced, since it can cause the lack of personnel, or recommendations in solving problems through mass communication ideas. It can as well lead to waste of resources by universities that invest and procure facilities connected with educational training of intakes in broad sectors of mass communication. This thinking is very vital considering the recent agitation by university programmes' regulators, the National Universities Commission (NUC) and the National Board for Technical Education (NABTE) in Nigeria for the unbundling of Mass Communication departments of universities and polytechnics into seven separate faculties. By this, it means that mass communication education departments are to be detached from other faculties to operate separately. This demand by the NUC and the NABTE has become controversial as some universities and polytechnics have since adhered to the directives while some are still yet to comply on excuses of inadequate lecturers and the seeming lack of students aspiring to pursue education in some of the courses recommended for the takeoff of the faculties. Perhaps, the first excuse may arise from the educational foundations of the lecturers assumed to have been tied to one direction of mass communication training and have handed over to affect the students. In the circumstances, a sizable number of universities have remained unperturbed for the commencement of the separate faculties for mass communication. Therefore, the statement of the problem is, if in mass communication education particularly in writing final year academic research projects, whether students prefer certain sectors above others and if they also undertake academic projects in certain theories and methods at the detriment of others.

1.2. Purpose of the study

To find out the most commonly used method in mass communication research that students apply in selected tertiary institutions in Nigeria between 2019 and 2022 academic year.

2. Literature review

2.1. Research: the meaning and overview

The term research comes from two words of Re: meaning, that which concerns an earlier issue or matter while Search: means, look back, find, examine or investigate about something or a person or groups. Akinkunmi [2] says that the two morphemes can mean, to search and search again; to take a second look and a more careful look; to find out more. Although, this thinking appears myopic and parochial, the central issue is that it has lend credence to the fact that, it is all about checking to find out missing aspects or the necessary side to be added reasonably. For reasonability of any matter to be arrived in an issue, it means that the facts have to be separated from the fictions. The stated points about research may not fit properly in the context of academics. Consequently, scholarly positions of Kothari and Garg [20] has it that research refers to the search for knowledge. The authors added that research can be a scientific and systematic search for pertinent information on a specific topic. An analysis of the position is that research can be taking off on a journey or a voyage for the purpose of coming out with discoveries.

In the reasoning of Ogunbameru and Ogunbameru [24] research is an interesting enterprise, since it involve collecting answers to problems and reaching a new understanding of the problems. It must be adjudged that before a research is carried out about any situation or institution, it goes to say that there was a missing thing or a gap. Wimmer and Dominik [39] agrees that the word "research", regardless of how it is used, means the same thing: an attempt to discover something. The authors mentioned that the most important thing for all researchers to understand is the correct method to follow to ensure the best results. In all regards, every academic research entail not the writing of volumes but striving towards solving existing or predicted problems.

Hence, Ifidon and Ifidon [17] argues that the process of carrying out a research endeavor cannot be haphazard or on the spur of the moment. Apparently, research has to be formal, systematic and intensive activity, but the inculcation of methodical steps. As an activity, in research the simple rules and protocols have to be strictly adhered. This is the understanding of Onabajo [27] that research is a process that includes thinking about a situation to discover answers through objective and careful conducted methods.

It must be pointed out that in researches, the end point lies in making contributions to knowledge by agreeing or disagreeing to postulations, models, theories, hypothesis or statements. In their comments, Omachonu and Ianna [26] noted that research should be an original work that contributes significantly to the growth of knowledge. In essence, a research has to be on topical issues of development which criticize and correct previous mistakes. Rugg and Petre [30] contents that an academic research does not mean making a major discovery to get a degree even at the doctorate level of education but to show that a good investigation has been done independently in any field of discipline including Mass Communication.

2.2. Types of mass communication research

As far as mass communication is involved, there are different types of researches for the purpose of finding solutions to several problems. These types of researches are not different from what

can be obtained in other social science researches. This is the reason the types of researches in Mass Communication appear to be related to others in arts or humanities. Mohammed [22] supports that there are many types of educational researches as there are authors ranging from historical, survey, descriptive, analytical, observational, correlational study, case study, exploratory study, evaluation, ethnographic, ex-post facto studies. For instance, Alphonsus [4] states that historical research deals with the determination, evaluation and explanation of past events essentially for the purpose of gaining better and clearer appreciation of the present with reliable prediction. The major issue is that every type of mass communication research revolve around the interest of people, institutions or about past events. The types of researches are expected to have variables or major issues which are to find the relationship between a phenomenon or another in the objectives. It is also expected that the topics are selected with originality but the results can be generalized or compared. Thus, Osuala [29] states that research topics are to be sufficiently original without objectionable duplication from the actions and activities of people, institutions or about occurrences. Wimmer and Dominik [39] argues that mass communication researchers can discover potential topics for investigations while reading articles from newspapers, magazines, academic journals either on local, national or international activities or happenings.

2.3. Mass communication research: the basic aims

It has become mandatory that final year students are to present copies of researches on a given topic. In academics, these research projects are not just taken for granted. There are major reasons that the institutions seek for researches from students.

Olaofe [25] said that there are seven reasons for students to write projects. These are: to test the ability to express ideas correctly, effectively, scientifically and clearly. This can be assessed by the composition of grammar, spellings, coherence of ideas and avoid ambiguities in expressions; to test the capacity of the students to uncover or discover fresh ideas or concepts; to test the ability of students to organize and compute data accurately; test consistency in the use of paragraph structures; test appropriate use of quotations and referencing; test contributions to knowledge; ensure the well baking of the students for global analysis of matters in areas at graduation.

2.4. Components of mass communication research

There are no strict rules of selecting mass communication research projects. In the position of Agbola et al. [1] the important considerations for the selection of researchable topics include the drive for intellectual curiosity, interest, ability to solve social and economic problems, the consideration of time, resources and the variables measurable, specific, achievable and attainable. The central issue is that a research topic need not be bogus or rigmarole neither must it be too broad. This require the listing of key words to make up the topic. It must not be seen as a sentence but a statement with operational words to form the components and the structure. Agbola et al note that the major distinction between the choice of a research topic and the statement is that topics represent the broad interest while the statement set out the direction of objectives.

Consequently, a typical mass communication research academic project is expected to have five major sections excluding the preliminary matters and the appendages. In section one of the project, described as Chapter one, the research sets out with the "Introduction" which incorporates: Background to the study, the statement of the problem; the objectives; the research questions; the significance; the hypotheses; scope of the study and the operational definition of terms. In section two or Chapter two, the researchers look at the "Review of Literature" comprising concepts analysis; the empirical review of related literature and the theories. Another interesting section is called Chapter three with main topic of research "Methods or methodology". This section has the research design; the population of the study; the sample and sampling procedure; the instrument of data collection; the validity and reliability; the methods of data collection and methods of data analysis. In section four, the researcher embarks on "Data analysis and discussion of findings" while in chapter five, there is the summary; conclusion and recommendations integrating the contributions to knowledge and suggestions for further studies. The selection of tenses, spellings and paragraphing as well as citations have to be based on formats to shape and be in contemporary standards of research [35].

2.5. Mass communication and educational technology

From the prehistoric abacus to handheld calculators, from slide projectors and classroom film strips to virtual representativeness, artificial intelligence and next-generation e-learning, educational technology continues to progress in new ways.

Lathan [21] states that educational technology focus on the theory and practice of utilizing new technologies to develop and implement innovative educational approaches to learning by students. The intent behind all the high-tech tools and the digitalization are to expand the educational universe of students. This is by encouraging most compelling topics among students to embrace technology for learning.

Generally, technology is continually changing the ways to work and play, create and communicate. Advancements in digital technology are also creating game-changing opportunities in the world of education. Benefits for students include expanded opportunities for personalized learning, more collaborative classrooms and new strategies in which students are introduced to the subject material outside the classroom but online to deepen understanding through discussions and problem-solving activities.

2.6. Theoretical framework

Two theories have been selected to back up this research. These are the bandwagon effect theory and the social influence theory. The bandwagon effect theory is a logical bias that causes people to think or act in a certain approach by merely knowing or seeing that others are doing things the same way or style. The bandwagon effect prompts people to adopt a certain social thought, because by opinion many people in the same social group have adopted the same way of carrying out certain responsibilities.

The bandwagon effect has powerful influences on people in many areas of life, not just in taking specific actions, but the overall culture and settings since group attitudes and norms are infectious. Similarly, people experience the bandwagon effect to conform to others and gain

approval by relying on the opinion of others for benefits, motivation by additionally escape fears of being omitted or sidelined. In addition is the Social Influence Theory. Deutsch and Gerard [12] propounded that social influence theory arises from the ways in which individuals adjust behavior, actions and decisions to meet the demands of a social environment. It takes many forms and can be seen in conformity, socialization, peer pressure, obedience, leadership, persuasion, sales, and presentations. Characteristically, social influence results from a precise action, command, or request, when people alter attitudes and behaviours in response to what may be perceived from others action or deeds. The authors added that two psychological needs that lead humans to conform to the expectations of others are: the right of informational social influence and need to be liked socially. Supporting this, Kelman [19] identified three broad varieties of social influence. These are: Compliance, by appearing to agree with others but actually keeping dissenting opinions privately; Identification by being influenced by someone liked, respected and knowledgeable; Internalization by accepting a belief or behaviour unquestionably. The two theories are significant to this work with a view to unveil that most mass communication students do not choose certain methods and aspects of research based on objectives but due to influence of peers and experts, thereby joining the trend to submit anything just to graduate from the universities.

2.7. Review of empirical studies

Prominently, Ukonu et al. [33] in a research "Preference of Research Areas and Methods among Mass Communication Students in Selected Universities in Nigeria" said that there have been ongoing debates on the identity of mass communication (research) as a field in the humanities, arts and the social sciences which has affected research teaching, literature and practice across universities. This study is one effort to locate the directions of scholarship in mass communication through the prism of research areas and methods. With a mixture of simple random, stratified and quota sampling, the study used the content analysis of documentary evidence in 400 research projects cutting across undergraduate, Masters and Doctorate degrees in four universities. The study aimed to ascertain the methods adopted in mass communication research as well as the variables and areas of interest in students' researches. The study found that quantitative survey method was the most adopted method by communication researchers and that qualitative method was not employed alone for analysis by researchers. Mass communication research in the four universities was still tailored more to the social scientific techniques. The selected universities showed remarkable similarity in subject matter areas, type of variables studied and analytical tools employed. The study recommends that universities should steer students' attention to qualitative analysis as core analytical methods.

Similarly, Greener [16] in "Methodological choices for research into interactive learning" sought to find out how do researchers choose research methodologies? What have been the standard research methods that students conduct? What broad analysis of either qualitative or quantitative or mixed methods are used based on the context and discipline of study. This focused on simple decisions that students navigate through to gain new domain of knowledge. The answers were well framed from rationales based on evidence of prior studies as general requirements. The justification of choice was from the fore that examiners seek common ground on which to base rationales developed thorough relevant disciplinary literature, precedent

methodologies, research designs and models adapted or adopted with dedication from published authorities. It was found out that unlike the physical sciences, where the experimental method has long held sway, providing statistics for analysis and interpretation in social sciences like mass Communication the standard of randomized assumptions and moral choices results are applied individually. In the social sciences with research questions, the boundaries of provable quantitative evidence come from opinion, behaviour, emotion and other unauditable phenomena, the absence of a choice of a research methodology can be serious problem. Findings also indicated that educational research is often reduced to the binary thinking in undergraduate research methods courses with theories. In addition, the research had it that many research papers are built on self-report surveys, to deepen knowledge and enriched more by combinations of methods, using data that fit the digital world. The author raises recommendations that evidence of researches should be self-reported, opinion-based data treated as something which can provide confident statistical outcomes. More so, qualitative analysis such as content, discourse or narrative analysis can be subjected to triangulation research methods than a survey or view from the literature supported by a theory or model arising from such analysis.

Nind et al. [23] addressed the perspectives of students of social science research methods from a United Kingdom (UK) study of holistic experience of learning during two years of postgraduate research training and early careers as researchers. The study used a diary circle combining online diary method with face-to-face focus groups to generate data. Data analysed from 10 participants and three co-authors narratively and thematically produced two individual learning methods and a synthesis of common experiences. Findings showed the active, experiential learning of the participants alongside salient themes of difficulty and struggle. This leads to discussion of the emotional dimensions of methods learning and implications. The paper argues that teachers and supervisors should attend more carefully to the social, emotional, active and reflective nature of research methods in learning. The gap between the reviewed researches and the present one lie in the position that they dealt only on the methods. None of it made attempts beyond universities. The present study has been extended to cover the major sectors of mass Communication studies as advertising, journalism, public relations, broadcasting that students mostly adopt in academic researches. It has also made attempts to explore on the common research theories that students prefer to apply in Mass Communication academic researchers in a typical University and Polytechnic in Nigeria.

3. Methods

3.1. Research design

The research adopted the use of content analysis method of project studies by final year students. Content analysis is the selection of substances that make up a particular container or sack into groups of grades using certain yardsticks or characteristics. In the case of this research, the content analysis is limited to what has been written or published and applied in each of the academic researches by students in groups based on choice of standards or benchmarks. Akpan and James [3] state that content analysis is one of the most practical methods for examining contents of written or printed material in a systematic, objective and quantitative method to analyze the most common characteristic or frequency of messages. Content analysis allow

for easy quantitative counting of the words, the frequency of presence and even the types of anything which the research intents to find in figures or statistics.

3.2. Study participants

The population of the study was the total number of undergraduates and Post graduate student projects approved research projects in the Department of Mass Communication, Wellspring University, Benin City, Nigeria between 2019, 2020 and 2021 and 2022 academic years. From the registry of the Mass Communication department, 45 undergraduate students and 21 post graduate students (66) submitted final projects on different topics of mass Communication education (WSU/MC/Registry, 2022) and from the Heritage Polytechnic Registry were 89 final year students (HPE/MC/2022). This had the population at 155 students.

3.3. Sample

In consideration of the manageable size of the population, the researcher adopted the census sampling method. Farooq [14] refer to census sampling as the comprehensive enumeration of a universe of place, a group of people or a specific locality through which data can be composed to gain vast understanding in research. In census method there is higher degree of accuracy, less bias, in a universe that is small, intensive examination of specific variables required, exhaustive and meaningful information regarding the number of people, status and education. Since, the census method recommend the use of all items or population, this research applied all the 155 copies of research projects as the sample size. The choice of two tertiary institutions taken from the list of 153 others was based on the fact that the universities in the Northern states of Nigeria had been under closure due to cases of insecurity during the period of the research. The two tertiary institutions were purposively taken to represent the universities in the South Eastern region and the Mid-Western region of Nigeria.

3.4. Research tools

In this study, the units of work started by the categorizing of booklets of the academic projects from mass communication students in the departmental library of the two tertiary institutions into groups which adopted a particular method, the types of theories and the sector of mass communication studies. This enabled the adoption of the content analysis method to determine the spread of students' projects with manifest contents analysis. Wimmer and Dominik [38] states that content analysis is that the research method that has its potential to identify trends over a long period of time by ensuring comprehensibility and generalizability in the examining of contents of records over a period of study in calendar months and years.

3.5. Procedure

In order to ensure accuracy of counting the number of academic research projects with a particular method, theory and sector, the Head of the Department was contacted to release the copies of the projects with three additional non-academic personnel who helped in grouping the projects and separately wrote down the numbers based on the variables of methods of

research, the type of theories applied and the sector of mass communication preferred by the students. This enabled the adoption of the content analysis method to determine the spread of students' projects with content analysis, interviews, surveys or group discussions. Types of theories ranged from framing, agenda setting, individual differences, cultivation, media dependency and richness, uses and gratification, systems as well as the critical theory and the Social Responsibility Theory. The computations of each category using a coding sheet was done using frequency tables analyzed and calculated by the ascertaining of totals, grand totals and sub calculated in percentages.

4. Data analysis

The respective analysis were carried out by referring to the objectives of the study using separate tables.

Table 1
The major method of research by mass communication students in Wellspring University and Heritage Polytechnic, Nigeria.

Method	Wellspring	Heritage	Total	%
Survey	59	62	121	78
Interview	2	12	14	9
Content analysis	5	15	20	13
Total	66	89	155	100

In table 1, the analysis of data was by the use of three major methods of survey, interview and content analysis. Survey attracted 121 or 78 responses, interview had 14 or 9 percent as the least out of 155 students.

Table 2
The major theories used by mass communication students in Wellspring University and Heritage Polytechnic, Nigeria.

Major theory	Wellspring	Heritage	Total	%
Perception	2	5	7	5
Gatekeeping	30	61	91	59
Framing	6	8	14	9
Uses & gratification	17	5	22	14
Agenda setting	6	10	16	10
Media richness	2	–	2	1
Techno-determinism	3	–	3	2
Total	66	89	155	100

In table 2, in the least of research theories, gatekeeping theory had 91 or 59 percent of students as the highest while media richness theory had the least of 2 or 1 percent of the 155 students.

Table 3
The major sector of mass communication research preferred by students in Wellspring University and Heritage Polytechnic, Nigeria.

Media sector	Wellspring	Heritage	Total	%
Print	5	–	5	3
Broadcast	36	45	81	52
Advert	8	13	21	14
PR	4	11	16	10
Social media	13	20	33	21
Total	66	89	155	100

In table 3, the sectors of mass communication applied are print, broadcast, advertising and public relations as well as social media. The broadcast sector had 81 or 52 percent as the highest and public relations had the least of 5 or 3 percent of the 155 students.

5. Discussion of results and findings

Based on research questions and the analysis of data, findings on the method of research among students indicated that 121 or 78 percent of students prefer the choice of survey methods in carrying out mass communication research in universities of Nigeria. This in why Sincero [32] says that among the different methods of data gathering for research purposes, the survey method is preferred by many researchers due to its various advantages, strengths and benefits. The survey methods are both qualitative and quantitative in form. Surveys offer a high level of general facility in representing a huge population. Due to the usual huge number of people who answers survey, the data being gathered retain upright description of the relative features of the general population covered in the research. Compared to other methods of data gathering, surveys are able to bring out data that are near to the precise elements of the larger population. This is also in agreement to the position by Cooper, Chenail and Fleming [10] that in meta-analysis of research papers, students' experience of learning are restricted to qualitative survey research methods. This is also supported by Weeks [37] that intuitive social research constitutes an acknowledgement of the emotional qualities of both researchers and participants, arguing that although there is no restrictions to the use of methods, or to say that there is a single preferred methodology, but methodological choice ought not to overlook the broader objectives behind a research, the scope, significance and the target audience. [7] maintains that the purpose of research methodology is to advance both theory and practice as vital platforms of interactive learning in academics. Hence, Deacon et al. [11] added that survey methods of research is popular because it provides credible, readily understood and clear-cut answers to overtly simple questions, where most complex investigations of audience response, and reception are debatable. In further support, Osuagwu [28] stressed that many research methods and techniques can be used for basic and applied types of research. However, the research methods/techniques used should be a function of the resources available, the research problem being investigated, the research environment, the relevant research variables in focus, and the audience for the research

report, among others. Schwab-McCoy [31] mentioned that research objective, research process (method) and research results (product) are some of the major pillars of any research work as scholarly publications (products) represent an important aspect of the research community.

On the choice of research theories, the findings of this work was that most of the students at 91 or 59 percent of students prefer social responsibility theory in the studying of mass communication researches. This is a theory that make the students to be alert and conscious of service to the society during practice. The theory of social responsibility in the media confers huge responsibilities on the media people to obey the laws, regulations and be accountable to the employers, the society and the profession. The potential journalists go through the tutelage of having responsibility to break only the news and not to break the society. The negatives of this theory is that it affects curiosity for investigations beyond limits to unveil the news behind the news mostly needed by the society. Within the confines of learning mass communication, the implication of this is that the respective universities also confine the students to the studying of few of the mass communication related theories rather than a wide exposure to several of the theories. The aggressive side of journalism using certain theories are excluded. This is not a positive omen to the students since the level of exposure may be limited to some of the theories above others as employers seek for mass communication practitioners that can use theories to break the ice in advertising, public relations, governance, science and sports reporting or general advocacy. This acceptance of the social responsibility theory seems to be only at the stage of learning mass communication rather than in the practice of the profession after university education. It can be argued that suppose the mass communicators (students) do rightly adhere to the social responsibility theory, there would not have been the proliferation of fake news, hate speeches and underground yellow journalism practice in Nigeria. That lends credence to Drew [13] that gatekeeping theory is the most commonly used theory of mass communication but can misconstrued as exercising of social responsibility in the practice of journalism. This explains that most people misplace and misapply gatekeeping to deny the public the ingredients of information as people also hide under the cover of the social responsibility theory to spread incomplete news to millions on the web of social media where gatekeeping is insufficient and uncontrolled.

Findings was also taken from data on the sector of popular preference by students of Mass Communication. It was noted that 82 or 52 percent of students took to broadcast aspect of mass communication against other sectors of print journalism, advertising, public relations or social media journalism practice. This has led to the proliferation of radio and television institutions in the affected states of Nigeria taking advantage of available personnel on graduation at the expense of other forms of media practice. This has cause such areas of journalism as the print to seem to be fading out due to low acceptance by trainees and the attendant patronage from employers. It is not unusual that after graduation, students of Mass Communication prefer to identify with a medium that aligns with their pre-graduation interests and talents, and resist tasks contrasting with creative strengths. This is on the right side since occupational conflict arises when one's personality does not align with expected work tasks within a role. Hence, broadcast students choose the course and work on it for social prestige, while students who go for print journalism do so to satisfy primary motivation of writing. The low choice of social media sector of mass communication may not be unconnected with the newness of the area which most mass communication teachers are not familiar to teach. The result

of this work goes side by side with the position of Carpenter, Hoag and Grant [8] that most mass communication students are not acclimatized with the added advantage of using digital communication platforms embedded in social media journalism facilities to raise capacities for practice after university education.

Interestingly, the respective findings specifically validate the two theories of bandwagon and social influence applied in this study. This is because it shows the position of Fedotova [15], Vorobyeva and Ermakov [36] that though students in institutions of higher learning are usually exposed to many forms of research methods trainings as focus group discussions, case studies, surveys, projective techniques, and statistical methods but end up in a bandwagon and social influence in choosing research methods without resort to the application of creativity. The two theories are useful in this work since students in institutions of higher learning are expected to have understanding the research methods in their studies to make valid and reasonable conclusions and inferences. The trend is that students only join the bandwagon of taking research methods without taking into consideration the aim and objectives of their researches. The future development of any discipline as Mass Communication is a function of the appropriateness of the chosen research methods. Umer and Razi [34] reviewed that the major research methods employed in social studies have been preferences for survey methods.

6. Conclusions

This work started with the topic of Mass Communication researches with interest to expose the preference of students in the choice of methods, theories and the sector of interest. It was on the strength that education is the center piece of social and economic development. One aspect of education for progress was established as mass Communication for the resolving of social problems in the society. However, it was noted in the statement of problem that the choice of research methods and theories as well as the sectors of mass communication can as well affect the level of contributions for social development by those that study mass Communication. The choice of the scope was on Wellspring University, Benin city and Heritage Polytechnic, Eket both located in the South section of Nigeria. The choice of the two schools was based on the premise that the institutions are part of the growing tertiary institutions offering Mass Communication. In addition, the research made a choice of two theories of to back up the research while empirical review centered on two different previous researches within Nigeria and the United Kingdom (UK). Content analysis of the various researches by students was used within a period of three years of 2020, 2021 and 2022 academic session. The research has made significant contributions to knowledge by the validation of theories of selectivity and choice as applied by the students in the preference of researches, methods and theories in Mass Communication studies of Nigerian tertiary institutions of learning. The methods of research applied by many of the students in Mass Communication make researches to be rhetorical and show the lack of creativity among students in tertiary institutions. The approaches to research as seen from the findings tended to add nothing innovative to the learning pattern in Mass Communication among students in Nigerian universities. It can be hypothetically deduced that approaches to Mass Communication research does not generate high order of knowledge neither does it make contributions maximally to the development of the course in Nigerian

universities.

7. Recommendations

1. Universities have to expand the scope of teaching mass Communication by the introduction of varieties of methods rather than concentrating on simple survey methods.
2. Universities have to encourage students to understand the cross purpose and interdisciplinary nature of Mass Communication by adopting sociological theories in addressing the relationship of phenomenon and phenomenon.
3. Universities have to spread the interest of students cover trending aspects of mass Communication particularly the adoption of digital process in social media against being tie to broadcasting.

8. Limitations/future suggestions

The scope is limited to students' research projects within the 2020, 2021 and 2022 academic years. This is because, from 2020 after the coronavirus pandemic, the much of demand tend to be on information dissemination particularly based on research of social behavior which Mass Communication graduates are expected to provide the society. Equally, the scope was limited to students' project of Wellspring University, Benin City and Heritage Polytechnic, Eket being growing institutions of learning offering Mass Communication courses in Nigeria.

It is suggested that further research be taken in other social science and art courses to determine the direction of applying scientific methods, styles and technologies in learning.

Conflict of interest

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